

- 3 -

Some sailors jostled by nervously, carrying ropes and stuff, and tied knots in things and pulled on lines, and shouted, and seemed quite fearful of the pursuing vessel. One guy bumped into Corky. Corky rubbed the place where it hurt, recalling that he hadn't felt anything at all when he was using the machine back in the coffee shop.

Corky opened the backpack and rustled around the bits of broken vacuum tubes. "I think something's wrong, Hewlett. I think we should try to get back to where we were."

"This is amazing," said Hewlett, oblivious. "The sights, the color, the smells...it's as if we're really here."

Corky had a really dorky black plastic digital watch. It had a calculator on it, and about six lines in the display, and would play songs, and had little games; and would always go off in movie theaters, so that the owner, in an impressive way, could say just loud enough for everyone around him to hear: "Oh, that's just my *digital watch* going off;" and had multiple time zones, and would do military time, and left a watch tan about three inches wide. In fact, it didn't merely leave a watch tan, it actually had a bleaching effect on the skin. If you compared your wrist to your butt, or someplace that never got any sun, the wrist would still be whiter. That was so the dork could impressively respond to queries with "Yes, that's the tan mark left

by my *digital watch*." And people would go "Ooooooh" in great awe and amazement, and there would be whispers like "He has a digital watch; he must be *high tech*." Others would sadly mutter "He's better than me, for he has a digital watch, and I have nothing."

Hewlett had made fun of Corky's watch on a daily basis for several years now, but only to overcome the natural feeling of inferiority because Corky had a digital watch, and Hewlett had nothing.

"Wow," said Corky. "My digital watch says that it's 1766."

"Seventeen sixty six," said Hewlett. "Very good. Very, very good."

Hewlett narrowed his eyes, and paced around a bit, and nodded, as if he had expected it to be 1766, and Corky's revelation was mere confirmation of what Hewlett already knew. "Very, very, very good."

"But it shouldn't say that. We're supposed to still be in the coffee shop."

"Shut up, Corky, here comes some 1766 guy. Let's impress him with how much modern stuff we know."

A peglegged ship captain came stumping up to them. He had a hook instead of one hand, and a patch over his eye, and a finger missing (not counting the five that used to be on his absent hand), and had a hunchback, and about every other malady that might afflict a human being. His remaining eye went off at an angle, so that you might suppose he's looking at a cloud when he's really staring straight at you. He was like those people who are cross-eyed but who see everything normal, so that when they look at you, one eye is looking at the sky and the other is looking at the shirt of the guy next to you, so when he amicably says "Hi, pleased to meet you," you think he's talking to that guy, or maybe to a bird high above, and aren't sure whether to respond, and feel guilty for a week.

The Captain wore a blue naval jacket that was all specially tailored to match his various modifications, and some fluffy fringy shirt underneath, with straps to

hold swords and things going across everywhere, and a telescope that actually telescopes in his hook, and a crutch in his hand, and long, long gray hair that was neatly combed into this huge bundle that went all over the place, and had dips and swoops and bumps in it.

He was pacing back and forth, suspiciously eyeing the ship off their stern, and mumbling "Aaarrrr" to himself every few seconds. Then he noticed Corky and Hewlett and said:

"Aloft with ye, ye foc'sle swabs, and shake out the foreto'garnts'l."

"Go where?" asked Corky, "do what?"

"Belay that flapjaw, scurvy swine, and hoist the stuns'l booms."

"Well you know what?" said Hewlett. "You lose, 1766 guy, because we're not really here. You can suck our wind. Pop us out of here, Corky."

"But Hewlett..."

"Never mind, just do it."

"I tried to tell you before..."

The Captain took a few stumpy steps closer to Hewlett and looked down at him. The Captain was pretty tall, probably because he'd had his peg made a few inches longer than his real leg had been. He was all distorted anyway, so it didn't make any difference, but at least this way he'd be taller than everyone, and could tower over them, and blow his bad breath in their face. As he did to Hewlett now.

Toothpaste was not available in 1766. If you wanted to freshen your breath, you had to eat a sprig of parsley, which didn't help much anyway. They grew no parsley aboard ship. Guys in 1766 usually considered themselves "rogues" and "brigands" and things like that, so they didn't really want fresh breath anyhow.

