



In 1912, the *Titanic* had set sail on her maiden voyage, the largest, most luxurious ship the world had ever seen. On board were many of the rich and famous of the day.

Then, on the fifth night out—tragedy. An iceberg, seen too late. Too few lifeboats. Pandemonium, and over 1,500 dead out of the more than 2,200 people on board.

Now the sub sailed out over the well deck, following the angle of the fallen foremast up toward the liner's bridge. We paused at the crow's nest. On the fateful night, lookout Frederick Fleet had been on duty here. It was he who warned the bridge: "Iceberg right ahead." Fleet was one of the lucky ones. He made it into a lifeboat and to safety.

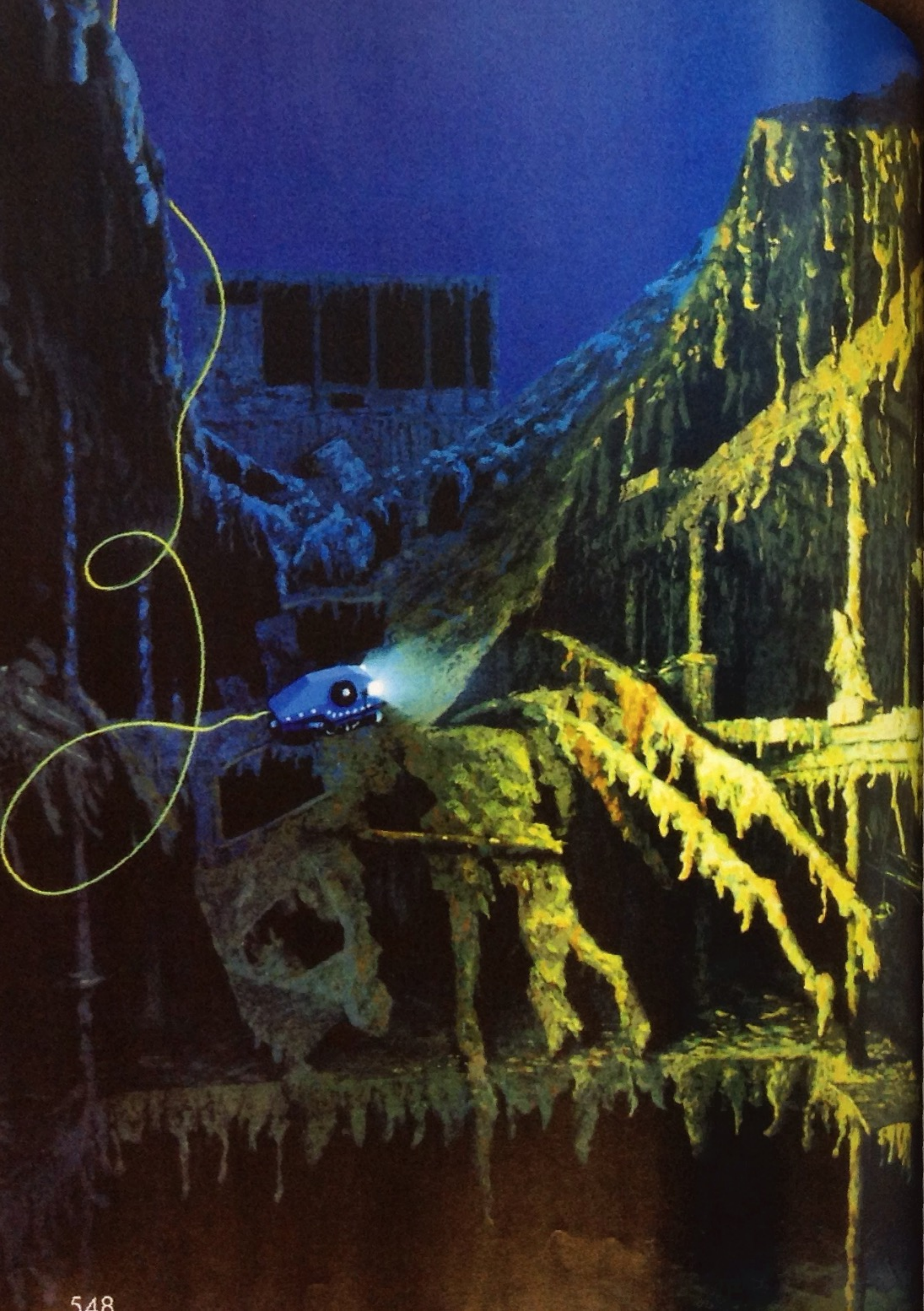
The pilot set *Alvin* gently down on the bridge, not far from the telemotor control—all that remained of the steering mechanism of the ship. It was here that First Officer William Murdoch, desperate to avoid the mountain of ice that lay in the *Titanic's* path, shouted to the helmsman, "Hard a-starboard!" Then Murdoch watched in excruciating agony as the huge ship slowly began to turn—but it was too late and the iceberg fatally grazed the liner's side. I thought of Captain E. J. Smith rushing from his cabin to be told the terrible news. Thirty minutes later, after learning how quickly water was pouring into the ship, he knew that the "unsinkable" *Titanic* was doomed.

