

A large three-masted sailing ship with white sails is shown on a blue sea under a clear sky. The ship is viewed from a low angle, emphasizing its height. The sails are partially unfurled, and the ship's dark hull is visible at the bottom. The background is a clear, bright blue sky.

# The Rigging Ape

Sequel to 'The Powder Monkey'

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# ~1~

“Ho ship!” I cried. I heard the men run into each other and tripping over in their haste to get to the guns. I screamed inside. I had just spotted a trireme barrelling towards us in great haste. The men on board my ship, *The Stringy Franchise*, had no chance of getting to their guns in time. This was an amateur ship that the General had told me to protect as it made its way to India, to collect tea leaves. I was a professional, the best of my kind. I swung fluently through the rigging, yelling orders at other men and shooting the occasional enemy. I was a great warrior, the best sailor and the British Navy’s best veteran. I was the Rigging Ape.

I yelled the warning again and then slipped from my hidden crow’s nest and swung through the rigging, shouting at the sailors to hurry up. I swung up and into my attack post. I grabbed my telescope and peered anxiously through the grubby lens at the pirate ship. I could see it was a pirate ship now, the skull and crossbones flag was all too familiar to me.

When I judged the pirate ship was close enough, I sighted and fired. The helmsman cried out and fell over the side. I sighted and shot again, another man fell. I sighted and shot until there was only the skipper and the lookout. Suddenly, a blazing pain struck me in the arm, I cried out and only just managed to snag a rigging. I immediately jumped up and ran to the side of the ship.

The pirate ship was loaded and ready to fire. I dived to the side as the opposing ship fired. The cannon tore through the railing and carried on through the captain’s headquarters. I could only hope that the captain was below deck. I slowly bent up. The pirate ship was readying the cannons. I sighted and fired but my aim was off. Instead of hitting the main pirate, my bullet flew inside the pirate’s cannon and blew the gunpowder. The cannon blew, killing the pirates manning instantly and wrecking the cannon next to it. I cheered but then I was hit again and the bullet tore through my leg tendons. I fell, my vision filling with blinding light. Another bullet whistled past my head and I heard a man cry out.

“Keep down, we are not boarding them!” I hollered. There were no more cries so I assumed our men had backed down. I crawled towards the hole in the banister. I saw the skipper and fired. The skipper stiffened and fell. The lookout cried out and started to call out orders to the men below deck. I had to stop him. I raised my gun and fired at the lookout’s feet. The lookout wailed and flailed, his arms wind milling his arms, trying to stay in the crow’s nest. I ended his suffering with a bullet to the head. He stopped flailing and fell, smashing into the deck far below. I felt no remorse. I had learned to hide it long ago.

Then there was a giant cheer from the *Stringy Franchise* as they fired the cannon. The cannon ball whistled through the misty air and struck the ship in the helm. The ship was immediately a goner. The ball tore through the helm and smashed out the other side.

The *Stringy Franchise* rowed away as the pirate ship sank slowly beneath the waves. The men threw a wild party down in the hull, celebrating the victory with kegs of ale. I yearned to join them but I needed to stay vigilant. You never know if that ship had some bigger friends.

The rest of the day was somewhat uneventful. We stopped in Singapore for supplies and some of the men disappeared with ladies on their arms. They'd be back by the time the *Stringy Franchise* pulled out of the harbour. I swung down from the crow's nest and fell onto the deck. Captain Nashville greeted me warmly.

"Good job you were here Mr Turner, or we would have been toast!" said the beefy man cheerfully.

"Just part of my job, sir," I replied.

"How's the leg?"

"Oh, its fine, just a couple of torn tendons. Dr Hadley will be able to handle it,"

That's the ways things had worked since I had joined the mercenaries. I was lent to a ship for a few months, protected the ships from pirates and whatnot, until they were in safe water. Then the General would hand me another mission and I would be on my way.

After my talk with the Captain, I headed below decks to see Dr Hadley. Dr Hadley had a fierce reputation but once you got to know him, he was harmless. Once I got to his office, he looked me up and down and grumbled.

*Dr Hadley's office was a mangled mess. The beds had stained blood covering their ragged surfaces. Various organs littered the damp floor. All of the rusty science equipment was crammed into one corner and piled up in an undisguisable heap.*

"Do you always have to hurt yourself so badly?" he said, but he was smiling warmly.

"Come, have a sit down and I'll see what I can do," said Dr Hadley. I obediently lay down on the bed and Dr Hadley examined my leg and muttered intolerably. Finally, he stood up and said,

"Okay laddie, I'm just going to remove the bullet shard from ye leg and I'm going to give you some rum to dull the pain, okay?"

I nodded and he produced a bottle of liquid, which I assumed was rum. Suddenly, two men jumped up and grabbed me. I struggled but the burly sailors grimly held on. I loosened the gun in my holster and my fingers slowly worked their way to the butt of the gun.

Meanwhile, Dr Hadley moved closer to me, with the 'rum'.

"What is the meaning of this?" I snarled. "Let me go!"

“The boss is paying big money for us to capture you,” said the man on the right.

“That’s right,” sniggered the man on the left.

“I’m sorry my friend but I have to do this,” said Dr Hadley, his voice trembling. “He’ll kill me if I don’t,”

I snarled again and Right Man swung a fist at me, it connected and stars burst before my eyes. I strained but the men were too strong. My hand was almost at my gun.

I decided to stall for time.

“So, who is this boss?” I enquired. Left Man started to speak, but Right Man quietened him.