"Corky?"

"In the coffee shop, my watch stayed normal when I went back a few minutes, because I didn't actually go anywhere."

"Come to the point, if you have one." Hewlett would often say that when he didn't understand what somebody was saying, in order that they'd feel in the wrong, and that it was their fault for arranging their thoughts incomprehensibly so that Hewlett couldn't understand.

"Since my watch says 1766 this time, I think we really *are* in 1766. I told you the machine was broken."

Hewlett's eyes got a bit bigger as he stared up into the Captain's nodding face.

"So," said the Captain, all long and drawn out, in order to blow as much bad breath in Hewlett's face as possible, "ye have quite a mouth on ye, isn't it so? Aaarrrr."

"Well pop us somewhere, Corky."

"T'will be a long day indeed before Captain Sprat of the *Flying Nudibranch* takes backtalk from the likes of ye. Know that before ye sleeps with the sharks."

"I'm sorry, Hewlett, but the machine's not doing anything now. I've pressed all the buttons."

"Bos'n," said Captain Sprat. A disheveled striped shirt guy with all kinds of curly hair that never got washed sprang to his side. "Prepare this man for hauling."

"Aye, Cap'n." The bos'n clamped a big fat hand on Hewlett's shoulder. There was gross curly hair all over the guy's hand, which made Hewlett shudder at the touch.

"Wait a minute, you don't understand. I'm an upperclassman. What's hauling?"

"Come, lad," said the bos'n as he forcibly pushed Hewlett forward, "don't struggle, and t'will be o'er with the sooner."

"Hey, that hurts."

Several sailors guffawed.

"He's delicate, he is."

"Don't jostle him so, bos'n."

"Careful of his dainty necktie."

More laughter, and Hewlett began to feel annoyed. "This dainty necktie," he said as he was roughly hustled forward, "is pure East Indian silk."

The laughter stopped in an instant. Eyes widened. Many of the men had never seen East Indian silk before, or even knew that such a thing existed. Some were impressed with its velvety sheen. Others with its cunning paisley motif.

Corky, meanwhile, was hard at work studying a certain familiarity about Captain Sprat. Corky climbed to the poop of the *Flying Nudibranch* and approached the forbidding presence.

"Excuse me, sir?"

Captain Sprat did not turn around. If he did, it would acknowledge Corky's presence, which of course might give Corky the idea that he was not an insignificant microbe after all. And that would be incompatible with commanding a crew consisting of a couple dozen total losers. So instead, Captain Sprat just said:

"Well?"

"I was wondering, sir, if you might know of a place called Thunderwood."

"'Tis me family estate in the colonies. What know ye of it?"

"I was just wondering if, by any chance, you might have a great great great great grandson named the Colonel."

At this, Captain Sprat did turn around, to scowl at Corky. He looked him over head to toe, much as one would look hatefully at a thorn bush that had just scratched him.

"Look I that aged to ye? Perhaps if ye'd lose eighty or ninety stones, ye might not have so much fat between your ears." And he stamped his crutch on the deck, exactly as the Colonel had done with his cane in the library.

Corky deemed it wise to make a hasty retreat, which he did. Captain Sprat watched him go, his lip trembling with anger. By the time he got up enough dander to say something else, Corky was gone, so the Captain let it go and turned back the way he was facing before. But his lip still had all that trembling going on, which meant that his dander was at a high level, probably not short of maximum, and needed to be discharged somehow. Probably, he would remain in a bad mood the rest of the day. If Corky knew this, he would have allowed Captain Sprat to "haul" him along with Hewlett, because Corky didn't want to be responsible for the Captain being angry at everyone for the whole rest of the day.

"Where's me mate?" roared the bos'n.

"He's aft, punishing Hawkins."

"Someone else will have to haul this swab. Volunteers."

"Me, sir! Me!" from a dozen men. Then the shoving started, and comments like "You punished yesterday," and "I haven't punished anyone all week."