We lifted off from the bridge and headed toward the stern. Over a doorway we could make out the brass plate with the words: 1st Class Entrance. In my mind's eye I could see the deck surging with passengers as the crew tried to keep order during the loading of the lifeboats. The broken arm of a lifeboat davit hung over the side. From this spot port-side lifeboat No. 2 was launched—barely half full. Among the twenty-five people in a boat designed to carry more than forty were Minnie Cou tts and her two boys,



(Above) *Alvin* investigates the bow section of the *Titanic* wreck. The stern lies in the distance. (Below left) The telemotor control that once held the ship's wheel; (middle) the A-deck promenade; (right) a section of bow railing.





Willie and Neville. They were among the relatively few third-class passengers to survive the sinking.

As our tiny submarine continued toward the stern, we peered through the windows of first-class staterooms. The glass dome over the first-class grand staircase was long gone, providing a perfect opening for exploring the interior of the ship. But that would have to wait for a later visit, when we would bring along our robotic "swimming eyeball," *Jason Junior*. As we continued back, I wondered what we would find. We already knew the ship lay in two pieces, with the stern nearly two thousand feet (six hundred meters) away. Suddenly the smooth steel subdecking contorted into a tangle of twisted metal where the stern had ripped free. Beyond it hundreds of objects that had spilled out when the ship broke in two were lying on the ocean floor.

◀ *Jason Junior* explores the remains of the grand staircase.

NEARLY LOST BECAUSE OF A HAT

Willie Coutts's hat nearly cost him his life. When the *Titanic* hit the iceberg, his mother, Minnie, roused eleven-year-old Willie and his baby brother Neville (right), got them dressed, and put on their lifebelts. Through the swirl of panicking passengers, Millie led her children out of third class toward what she hoped was safety. One officer handed his own lifebelt to Minnie, saying, "If the boat goes down you'll remember me." Another crewman led them to the boat deck. Minnie and Neville got in one of the last boats—but the officer in charge held Willie back. The rule was women and children first, and the hat Willie was wearing made him look too old. Willie's mother insisted but the officer refused again. Finally, good sense prevailed and Willie, too, stepped to safety.





As we floated out over this debris field, I found it hard to believe that only a thin film of sediment covered plates and bottles that had lain on the bottom for seventy-four years. One of the ship's boilers sat upright on the mud with a tin cup resting on it, as if set there by a human hand. Champagne bottles lay with their corks still intact. A porcelain doll's head stared at us from its final resting place in the soft ooze. Had it belonged to little Loraine Allison, the only child from first class who didn't survive that night? Most haunting of all were the shoes and boots. Many of them lay in pairs where



HAUNTING MEMENTOS

Unlike its fairly intact bow section, the *Titanic's* stern (page 550) literally blew apart on hitting the bottom. In the debris field between the bow and stern we saw hundreds of touching reminders of the tragedy. A porcelain doll's head (above right) is all that remains of an expensive French doll (inset). It may have belonged to Loraine Allison of Montreal (above middle with her baby brother), the only child from first class who did not survive. A tin cup (above left) has come to rest near the round furnace door of one of the ship's huge boilers.

bodies had once fallen. Within a few weeks of the sinking, the corpses had been consumed by underwater creatures and their bones had been dissolved by the cold salt water. Only those shoes remain—mute reminders of the human cost of the *Titanic* tragedy.

After only two hours on the bottom, it was time for *Alvin* to begin the long ascent back to the surface ship, two and a half miles (four kilometers) above. As we headed back to the surface, I was already impatient to return to the *Titanic*. We had only begun to plumb its secrets.