“We ain’t tellin’ you nofin” he drawled.

“Wait! You! Come back!” Left Man shouted. Dr Hadley had tried to run for it, but two more sailors jumped on him, pinning him to the ground.

“The Captain will hear about this!” I shouted defiantly. In answer, something came flying out of the shadows, landing in front of my bed. I saw Captain Nashville’s white face staring sightlessly up at me. I stifled a scream, the normally tall and majestic figure looked weak and small in death.

“You’ll pay!” I screamed. Right Man grinned.

“And how would that happen?” said Left Man, smirking.

“Like this,” I said and I brought the gun out from underneath me. Right Man stepped back, so I shot him first. He fell, sightless, to the floor. Left Man charged me and I rolled out of bed and shot upwards. The bullet went through his chin and he also dropped to the floor. More men poured from the shadows, I dropped them one by one until my pistol clicked. I threw it at another sailor and he dropped as well. I slipped out of bed and swiped a cutlass from a dead sailor’s hand.

I limped out into the corridor and a sabre slithered out from the darkness. I ducked, rolled and thrust. My cutlass shot through the man’s chest. I slid it out and the man fell. I moved on. Another sabre whistled out of the darkness. I block and deflect the blade away from my body. Suddenly, a bat comes out of nowhere and smacks me in the nose. Stars burst into my vision. I groggily try to stay standing, but another blow comes and darkness overwhelms me.

~2~

*The sea. The way it glistened and froths. The way the waves wash into the side of the ship. The way the sea salt sprays into your face...*

I awoke in a dark room. I tried to lift my head but a big force pushed me back down. I swiftly gather my thoughts. The floor rocked gently under my feet, so I knew I was still at sea. I tried to move once again, but the force held me down again. I quickly started to move my hands, trying to relieve the pressure from my wrists.

*The room was dark, the only thing to be seen were my bonds, tight and pulled into a proper knot. The gloominess was overpowering and it was closing in, ever so slightly.*

“This is boring,” I thought to myself. It had only been ten minutes, but I was full of adrenaline. I struggled against my bonds but the figure behind me kept my hands down.

“Stop moving or you will get hurt,” said a grating voice behind me. I recognised the threat and kept still. While my body was still, my mind was racing through possibilities. I could roll forward and free my hands, but the man behind me would most likely have a weapon on him.

After another half hour a gruff man walked into the room. I can tell this man is important. He is wearing a British Navy Lieutenant

uniform. He was one of the corrupt officers that patrolled the seas with a band of pirates.

“Having fun running around with those pirates are ya?” I said with a high amount of venom. I recognised the officer now. It was his friend and comrade Jimmy Foghorn. He had been presumed dead when our ship had been swamped by a storm and attacked by pirates. I had seen his face, full of terror as he fell over the side of the ship and into the churning water. I had mourned for days for my trusted friend.

He sneered back and I had trouble remembering him as a fine and trustworthy friend.

“What brings you to the Indian Ocean,” he said, with more than a little menace in it.

“You obviously haven’t heard that I finished my training and became a mercenary. I protect ships as they cross the oceans.”

Jimmy barked with laughter.

“So now the Colonel sends you on missions, does he?”

“No, actually it’s the General himself,” I threw back at him. His eyes widened. Then they resumed their new evil look.

“So, the General’s puppy ay? That must be fun,”

He smiled darkly and I sensed the blow before it came. I ducked and Jimmy's fist flew over my head. I tried to move, but I was bound to the chair. Jimmy's next punch broke my nose. The third knocked out some teeth. The final one rattled my skull.

Jimmy was breathing heavily now. His fists were covered in my blood.

"How does it feel to hit a friend, huh?" I yelled, blood pouring from my nose. Jimmy just stood there, staring at me. Then he abruptly turned and marched out of the room. I stared at the door, waiting for him to come back. I knew he would come back. As I predicted, Jimmy came back into the room, with a ragged man next to him.

"This is Captain Frankfurt; he is the man I have sworn my allegiance to."

"Like I care," I muttered. Jimmy suddenly whipped out a bat and struck me in the face. I reared back, blinded by my own blood, which was pouring from my forehead.

"Give some respect," snarled Jimmy, although his wavering voice betrayed his true thoughts. He hadn't wanted to hit me, I realised. The Captain had forced him to do it. I smiled. At least my old friend still had some good in him.

"I presume you are the man who killed half my men while you tried to escape?" the Captain asked. He had a thick Indian accent. I realised that the ship had been overrun by pirates. That was why

the crew hadn't burst in on him. They were probably either dead or being held captive like him.

"Yup, that's me," I said in a cheery voice. I wasn't scared in the slightest. I knew death had to take me, one way or the other.

"I could kill you right now if I chose to,"

"Oh I know, but you see, I know you are not going to kill me because you need me for ransom and the inside information on the British Navy. However, I will never tell you because I will not betray my country!"

The captain smiled and suddenly, I knew what was coming. I didn't need his snarling to tell me what my fate was.

"You, my friend, need some thawing, to break your spirit. I think I'll make you my slave. You can work with the rest of your crew down in your own ship. I think a month will be enough." With that, he flew from the room, barking back at Jimmy.

"Come on boy!"

Jimmy cast a last fleeting glance at me, and I saw hesitation there. Then he swept out of the room without a backwards glance.