Lots of the sailors in the crew had things wrong with their faces. All sailors back then had facial anomalies. Most were missing some teeth, due to scurvy and things like that, and scars were popular as well. One guy's eyes were only like half an inch apart, and he had one big eyebrow arching over both of them. It was about four inches thick. Another guy's mouth was really huge, and when he talked, his big tongue flapped all over the place like a dog. If you tried to become a sailor back then, but looked normal, they wouldn't let you join. You had to look tough, and the easiest way was to have something wrong with your face. No one doubts the toughness of a really weird looking guy. The one sailor who was the toughest was from some country, and was super tall, and had little animal bones stuck through his face, and was a weird color like orange, and no one could tell where he came from. But he looked like you wouldn't want to mess with him, so he made a satisfactory sailor.

“All right, you,” said the bos’n, “and you, and you too.”

Everyone who didn’t get picked griped and moaned and “shivered their timbers” and expressed disappointment in all manner of sailor-like ways, but the bos’n just ignored them, and went aft to go spectate at Hawkins’ punishment.

The sailors kicked bits of debris along the deck and swatted at hanging ropes, and remarked that Hewlett’s hauling wouldn’t be worth administering anyway. What with his wimpy silk tie and all. So they all went back to work.

The big orange guy and a couple others bound Hewlett’s hands. At this point, Corky trotted up and said:

“Hewlett! I have some good news.”

“You’re going to beat these guys up and release me?”

“No. Captain Sprat is a relative of the Colonel’s.”

“Oh, good, Corky. That’s good that you’ve been researching the family trees of complete strangers. I was afraid you had boring and irrelevant news, like you’ve decided to pop us back to the coffee shop before these guys ‘haul’ me.”

“I’m afraid the machine still isn’t working.”

“Well then, you go back to your crucial genealogy work. I’d hate to think you were wasting time by continuing to try with the machine.”

Before Corky could apologize, he had to step aside to let the big orange guy through. One of the sailors had a rope tied to Hewlett’s wrists, and the other had a rope tied to Hewlett’s ankles. These two stepped to opposite sides of the ship, and the big orange guy lifted Hewlett up to throw him over the bow.

“Maybe you’d like to try the machine again, Corky.”

Corky pressed several buttons, but nothing happened. He shrugged.

The big orange guy did nothing for several moments.

“Go on,” said Hewlett to the orange guy. “See if you’re man enough.”

The big orange guy said a whole bunch of stuff in some language, and pointed at the ropes and things that attached at the bow of the ship.

"Idiots!" hissed Hewlett. "Corky, look. They can't throw me over the bow because there's stuff in the way. You there, pass your rope underneath that big stick thing coming out from the point of the ship."

The guy was Portuguese and didn't know what Hewlett was talking about. He thought Hewlett was cautioning him to have a really good grip on the rope, and so double-wrapped it around his wrists.

"I'm being hauled by idiots!"

Corky went to the third guy, who could understand English all right, except that he was just really stupid. Corky directed him to pass his rope underneath the bowsprit, then positioned the orange guy to drop Hewlett over just to one side of it.

The Portuguese guy grinned really big, and figured out what was going on, and made weird hand symbols that were Portuguese for "thumbs up" and "OK." The Portuguese guy wasn't stupid or anything, it's just that he only spoke Portuguese, and the orange guy only spoke orange guy language, and the stupid guy was entirely clueless; so together, they made a real winning team.

Corky showed the orange guy how to cradle Hewlett in his arms, and performed a pantomime "one two three toss," which the orange guy seemed to pick up all right. He'd probably done similar things with missionaries in whatever country he was from.

About this time, the other ship that was chasing them caught up alongside and steered toward them. Captain Sprat shouted from the poop deck:

"Aaarrrr, heave to, laddies! Prepare to repel!"

Neither Corky nor Hewlett knew what kind of a thing "heaving to" might be, but the crewmen did; so they ran around and pulled on ropes and climbed on rope ladders. The ship slowed and began to turn in the bouncing swells.

The orange guy dropped Hewlett and grabbed a couple spears that were leaning handy against the mast. The Portuguese guy sprang into the rigging and started aloft, while the stupid guy looked around, saw that the coast was clear, and disappeared into a hatch.

