

CHAPTER ONE

I'M NOT VERY GOOD AT making things. If I ever do one of those plastic construction kits (you know, fighter planes, sports cars, etc.), I always end up with it covered in patches of glue. And a piece stuck on backwards. And another piece that falls off as soon as I put the finished model on my shelf.

So I should have known better than to try to fix my Thinking Chair. As readers of Volume One of my case files will know, my Thinking Chair is a vital part of my work as a brilliant schoolboy detective. It's a battered old leather armchair, and in it I sit, and I think, and I mull over important facts about whatever case I happen to be working on.

My Thinking Chair had developed a slight rip on one

of the arms. One afternoon during the spring half-term hols, I was in the garden shed trying to patch it with a piece of super-tough heavy-duty repair tape. *Guaranteed 100% Bonding Power!* it said on the roll. The trouble was, it was one hundred per cent bonding my fingers together.

Just as I was wishing I'd asked my very practical friend 'Muddy' Whitehouse to do the job for me instead, there was a knock at the shed door. Immediately, I heard the sign fall off (the sign I keep nailing up outside, which says *Saxby Smart – Private Detective*). I sighed to myself.

'Come in!' I called.

In came Charlie Foster, a boy in my year group at school. He was an owlish kid, the sort of person who gives the impression of being tubby even when they aren't. He wore tiny round glasses, and had a habit of sniffing a lot.

He looked around the cluttered interior of the shed. Half of it, as always, was crammed with old gardening and DIY stuff of my dad's (I'd found that super-tape in amongst it). The other half of the shed was crammed with my desk, my files and my Thinking Chair.

He handed me the sign from outside. 'Hello, Saxby. Is this yours?' he said.

You can tell he wasn't the sharpest tool in the box,

THE TOMB OF DEATH

can't you? He was also looking a little scared, and carrying a slightly crumpled handwritten note.

'What can I do for you, Charlie?' I asked. 'Who's told you to come and see me?'

He sniffed in amazement. 'How did you know it wasn't my idea?'

'People who need my services don't normally turn up looking as if they don't want to be here,' I said. 'Besides, that note you've got there is written in an adult's handwriting. My guess is that someone has written down some specific information.'

'Yes,' said Charlie, with another sniff. 'My big brother Ed. He's nineteen.'

'And why does your brother Ed need my help?'

'His comic's been stolen.'

My eyes narrowed. 'Hmmm. Yeeees, I can see that would be annoying. I don't want to sound rude, but, umm, wouldn't this be filed under Not All That Important? Or possibly under I'll Go And Get Another Copy?'

Charlie suddenly remembered the note, smoothed it out a little and double-checked something written on it. 'This comic is worth one hundred thousand pounds.'