About an hour after Jimmy had left, I heard a thumping coming towards the room I was in. It was footsteps. Over the hour, I had managed to loosen the bonds so I could free my hands at a moment's notice. The footsteps got closer. I tensed, ready to floor

the man behind me and take whatever came through the door. Too late did I realise that the footsteps were in fact two sets merged together. The door opened, and two sailors thrust a body into the room. I caught the body and it groaned. I turned his face upwards and Dr Hadley stared up at me. A long, eye shaped cut had been gouged into his neck. I held his body to me and wept. Everything had gone wrong, so so wrong. Everyone had turned against me. My friends were either dead or traitors. For once, I cried myself to sleep that night.

~3~

I was roused from my slumber by a knock at the door. I tried to move up and was surprised to find that there was no resistance. My 'bodyguard' was gone. I freed my hands and started to work on my legs. To be able to work on my legs, I needed to drop the body of Dr Hadley that I was cradling to my chest. I took one last look at the sightless eyes and dumped him on the floor. I was half way through releasing my legs when the door swung open and the Captain and the two guards walked into the room.

"You're coming with us," said the Captain. The tone in his voice suggested that I should brook no argument. I continued to work on my legs. There was a silver flash and my bonds were cut. A silver dagger was imbedded in the wood between my legs. I looked up. The henchmen were grinning stupidly. The Captain was standing where he had stood when he let go of the silver knife. He too, had a malicious grin on his face.

"No need to worry about those bonds. Come along now, boy,"

I bristled with that comment. I was twenty two, but I still had a boyish look about me. If I hadn't seen the Captain throw the knife, I would have killed all three of them. Instead, I followed them obediently out of the room. We walked down the corridor, the walls still alive with blood. We walked up onto the deck. I

welcomed the cold, brisk breeze. I breathed in the sea salt, sighing appreciatively. I had missed the sea and it had missed me.

“Come on, stop slacking,” snarled one of the bodyguards. I picked up the pace and the Captain hurried to catch up with me.

“So, son, you are going to be working for Lieutenant Foghorn,”

I accepted this in my stride. I knew I would have regular beatings and punishments but I could deal with that. After all, I had been trained in the British Navy.

“When do I start?” I said after a few minutes had gone by.

“Now,” he said and he pushed me forward. I felt myself falling. I tried to grab at something the only thing around me was open air. I landed in the water and sank. My blurry vision picked up a man swimming towards me. Then I blacked out.

I awoke below decks. I was in a small dark room. I could see vague dark shapes moving around the room. I got up, swaying slightly and walked around. The room was similar to the room in the British Navy ships that I had trained in. There was sick everywhere and in the dusty, dark corners, there was urine and waste. Men slipped around the room lazily. Some sat and read books or letters; others just lay there, muttering incomprehensible phrases. I found an old man who was walking around, giving advice and telling jokes to the other sailors, generally keeping the other sailors happy, no, the

slaves. All of the men here were slaves. The old man ushered me to a waste and urine free corner.

“You must be new,” he said gently. “Hi, my name’s Lucas Finnegan,”

“Hi, my name’s Paul Turner,” I replied.

I was surprised when Lucas dropped to his knees and said,

“Oh yes, the gods have blessed us this time!” He yelled. He grabbed my hand and started to parade me around the room.

“The gods have blessed us. Paul Turner is among us. We will be saved!”

The sailors crowded curiously around me. A sudden rush of questions and body odour overcame me. I fell to the ground, unconscious.

I awoke in Lucas’s corner. Everyone had backed off and Lucas was waving some wax above my nose.

“Sorry about that Mr Turner, we just all got a little bit excited,” He said apologetically.

“Never mind, never mind, I just caught by surprise,” I said airily.

“Anyways, how do you know so much about me?” I asked.

“Your reputation is massive. If the Captain knew you were Paul Turner, he would try and ransom you to the British Navy. You would be worth millions!”

I just stood there, shell-shocked. I had never realised that I had gained a reputation. I guess all my adventures had caught everyone’s attention. Lucas stared at me, amazed. Then a bell rang.

“Okay lads, it’s time for dinner,” said Lucas and they all filed out. Lucas put his arm around my shoulders and led me to the food area.

“Always put as much food as you can fit into your mouth,” Lucas said and then there was no more time to talk because we were being served. The food was better than I expected. It was roast beef and pork, served with mashed potatoes and gravy. I dug in and the phenomenal taste flew into my mouth. I scoffed the lot up and I was served more. I dug in greedily, emptying my plate with a flourish. The server moved to give me more but I declined. I knew I shouldn’t eat too much or I would become unfit and lazy. I excused myself and walked back to the prisoner’s room. I sat down and started to dose off but then Lucas shook me awake.

“What are you doing? We have to clean up and make a new mast by nightfall! Hurry!”

I jumped up and followed Lucas to the door and out onto the deck. Jimmy was standing there, looking angry.

“FINNEGAN! YOU’RE LATE AGAIN!”

He roared at Lucas. Lucas mumbled something and Jimmy whipped him. Lucas cowered on the ground, whimpering pathetically. I moved to help him but Jimmy lashed at me. I jumped aside and the whip missed by an inch. Then a stinging blow caught me on the shoulder blades. I grunted and fell to the ground. A man stood over me. He lashed out and I rolled away and jumped to my feet.

“Fine, I’ll go,” I said. “C’mon Lucas, let’s go,”

Lucas staggered to his feet and limped after me.

“Which way?” I whispered. I was coursing with adrenalin and needed to get working.