Hewlett loosened his ropes and threw them aside. "Now's our chance, Corky. Let's hide somewhere and get that darn machine to work."

The other ship was bigger and had more guys on it. They had these little miniature cannons attached to their fancy teak railings, which they were in the process of loading. Their ship was bearing down on the *Flying Nudibranch*, and it didn't look to Corky like there was enough room to stop or turn away. A collision was imminent.

"Hewlett, I don't think we should hide right now."

"Nonsense, Corky. Let's just follow that guy down that hatch."

The other ship plunged into the side of the *Flying Nudibranch*. Wood crunched apart, beams snapped, the decks lurched and everyone tumbled. The enemy crew aimed their miniature cannons and fired. Captain Sprat stood on the poop, waving a sword in the air (as if it was going to frighten the enemy away, or who knows why), just as one cannon shot a white burst of smoke with a bang. Chainshot swept across the *Flying Nudibranch's* decks, clearing a path of men and rigging nine feet wide.

Guys from the other ship swung over on ropes, like in movies where someone swings someplace where there couldn't possibly have been a rope hanging from anything. Nevertheless, a whole bunch of guys came over this way, and the crew didn't have time to question how, but fell to with swords, muskets and song:

*Such manly men are we
We're manfully a-sea
Hark, some chainshot
We fight manfully.*

“Now this is when men were men,” said Hewlett with admiration, as the crushed bow sunk lower and lower, and fire broke out. He closed his eyes and drew in a long, savory smell.

Some guys who were sword fighting got close, so Corky and Hewlett stepped back and got on top of some barrels.

“Hewlett, why do you think the machine brought us here? Of all places.”

“It’s technical, Corky. I’m not sure you could understand.”

“I think it’s important that Captain Sprat is distantly related to the brunette.”

“Of course,” said Hewlett, and ducked to avoid a flaming piece of debris.

“You’re beginning to comprehend.”

The guy with the huge mouth staggered up, run through by a cutlass. He handed his matchlock pistol to Hewlett, then collapsed on the deck and burst into flames. The pistol had a big curved handle that was really hard to hold, and a big bayonet blade that was probably more effective than the pistol part.

“What does he think I’m going to do with this?”

An enemy bald guy who looked like Sinbad the Sailor swung over on a rope, laughed crudely, and lunged at Hewlett with something that may have been a scimitar. Whatever it was, it looked like you’d probably call it a scimitar. It was eight feet long and curved, sharp on the side that was curved in, and jagged on the side that was curved out. It could probably mess you up if wielded by the right guy, and the Sinbad guy looked like he could be him. He was your average big fat bald nosering muscle guy, and he looked like he drew on a circle of black eye shadow every morning, and wore big loose Baghdad pants.

Hewlett quickly handed the pistol to Corky and said:

“Shoot that guy.”

“No.”

Corky tried to hand the pistol back.

“Corky, sidekicks do the dirty work.”

“Who says I’m the sidekick? Perhaps you are.”

Hewlett scoffed. “Yeah, *right*.”

Corky handed the pistol to the Sinbad guy, who dropped his scimitar, examined the pistol approvingly, and said:

“Thanks.”

And he ran off and joined the fight.

“Anyway,” said Corky, “I think the machine brought us here on purpose. If it was completely broken and operating at random, we wouldn’t have encountered Captain Sprat.”

Another blast of chainshot cleared the poop deck and sheared away Captain Sprat’s remaining arm—and the one that was waving the sword, at that.

“Great thunder and lightning!” shouted Captain Sprat. “Return fire, lads!”

“But Cap’n,” said the bos’n, “your arm.”

“Never mind,” said the Captain, and went for the ladder down to the deck, and leaned to reach the handrail. But the move was poorly planned, because he wasn’t yet accustomed to having no hands left, and the lean sent him toppling headfirst off the poop.

The bos’n helped him to his feet, or rather, to his foot and peg, and adjusted his hat for him.

“Where’s gunner’s mate Hawkins?”

“In punishment, sir.”

In the midst of the fire, smoke, rising water, bloodshed and clashing steel, several members of both crews had laid their weapons aside and were taking turns thrashing on a bound sailor with cat-o-nine tails.

