

# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 24, 2008

## CONTACT:

Capt. Carl Fismer 305.304.7206  
Carrie Cagnet: 305.394.0887  
Robert Lewis Knecht: 480.510.4179  
www.TajMahalSunkenTreasure.com

## ARTHUR C. CLARKE'S "LAST DIVE" COMES TO PASS

Little known part of Clarke's life comes to light in documentary about the discovery of the Taj Mahal Sunken Treasure

Key Largo, Fla - "If I never do another dive, it will be a good way to go out," Arthur C. Clarke says at the end of Arthur C. Clarke: before 2001, the documentary Sci-Fi Channel called "...eminently watchable and endearing, mainly because of the obvious nostalgic joy communicated by Clarke as narrator."

That statement came to pass March 19th, 2008, when Clarke passed away in his beloved Sri Lanka.

Long before Sir Arthur C. Clarke received an Oscar nomination for 2001: a space odyssey or a Nobel Prize nomination for the invention of satellite communications, there was Arthur C. Clarke and The Treasure of the Great Reef.

"Few people know that Arthur C. Clarke was an avid SCUBA diver and that he recovered a sunken treasure before he wrote 2001: a space odyssey," says renowned treasure hunter Capt. Carl Fismer, star of the new hit TV series Treasure Divers, currently running on Treasure HD. Fismer is the owner of the Taj Mahal Sunken Treasure that was discovered on Great Basses Reef off Sri Lanka in 1961 by Clarke's dive partner, Mike Wilson, and two American consulate boys, Bob Kriegel and Mark Smith. It was brought to the surface by Clarke, Wilson, and archaeologist Peter Throckmorton in 1963. Clarke was so inspired by the discovery that he wrote two books, Treasure of the Great Reef and Indian Ocean Treasure.

"Clarke was an avid SCUBA diver," says Fred Clarke, Sir Arthur's brother. "He discovered in the late 1940s that he could approximate the effects of weightlessness underwater, so he could write more accurately about life in space."

In the years preceding 2001: a space odyssey, Clarke had written eight books about underwater exploration. Then, in 1962, Clarke was stricken with polio. His dives in 1963 to recover the treasure gave Clarke the freedom that he had lost on land due to the polio, and fired his pen to write the books. But he never donned another SCUBA tank again. And as the years passed, Clarke found himself increasingly bound to walking aides and wheelchairs.

In 1992, Fismer acquired the personal collection of Great Basses Reef treasure from retired Smithsonian curator Mendel Peterson, and discovered the exciting history of the coins; silver rupees minted in Surat,

India, in 1702 by the order of Emperor Aurangzeb, whose is known as India's last great Mughal emperor, and whose father built the Taj Mahal. "I have been treasure hunting for over 35 years," says Fismer. "And very few sunken treasures have such an exciting story to tell, from the Mughal dynasty that built the Taj Mahal, to Sir Arthur C. Clarke." Fismer dubbed the coins the Taj Mahal Sunken Treasure, then teamed up with adventure photo-journalist and documentary producer Robert Lewis Knecht and together they traveled to Sri Lanka to visit the reclusive Clarke and hear the story of the Treasure of the Great Reef first hand.

"I was truly surprised," recalls Fismer. "Clarke was more excited to talk about the treasure than he was about space!" But nothing had prepared Fismer or Knecht for the surprise they were about to get.

In 1991, Knecht had produced the documentary Where Wheelchairs Are Not Allowed, about how members of the Houston Disabled SCUBA Divers Association had overcome tremendous odds to break the bonds of their wheelchairs and discover the freedom of SCUBA diving. Clarke had seen the program and was so inspired by it that he joined Fismer and Knecht on a dive off Colombo, Sri Lanka, to over 100 feet. By Clarke's own admission, he hadn't dived since the treasure recovery in 1963.

Sadly, it was also Arthur C. Clarke's last dive...

This rare footage is featured in, Arthur C. Clarke: before 2001, the True-Life Story of the Taj Mahal Sunken Treasure.

"You proved to him (Clarke), when you took him to 100 feet, that he is still capable of making these dives, and he doesn't have to be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. And I think that has had an enormous effect, not only in his life, but in his work," comments Fred Clarke in the 15th anniversary edition of the documentary soon to be re-released by Sourdough Studios.

"When we left Sri Lanka we told Arthur we'd be back for another dive with him someday and he said he would be waiting," says Knecht. "We will miss him dearly. I know my mom will because they used to send each other Christmas cards each year."

Worth nearly one million dollars, the Taj Mahal Sunken Treasure consists of a cluster of over 750 silver rupee coins still in the shape of the sack that once carried them, and another 425 individual coins. Capt. Carl Fismer is available with the 750 coin cluster for a few last showings before it is sent to Sri Lanka's maritime museum to replace their portion of the treasure reclaimed by the sea in the 2004 Tsunami.

More info and photos of the treasure can be found at [www.TajMahalSunkenTreasure.com](http://www.TajMahalSunkenTreasure.com). A file containing the DVD files for ACC: before 2001 can be downloaded from [TajMahalSunkenTreasure.com](http://TajMahalSunkenTreasure.com) which can then be played in any computer based DVD player software. E-mail Robert Lewis Knecht at [chewie@sourdoughstudios.com](mailto:chewie@sourdoughstudios.com) or Carrie Cagnet [carriecagnet@gmail.com](mailto:carriecagnet@gmail.com) for the FTP access codes.

More information about the origin of the Taj Mahal Sunken Treasure:

The history of the Taj Mahal Sunken Treasure is a bitter sweet story of love and loss, conspiracy and murder, and finally, sunken treasure and Clarke's last dive before he passed away on March 19<sup>th</sup> 2008.

The silver rupees were minted in Surat, India, in 1702, by order of the last great Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb Alamgir, whose father, Shah Jahan, had built the Taj Mahal as a memorial for his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. History says that when Shah Jahan fell ill in 1657, his third son, Aurangzeb, seized the thrown of India by executing his two older brothers and imprisoning his father within view of the Taj Mahal. Shah Jahan is said to have looked upon the tomb of his beloved wife until he was laid to rest beside her in 1666.

From the archaeological evidence discovered during the recovery, combined with trade route history, Capt. Carl Fisser believes the rich silver rupees most likely would have been loaded on a Muslim trader in Surat, India, and sent to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to buy gems and spices that would then be used to trade for Oriental treasures to be returned to India... perhaps for Emperor Aurangzeb himself. But we will never know as the ship struck Great Basses Reef off the southern tip of Ceylon in 1702. There were no survivors, and the glittering treasure was lost to the world until Clarke and company recovered it in 1963.

END