“That way,” Lucas managed to say. We stumbled towards it and we saw men lifting big pieces of wood and lashing them together with pieces of rope and hauling them upright. I let go of Lucas and went to help. I picked up two long beams and lashed them together, making a mainframe for the mast. I commanded the men to lash three more long pieces of wood to the mainframe in a tripod formation. To my surprise, the men followed my orders and split into teams to lift the heavy pieces.

Jimmy and Marco watched the men working.

“That one I whipped, he’s got a natural commanding influence. The prisoners will do anything he says,” Marco said, with a tinge of understanding. “We should try and befriend him“

“NO!” Jimmy shouted and Marco instinctively stepped back.

“Sorry,” He mumbled. Marco was superior to Jimmy, but the younger man scared him. He had a dangerous energy around him like an angry bubble. They stood in silence, watching the slaves complete the tasks.

I looked down at my watch. 11:45.

“Come on boys, hurry up. We only have fifteen minutes so get cracking!”

The group picked up the pace, running with the rigging instead of walking. They were finished in five minutes. We tramped back to the room, making a lot of noise in the process. I didn’t care. I had lifted logs about two times my weight and my muscles were screaming. I slumped into Lucas’s corner and fell asleep.

~4~

The next day, we gathered in the hull of the ship for registration. Everyone was there except for Finley Trike. Lucas and I looked at each other. We had seen him throw himself off the side of the ship. There was no stopping suicide.

Next, we queued up on the deck. The Captain was examining the new mast we had made overnight. It really was magnificent. The middle stood tall, surrounded by a tripod of beams holding it in place. The rigging was perfect, loose and strong all at the same time, it would give me extra swing and leverage if we ever went into battle.

The Captain finally finished his inspection and turned to us.

“So, this is what you built last night?” he snarled. We all nodded and he snorted.

“Of course you did. Who’s your leader?”

That question got a few people off guard.

“I said, WHO IS YOUR LEADER!” roared the Captain and the prisoners took a step back. They all pointed at me and the Captain turned to me.

“So, you’re the new recruit, aren’t ya?”

“Aye, that I am,” I replied and the Captain snorted.

“It seems that we are going to have to break your spirit,” said the Captain. “You are all equal here. You don’t listen to anyone but us pirates, you understand?”

“YES SIR!” we shouted and the Captain smiled.

“Now get on with scrubbing the deck!” And with that he was gone.

*The deck was a miserable wreck. Urine covered the once fine, polished wood, turning it green and mouldy. The slaves were supposed to clean out the green stains in one hour.*

We scrubbed the deck until it was spotless. Jimmy and Marco stood in the mist of prisoners, whipping and lashing out at sloppy slaves with their bats. I kept scrubbing as hard as I could, until my area was spotless. I started to move towards another slave to help him, but Jimmy blocked my path.

“Stay where you are Turner,” he snarled and I backed away, into Lucas. He stopped scrubbing and then Marco was there, whipping at Lucas’s face. Lucas cried out and fell, and I went into a rage. Nobody hurts my friends. I rolled underneath Marco’s next strike and slid the knife out of his belt. I ran away, so he thought I was scared. He charged after me. I suddenly spun around and threw the knife at Marco. Marco stopped and stared in horror at the gleaming

hilt of his own knife sticking out of him. He wailed and slumped to the ground.

“STOP!!” roared Jimmy and all the slaves stopped. He walked towards me and lifted me off the ground by my neck.

“You’re lucky I was your friend, Turner,” he snarled into my face. I kicked him between the legs and he fell, letting go of me. I massaged my neck and said,

“You’re lucky that that knife was heading for Marco.”

I left him groaning on the floor and ran over to Lucas. He was on his side, facing away from me. He was motionless. I crouched beside him and felt for a pulse. There was none for a second, but then it came, fluttering. That was worrying. I rolled him over and gasped. His face was a mass of blood and there were deep gashes gouged into his cheeks. His eyes were open and he was struggling for breath. When he realised that it was my face looming over him, he smiled. I felt his pulse slowing, and I desperately started to shake him.

“Please don’t die Lucas, I can’t lose you too!”

Lucas smiled and then closed his eyes. His pulse quickened then stopped altogether. I gently left him and stood up. I went over to Jimmy and tore his cape from his back. Jimmy groaned but didn’t put up a fight. I went back over to Lucas and wrapped his body with the cloak. I picked him up and carried him to the edge of the ship. I

looked at his face once last time and then dropped his body into the sea. All the slaves gathered around me and murmured a prayer.

Finally, Jimmy was able to stand and he escorted us to the Captain's office. The Captain told Jimmy to herd the prisoners away. Soon, the only people in the room were me and the Captain.

*The Captain's office was the nicest room on the ship. The walls were covered in all kinds of expensive materials. The furniture was made of rich, polished mahogany wood, carefully polished until it shone in the sun's ray.*

"I hear you killed one of my men," said the Captain, in a dangerously low voice."

"Yes, I did,"

"Why?"

"He was whipping my friend, sir"

"And that gives you the excuse to kill him. Your friend was annoying. He deserved what he got."

I leapt up and pinned the Captain to the wall and snarled at him,

"My friend was one of the bravest men I knew. You will not mock him. You understand me?"

The Captain nodded frantically and I let him go. Her hit the desk and slid off, landing in a heap on the floor. I let myself out of his office. I was going to get a lashing tonight, but I didn't care. No-one mocked my friends. No -one.

I was right. They had scheduled a whipping for me after dinner. All the slaves were commanded to watch me suffer. Some patted me on the back. Some said goodbye. Some said nothing.