“Commute the balance of his punishment, and get him to the powder stores.”

“But Captain, he’s only ten or twenty more lashes to go.”

Captain Sprat stepped into a knothole in the deck, and was busy trying to wriggle his peg out of it, when another volley of shot crashed through the scene and sliced off his good leg. The impact sent him spinning like a top, which drilled his peg even deeper into the hole.

Corky and Hewlett observed all this dubiously.

"I don't see how he's going to be of any help to us," said Corky.

"You're right; the old man let us down. Try the machine again."

A vast, weather-beaten hand landed on Corky's shoulder with a thump.

Corky was rotated by force, and found himself facing the man attached to the hand.

Admiral Grog was not really an admiral at all. In fact, if he was ashore, he'd have been naked and chained inside a box in an asylum. But at sea, insanity was encouraged, and so Grog found conditions favorable to declare himself an Admiral, and tell dumb sailor guys so, and get them to follow him. He had a big blue three pointed hat which he'd stolen from a tavern, and had plucked a pink plume from the costume of a dancing girl, and stuck it in the hat. His dumb sailor guys assumed it was a real naval officer's hat. They didn't know enough to wonder what navy he was an admiral in. Whenever his ship was in trouble, Admiral Grog just raised his sword and said something like "King and Country," *which* country being irrelevant. His crew would blubber and wipe a tear, overflowing with nationalism and pride, and fight to the death for him. Those who made it most of the way through battles uninjured began to fear that they were not giving it their all, and so would seek out deliberate injury or death, perhaps by allowing themselves to fall dramatically from the rigging. Consequently, Admiral Grog had to put in to port often to restock.

"Aaarrrr," said Captain Sprat. He was still boring deeper into the knothole, but his revolutions were beginning to slow enough that he could carry on normal conversation. "'Tis me old nemesis, Admiral Grog."

“Captain Thpwat,” said Grog through his neatly waxed handlebar mustache and 24-karat incisors, “and with a limb or two leth eath time, I thee.”

“I still has me hook,” said Captain Sprat, and swiped his remaining prosthetic limb in Grog’s direction each time he spun past, “and a bloody good distance from it ye’d keep if ye had the wisdom.”

The clamor of battle waned. Now and then there was the odd musket shot, or the sound of a sword sticking fast in a mast once it had passed through a victim, but the main part of the action was ended. Admiral Grog’s dumb sailors rounded up the few survivors of Captain Sprat’s crew.

“It theemth the battle ith won,” said Admiral Grog, and looking over the burning and sinking surroundings, “and little time left for converthathun.”

Admiral Grog maintained his grip on Corky and took three or four steps toward Captain Sprat. Grog had read many years ago that to gain respect, a seaman must walk With a Swagger. As a youth, he had interpreted this to mean that the legs must be splayed into a bowlegged position, and held rigid. The actual walking motion must take place in the spine, thus maintaining all parts of the anatomy from the hips down in a fixed position, tipping alternately forward, with the pivot point near the top of the lumbar vertebrae. He had practiced this action tirelessly for years, and through careful observation and note-taking, had concluded that the proper costume for walking With a Swagger included pantaloons that stopped short below the knee, proceeded tightly up the thighs, buttoned up the front with prominent round brass buttons, and ended above the stomach roll or at the bottom of the ribcage, whichever was higher. Outwardly curved legs that tapered uniformly like bent carrots were best, particularly with tiny little black shoes. Socks, or, more properly, stockings, were to be pulled high and terminated just below the cuff of the pantaloons. Observations of actual naval personalities suggested that the most effective countenances tended toward top-heaviness, with the bulk of the body

concentrated in a great round ball, supported by the seemingly inadequate leg structure. Admiral Grog was fanatical about the maintenance of these characteristics. He was convinced that it was the secret to his command.

His steps With a Swagger toward Captain Sprat were meticulous. His costume was immaculate; his presence, dominating.

“Thtop that nonthenthical thpinning.”

Captain Sprat’s rotation slowed even more, but rather than alleviate his embarrassment, a new development added to it in the form of a loud creak. Captain Sprat’s bos’n and remaining officers cringed in shame; each time their Captain’s face went by Admiral Grog, the pegleg gave an excruciating squeak against the wooden knothole.

