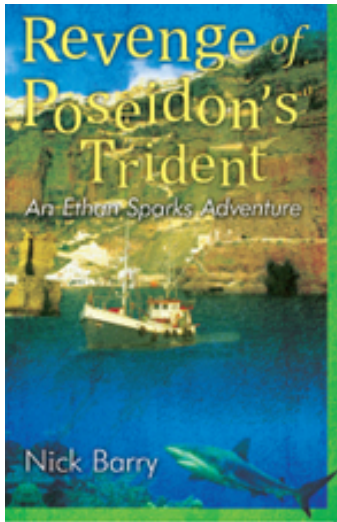




Revenge of Poseidon's Trident: An Ethan Sparks Adventure
by Nick Barry

Chapter One

The bus screeched to an abrupt halt. A huge herd of goats blocked the razor-thin path they called a road here in Santorini, Greece. It didn't even have an inch of shoulder—just a sheer drop-off that went straight down to the Aegean Sea. I bet if I opened the window on the other side of the bus and reached out, I could touch the mountain. The road was literally carved out of the cliffs.

Suddenly we teetered precariously. I flung open my window. My head popped out of its shell like an alarmed tortoise; bug-eyed, I stared down at the bus's back wheel. It was hanging half off the edge of the demented cliff and spinning, spitting gravel. Either the goats were going down ... or we were. And it didn't look like it was gonna be the goats.

I looked toward my father at the front of the bus. His head remained hunched over his laptop as though nothing was going on. My dad has been lost in his research ever since he'd told us we were going to Greece to prove that Poseidon's Trident was not a myth. Now, we were going to die, but my dad was merrily typing away.

"Hey, Ethan!" Rolf, the team's archaeological photographer, yelled even though he was only one seat in front of me. "Take a look at my cool new underwater camera."

"Good!" I said, nodding sarcastically. "We'll get some awesome shots before we drown in the Aegean."

"C'mon, man," the thirty-year-old hippie said, shaking a head of hair that hadn't seen a comb in at least a decade. "What's the point in bumming us out?"

"Uh," I replied, pointing down, "see that back wheel of the bus? It's off the road. One or two inches more and we're goin' down a nasty cliff!"

The bus driver was revving the engine, and the smell of peeling rubber burned my nose. Rolf slid along his seat toward his window to look out, and I closed my eyes, waiting for his shifting weight to send us over the edge. "No," Rolf said, shaking his head back and forth. "I don't see the back wheel off the road."

My eyes shot open. "What?" I popped my head out the window again and looked down. The wheel *was* back on the rocky path. As I sighed in relief, I saw a little old man. He could barely stand up, yet he was calmly herding the mountain goats past my window, humming like

nothing was wrong. *My guess*, I thought, shrugging, *I'm the only sane one around here!*

The bus inched forward, the driver honking the horn at the goats until they were all finally behind us. We continued our treacherous climb up the road to ancient Akrotiri, the second stop of my summer vacation.

After sixteen hours of travel, we were almost there. I couldn't believe it. I was only thirteen, and I'd already been hired to do my second article for *The Young Explorer* magazine. My first assignment last fall in China, when I'd cracked an artifact theft ring, had put me on the map. Now this one in Greece looked like it was going to make this summer trip a weird one!

I was calling this article, "Drowning in the Oracle of Delphi." That's what my father was doing to his career—drowning it. And all because some modern-day seer in Delphi had recently looked into a pool of water and uttered that she knew the location of Poseidon's Trident.

Rolf dangled his new underwater camera in front of me with an excited grin. I snatched it. It was cool—a silver-gray aluminum box with a big, square lens. "Instead of forming an image using visible light," he explained, "this camera forms an image using infrared radiation."

"Cool," I said, staring through the telephoto lens at a fishing boat dripping blood from its stern into the Aegean. Its name, the *Killing Machine*, was painted in shiny, black words that were smeared with blood.

"Yeah, man, it's real cool," Rolf continued excitedly—or, at least as excited as Rolf ever got. "The infrared automatically turns on when there's less than five lux of light."

"What does that mean?" I asked, letting the boxlike camera fall on its strap.

"Lux is a measure of how much light is reflected off a surface. And as you know, it's the reflected light that supplies the camera with its photographic image. Since there won't be much reflected light at our underwater dig site, we have to use infrared, which will pick up images where there's hardly any light. One lux is equal to the light of a full moon shining in a dark backyard."

"Wow!" I exclaimed. "I hope you didn't get this expensive camera just for this expedition, though, or you wasted a lot of money. Dad's really lost it this time."

"Just give me back my camera," Rolf said. "You can keep the attitude."

I looked up with an incredulous grin. "What? You think this trip's for real?"

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