After dinner, we were led up to the deck and I was separated from the rest of the slaves. They tied me to the new mast I had worked the slaves so hard to make. They tied me so that the whipper could not see my face but the slaves could.

*The whipping area was covered vividly in blood. It covered the entire rotted floor and the post the offender was chained to. It was in the middle of the vast ship, right where all the other slaves could see to teach them a lesson.*

The slaves drew breath and I knew that the whipper was behind me. I heard the bat whistle as it went through the air. It cracked onto my back and I almost screamed. Almost. I felt warm, hot blood run down my back. Then the whipper struck again. And again. The blood kept pouring. The slaves kept wincing. I kept silent. I knew that any sign of weakness would result in my death, so I kept quiet.

Finally the Captain got bored and the whipping stopped. My back was red raw and my skin stung against the moons rays. They untied

me and I staggered away to the slaves' room. My back was burning. I lay down in what used to be Lucas's corner. I lay down and dreamt of Lucas dying over and over again.

~5~

The next week was spent, by the slaves, in mourning for Lucas. I had learned that Lucas had been in captivity for seven years and had a wife, children and grandchildren back in Africa. He had never told me. Then again, I had only known him for nearly a week, but the old man had grown on me. I felt responsible for his death.

We got through the morning chores and started the afternoon ones. I was in deep thought, distracted from my chores with the horrible image of Lucas dying in my arms. I was whipped countless times for slacking but I didn't care. Nothing could be worse than how I felt now.

After a week, the shock of the old man's death wore off and we got back to our duties. We were beaten and whipped for fumbling and slacking. All our tormentors had guns in their hands, just in case we did something funny. We didn't though. We had learnt our lesson.

I was scrubbing the deck two days later, when the Captain walked up to me.

"Come with me, slave," he snarled and I got up and followed him. I didn't say anything. I was too lost in my own thoughts. We walked into the Captain's quarters and he told me to go in.

"You're not coming," I said with surprise.

“Nope, now get going,” the Captain said gruffly. I shrugged and walked through the door. There was an old man lounging in a chair. He jumped up and rushed over to me.

“Hey Turner, how goes life?”

“General!” I yelled and flew at him, knocking him to the ground. We wrestled for a few moments, but he came up on top. He always did. I rolled off him and we embraced warmly. He pulled away and sat back down on the couch, motioning for me to sit. I sat and he explained the situation to me.

“So, the British Navy has been searching for you for the past two weeks since your ship went missing. We found the pirate ship you had sunk and started searching for your ship. We were combing the waters when I spotted this ship heading *away* from us at top speed. We followed it and found you. Right now, the Captain thinks I am a fellow pirate and am here to trade some of his prisoners.”

He sat back and waited for my response. I knew what he wanted. He wanted me to come with him and sail away. But I couldn't leave the prisoners. I needed to free them as well.

“Sir, I'm sorry but I'm going to have to decline your generous offer,”

I said, dreading what was coming next. The General stood up and walked over to me. He studied my face, saw my determination, and shrugged.

“Fine, as long as I get to help,” he said, with feeling. He had always wanted to escape from his prison of an office. I agreed and we stood. I walked towards the door and held it open for him. He kicked me in the knee and darted out of the door. I smiled, rubbed my knee, and followed him out the door. The Captain was standing there, talking to the General in a low voice. I resisted the urge to salute to the General, and walked away. I walked into the prisoners' room and was hit by a fist. I toppled backwards into the wall, instinctively covering up. The fists kept coming, flying from all directions. I lashed out and felt a satisfying jolt. The fists were suddenly gone. A man lay on the floor, unmoving. I leant against the wall, calming myself down.

When I was calm, I walked over and slapped the man awake. His eyes shot open and his hands came at me. I knelt and punched him squarely in the nose and he stopped. I bent menacingly over him and asked him,

“Why did you try to kill me?”

The man coughed and said,

“You could have saved him!”

I wondered for a moment and then remembered Lucas's white face. I picked the man up and choke slammed him into the ground. I walked away, my good mood evaporating entirely. I sat in my corner and wept for Lucas.

Eventually, the pirates came to auction us off to the General. I didn't argue. I knew the General had a plan. The pirates herded us onto the deck and made us stand in height order. I was in the middle. We were pushed along and straddled into place. Finally, the pirates were satisfied with our order and went to stand by the Captain.

*The centre of the deck was the most glamorous bit of the deck. It shone with all the hard work the slaves had put in to it over the years.*

The Captain and the General talked in low voices for a few minutes, and then nodded. The General stepped back and walked towards the slaves. He stopped in front of the slave that had tried to kill me earlier. Suddenly, there was a flash of steel and the prisoner sagged against the steel blade that was imbedded in his chest. The General moved backwards and the body fell like a sack of potatoes. He repeated this until there were only the loyal slaves left. Then he turned to the Captain and said,

"I'll take all of these then,". The Captain stepped forward, outraged.

"You have just killed all of my able slaves. You will not be taking any of my slaves!"

He ran at the General and surprised him by rolling underneath him. He thrust upwards and the General toppled.

"I said," the Captain whispered in the General's ear, "That I wouldn't let you take my slaves,"

The General flipped up and smacked the Captain in the face. He flopped, lifeless, to the floor.

"Yes, I will," he said and the pirates backed away from him. I admired the General. He had struck fear into the hearts of these pirates just by taking out their leader. They would now do whatever the General wanted, or die.

"You pirates jump off the side," said the General. The pirates hesitated. The General threw a pistol to me and I shot two men down. The others quickly dived off the side. All except one. The helmsman stood proud and strong against our threat. I shot him down and dumped him over the side. I turned to face the Captain. He nodded and I pitched the other two over the side as well.

~6~

We loaded the slaves onto the boat and then stepped on ourselves. As we left the boat, the Captain set the mast on fire. It soon spread, eating up the dry wood of the deck. I turned away, but then saw a slave running towards our ship. His shorts were on fire and he threw them away. I reached out my hand. He grasped for it, but then the whole deck disappeared, taking the slave with it. The fire had burnt the hull and the deck had fallen into the sea.

*This standard warship was massive. It had all the latest cannons and cabins. The rigging glinted in the sun. The deck and hull was polished to perfection. This was a scout ship, a mere prototype of the British Navy.*

I turned away, horrified at what I had just seen. The General ushered me over to the Lieutenant. He nodded smartly to the General and then gripped me tightly.

“Welcome back Paul,” he said and pulled away.

“It’s good to be back,” I said with some feeling. I had missed my friends a lot.

The General smiled and led me over to my nest in the rigging. I jumped up into it and let out a sigh of satisfaction. This was where I belonged. I picked up my pistol and lent back into the cushion behind me. I drifted off to sleep. Then the nightmare began.

*I crouched down, trying to stem my whimpering. Marc burst into the room. I curled up under the bed. He walked around the room, occasionally jumping out at things. He was moving closer to my hiding spot. I shifted and knocked a piece of wood, and froze. Marc froze as well. His head turned in my direction. I slowly moved backwards quietly. Marc climbed on top of the bed and jumped on it. His weight crushed me and I yelled. Immediately, Marc jumped off the bed and lifted it up, leaving me exposed. I tried to run, but he grabbed me. Then the beatings began...*

I woke up slipping out of my nest. I was plummeting towards the deck. I desperately grabbed for the rigging. My hand snagged a piece of rope, which bit into my flesh. I cried out and let go. I hit the deck and lay, coughing violently. The General and the Lieutenant rushed towards me. The Lieutenant dropped to the ground and gently rolled me over. He grimaced, and lifted me off the ground. As I passed the General, he looked at me for confirmation. I nodded and he sat back, satisfied.

I was lying in the infirmary for a day before I could get back on my feet. I had severely damaged my collarbone and wouldn’t be able to swing for some time. I limped around the ship, assuring the sailors that I was fine and ready to go. But I wasn’t. The dreams had started again. I had been having nightmares about the ship I had trained on since the Sacramento mission. The bully Marc had found me hiding and always whipped me until I bled. I turned up to

lessons dripping with blood. If I told them, Marc would come after me to give me extra lashings for telling on him.

I shook the memories out of my head. They would have to wait I had work to do. First, I went to have breakfast with the General and the Lieutenant.

I dug ravenously into the pile of food before me. The General and the Lieutenant watched me for a few minutes then dug in. The food was so good! I had finished in minutes and I sat back, satisfied. I waited for the General and the Lieutenant to finish and then got up and followed them to the deck. We watched the sunset for a few minutes.

“So, Turner, are you ready to go on another mission?”

I looked at him in surprise. I had only just got back from a failed mission. He shouldn't be sending me out so soon.

“Sorry, but we need you out on another boat that is also heading to India,”

I nodded in understanding. No rest for the wicked. I got up and went to explore my kit. As I was walking to my room, a hand snaked out of the shadows and grabbed my arm. I ripped my arm from his grasp and spun around. Standing in the shadows was a pirate, equipped with a knife and a flintlock. His hand moved towards his waist but I chopped his hand and the knife fell.

I back up against the wall, defending the slices and stabs the pirate threw at me. I found an opening and palm-struck. The pirate fell, hands on his broken nose. I aimed a kick at his leg and he screamed as the bone broke. I picked him up and pinned him against the wall.

“Listen closely,” I said, spitting the words into his face. “You are not worthy of fighting me. For now, I will give you to the General and he will do what he pleases,” I released him and he flopped to the floor. I picked him up by the ankle and started to drag him to the General's office. I had to lean against the wall a few times. My collarbone was starting to throb.

I got to the General's office and knocked on the door. A voice said,

“Come in,” and I opened the door. The General was lounging in a chair by a blazing fireplace. He jumped as I entered the room. He rushed over to me, but stopped when he saw the bloody face of my assassin. He raised an eyebrow.

“So, Turner, why exactly are you dragging around this man?”

“Well, sir, he tried to kill me and I thought you would like to meet a man so daring,”

I said, with a trace of humour in my voice. Then I collapsed.

I woke up three days later in the Infirmary again. I groaned and lifted my head off the soft cushion. The doctor leaned over me and gently pushed me back down.

“Sir, you have to rest,” he urged. I nodded and drifted off to sleep.

*Marc was after me again. I ran the length of the deck and hid behind the captain’s quarters. I could hear Marc’s footsteps, coming closer and closer to me. I held my breath as he ran past me. I let it out and he turned. He smiled and jumped at me. We rolled around, clawing at each other. I rolled free and struck out at Marc. My foot connected with his chin and he fell backwards into the rolling waves. He screamed as he fell and I heard the captain waking. I took one last look at where Marc had fallen and scampered away.*

~7~

I awoke on the floor. I rolled over and stared at the ceiling. My blanket was sprawled on top of me. I appeared to have fallen out of bed in my nightmare. I shuddered as I remembered the vivid dream of Marc. I saw his falling body, his face a picture of pure terror. I shook the image out of my head. I got up and walked out of the Infirmary.

I passed sailors on the way to the deck. They nodded in greeting and I nodded back. I continued on to the stairs that led up to the deck. I walked forwards and into the General. He fell over and smacked his head against the wall. I hurried over to him, rubbing my head. He seemed to be okay, apart from a few bruises. I carried him to the Infirmary, and sat him down on a bed. He groaned and I looked at him again. A large swell had appeared on his forehead and he was muttering intolerantly.

I called a doctor and Dr Donker entered the room. He was a tall, brown man with a neat trimmed beard. He bent over the General and said,

“Well, he seems to be coming along well,”

I waited for more information but Dr Donker shooed me out of the room. I stood outside, wondering what to do. I decided to go see

the Lieutenant. I had to see what his reaction would be to the injured General.

I went up to the deck and saw a blot in the distance. If I had used a telescope I probably would have seen it clearer, but to me it seemed like it was just a small island. I dismissed it and headed over to the Lieutenant's office.

He greeted me warmly and asked why I was here. I told him that I had accidentally knocked into the General, and he was now in a coma. The Lieutenant nodded gravely.

"Yeah, he's getting on, but we can't make him stop coming. We tried to stop him coming here, but he just wouldn't listen!"

I nodded in understanding. I had too, seen the General stumble or lean against a wall for support. The man was getting on, and I didn't want to lose him soon. The Lieutenant surprised me with a cup of tea.

"To the General's health," he said, and we drank to the toast.

"Well," said the Lieutenant, putting down his mug of tea. "Go see if you can get anything out of that scumbag who tried to kill you."

I nodded in agreement and left the Lieutenant's office. I walked along to the cell department and knocked on the door

*The cell department was a ragged old cell, with rotting walls and rusting iron bars, built to keep the damned in. Its ceiling had bits of*

*worn plaster hanging precariously from the ceiling. The prisoner had a bunk, which had decrepit legs and a moth bitten rug to be called a blanket.*

The armed marine nodded and opened the door. I strode through and saw the prisoner trying to hang himself. I pushed over and threw him out of the makeshift noose. He flew across the room and slammed into the wall and slid to the ground. I walked over and knelt on his hand so he couldn't get up.

"Listen carefully peasant," I spat into his face. "You are very close to being tortured. If you so much as try to escape, I will personally come after you and pound you into the ground. Now tell me, who sent you?"

The man spat into my face in return and tried to wriggle out from underneath me. I carried him to the wall and pinned him to it.

"It would not be in your best interests to lie,"

"Baron Shigchgura," the man gasped and coughed. I let him drop to the floor. I leaned over him and said,

"Is he near,"

"He's been near the whole of your life," the man grinned.

I frowned and stood up. There had been no-one following the *Stringy Franchise*; nothing following the Captain's ship; nothing following this ship except...

Suddenly I heard the Lieutenant shout,

“Ho ship!”

I cursed and threw the prisoner against the wall. It was all clear now. The blot I had seen in the distance had been the Captain’s backup. With one more murderous look at the pirate, I tore out of the cell and onto the deck, which was in mayhem.

~8~

Men were running to and fro, preparing the guns, manning the outposts and so forth. I stumbled over to the rigging and swung up to my nest, where I confirmed my suspicions. The blot I had seen in the distance had been the pirate Shigchgura’s ship all along. I pulled out a telescope and felt the strange sense of déjà vu of when I had been defending the *Stringy Franchise*. Hopefully, we would win the battle. I looked through the telescope and nearly dropped it at what I saw.

A man, clearly 7 feet tall, was shouting at his men to man the guns and grappling hooks. There were at least 50 men scurrying around the deck. I dreaded to think how many lurked below the deck. I jumped down from my nest and started swinging, yelling orders at the British Navy men, encouraging them and hurrying them.

The enemy fired their first shot about an hour after the Lieutenant had sighted them. Their cannonball hurled towards us and buried their big explosive shells into our hull. There was a groan and our ship started to tilt. I fell from the rigging and dropped into a barrel of ropes. I climbed out and ducked, a gunshot flying over my head. I collapsed, waiting for further gunfire. When I deemed it safe, I got up slowly and ran towards the front of the deck. There, I could see Shigchgura, roaring at his men to launch the grappling hooks. They complied and soon hooks were whistling towards our boat on a

flurry of ropes. Some men went down, struck by the heavy weight of the hooks. Others were working on sawing through the ones that were imbedded in the deck.

But they weren't working fast enough. Slowly but steadily, the pirates were streaming over the lines, engaging with our men. I jumped at one and we went down under the forest of legs. We grappled, I shot and he cried out, I stood.

I was surveying the carnage when a man leapt at me. I decapitated him and his headless body hit me, bringing me down. I pushed it off and got up. I cut down two more pirates and searched for the Lieutenant. I found him grappling with a burly pirate while a smaller pirate crept up behind him, wielding a knife. I roared and jumped at the smaller one. He turned in surprise and I stabbed him in the chest. Drawing my flintlock, I shot down the burly pirate. The Lieutenant and I nodded and then launched back into the fight.

Gradually, we were pushing them back. Whenever a pirate broke through the line of sailors, I was there laying waste to many a pirate. I was sweating and panting but I fought on for the men, for the weak General, for my life.

As I disembowelled a pirate, I was struck by a massive force. I flew across the deck and hit a wall. I dropped to my hands and knees. Shigchgura was standing above me, wielding a colossal mace. He swung it and I leaped to the side. The mace demolished the wall

behind me and stuck. Shigchgura tried to pull it out but it was no use.

I closed in, holding my Pooley sword. Shigchgura left the mace and drew a long dirk from his belt. We clashed blades and the force made my arm shake. We exchanged blows, testing each other's abilities as a swordsman. He suddenly lunged and I leapt to the side. He flashed the dirk back and I only just managed to catch it on my blade. We held it there for a whole minute, both of us trying to gain the upper hand.

I suddenly left my sword and Shigchgura fell forward. Onto my flintlock. He just had time to look surprised before I pulled the trigger. Shigchgura was thrown off me and fell over the side. I wiped the sweat off my face and stood.

Without their captain, the pirates were being driven back to their boat. The Lieutenant and I fought like demons and cleared the pirates off our ship. They scuttled back and started to set sail. We couldn't let that happen.

I ordered the men to fire arrows at the pirate ship. The sails went up instantly. The deck took more and finally the mast fell, cleaving a fiery line through the deck, cutting the ship neatly in half.

The two halves slowly sank beneath the waves. I turned around with a smile on my face to see the Lieutenant on the floor, bleeding.

I rushed over, my triumph savagely ripped apart by the sight of the Lieutenant. I dropped to the ground in front of him and cradled his dying body. I could feel his heart beat fluttering as it frantically tried to keep him alive.

I rocked him gently side to side, willing him to keep focused. His breathing was speeding up and that worried me. I propped him up against the wall and started to search for the wound. Eventually, I found the long gash cut from shoulder to waist, obviously dealt by a massive weapon. I had a bad feeling that the Lieutenant had tried to stop Shigchura and had suffered the dire consequence.

I gently rolled him onto his side and called for Dr Donker. He arrived in a flash and started to work feverishly. First he gently opened the Lieutenant's blood soaked jacket and started to work at the undergarments. Once he was stripped to the waist, Dr Donker began to peel the sides of the gash open. Blood rushed out, wave by wave but Dr Donker gritted his teeth and kept carefully peeling away the skin. Once the wound was exposed, he got out his tools and started to probe the insides. I had to look away because I was a bit squeamish at the sight of his organs.

Dr Donker coughed when he was done. I turned around and knelt by him.

"I'm sorry my friend, but he is too far gone," He said gravely. I fell back, horrified.

"NO!" I screamed, cradling the now dead body of the Lieutenant.

"NOOOOOO!"

*The funeral pyre was made of the finest rope. The coffin shone in the sun like a dove. A stage was hastily built for the crowd of officers, wishing to send the Lieutenant off well.*

We had the Lieutenant's funeral today. I sat through the whole service in silence, mourning the closest thing I had to a friend in the Navy. The clerk droned on and on about the good deeds he did. I wasn't listening.

Finally, the painful process was over. I got up and swung into my nest. The General, fit and healthy tried to call me down for dinner but I didn't go. Eventually, he left me to my sorrow and mourning.

I didn't know what to do any more. There was no point in life. There was no point in anything anymore.

I must have sat there for the whole night because when I snapped awake, the sky was a warm bright blue and the sun was high in the sky.

I slipped out of the nest and fell to the deck. A sailor greeted me and persuaded me to have breakfast with him. Just as we entered the cafeteria, he peeled away and the General came over.

*The cafeteria was a nice place. The wooden floorboards were waxed and polished to perfection. The food was nutritious and fruity, truly the best food you could get on the ocean.*

I sat down with the General and he leaned over.

"How're you holding up laddie?"

"Fine."

"Oh, I know you're not fine laddie. Tell me truthfully, how're you holding up?"

I suddenly broke down and the General had to support me.

"He's gone. He's gone and he's not coming back!" I cried. The General comforted me and I managed to regain my composure.

"So, how close are we to port," I asked.

The General looked for signs of further breakdowns, but couldn't find any. He shrugged.

"It's hard to say. Might be three or four days,"

I sighed in frustration. I wanted to see my girlfriend so badly. I needed someone to feel safe with. Obviously, the General would give me a leave of a week to recover from the shock of the death of the Lieutenant.

Finally, land was sighted. We all stood at the front of the deck and waved at the massive crowd that was awaiting us. I saw my girlfriend, beautiful with her hair like a shimmering rainbow, hollering and shouting my name. I smiled and waved back.

The ship docked and the sailors flooded off. I walked through the throng of people and was hit by a screaming force. My girlfriend plunged into me and started to sob uncontrollably. I patted her on the back and she calmed down. She held me at arm's length and looked me over. She observed my arm wrapped in a bandage, my leg swathed in a cast, and my face covered in bruises and cuts. She held me close.

"Promise me you won't die," she pleaded for the hundredth time. I shook my head.

"I have a duty to the Queen, you know that,"

"I know but one day you'll get killed,"

"I know. I'll keep fighting though."

"I guess I can't influence you,"

"Nope, but guess what! I have leave for a week!"

She yelled and hugged me even tighter.

"Yes, yes, yes!"

I hugged her and she laughed. Hand in hand, we danced up the street to our house, where our butler, Tom Louisan was waiting.

He gave us a friendly nod and beckoned us into the house. I stepped into the musty room and breathed happily. This was where I belonged.

Follow the adventures of *The Rigging Ape* as he sails the sea on board *The Stringy Franchise*, swinging high above the roaring waves, fighting pirates, rescuing slaves, bullets, knives, death and intrigue. Read on to discover more about this exciting adventure.....

**A swashbuckling sequel to the high seas drama**

*'The Powder Monkey'*