“Aaarrrr,” said Captain Sprat each time he went by, though with less gusto than before.

Finally he creaked to a stop. He had hoped that he would at least be facing Admiral Grog, but alas, fortune put him at an undignified four o’clock position. The bos’n rotated him back toward the Admiral manually.

“The *Flying Nudibranth* ith thinking,” said Admiral Grog. “It’th a pity, for you’d make a fine maypole for a thummer thelebrathun.”

Captain Sprat swiped with his hook again, but he was a couple feet short.

“I thuppothe you know why I’m here.”

“Me secrets will go to Davy Jones with me, and a curse shall be on he that dare follow.”

“I’m thertain that would thound nithe in literature,” said Grog, and took a couple more steps around Captain Sprat. Everyone watched with awe. The bos’n discreetly rotated his captain to follow Admiral Grog as he paced around.

“I thuppothe *thith* hath nothing to do with your thecret.” Admiral Grog threw Corky to the deck at Captain Sprat’s feet—or at his peg, rather.

"Ouch," said Corky.

Captain Sprat glared at Corky with derision. "'Tis merely a lubbardly member of me crew, more suited for the gallows than the foc'sle."

"A thimple thailor, you thay?" Admiral Grog prodded Corky's prone form with his tiny foot. "How do you explain the finery of hith dreth?"

"Aaarrrr," said Captain Sprat with a note of surprise. He noted with disgust that Corky was not wearing the same coarse rags of the others.

Admiral Grog's rapier shot backward over his shoulder, caught Hewlett by the dainty silk necktie, and pulled him down to the deck beside Corky.

"And thith one. Look at hith handth. Thith man hath never handled a rope or climbed a throud in his life." The Admiral tugged Hewlett to his feet and gently caressed his hand. "The hand of a thcribe. The hand, my dear Captain Thpwat, of the author of your thecret thelethtial navigathunal thythtem!"

Corky and Hewlett exchanged knowing glances. "The Colonel's blue manuscript," said Hewlett as Grog dropped him back to the deck, "the one you stole for the Poet. What was in it?"

"Honestly, Hewlett, you can't mean to insinuate that I would read someone's private writings."

"Well then, is celestial navigation a 1766 thing, or a modern thing?"

"I don't know. It sounds pretty 1766 to me."

"Then it follows," said Hewlett, and stamped his fist on the deck, "that our Captain Sprat fancies himself something of an amateur scientist, not unlike his great great grandson the Colonel."

"Great great *great* great grandson," Corky corrected.

A burning spar fell and crunched a couple of *Flying Nudibranch* prisoners. Yards of flaming canvas crashed down and landed with a hiss in the water washing over the sinking decks. Steam billowed.

Admiral Grog smiled. It made his waxed mustache twitch. In fact it cracked some of the wax off, and made it look like he'd done a really bad job waxing it. His grin exposed his golden teeth. Hewlett reckoned that if it wasn't 1766, Admiral Grog would probably be working in Vegas.

"Me bones shall sink to Neptune's realm before I give ye my secret system," growled Captain Sprat as the water lapped at his peg, "and I'll scuttle me ship before ye takes it in prize," he said as a firestorm raged in his rigging.

"Time is wathting. Give me the thecret thythtem."

Captain Sprat's officers began to sweat. Were they to die to protect their Captain's navigational discoveries?

Admiral Grog's pasty face swelled with ecstasy in the suffering of his foe.

Hewlett picked himself up out of the water and fixed his tie. "Gentlemen," he began.

No one responded. A few of Grog's dumb sailors looked at each other. Finally someone said:

"You mean us?"

"Yes. Gentlemen, I believe I have the solution to this dilemma."

"Thpeak, thcribe."

"It is pointless for men to die, and for a technological advancement to be lost forever, to protect one man's sadly misdirected pride." And Hewlett turned toward Captain Sprat, narrowed his eyes with disapproval, and shook his head as if to say "I am *so* disappointed in you."

Captain Sprat opened his mouth to call Hewlett a foul traitor, but stopped himself when he realized that Hewlett knew nothing about the secret navigational system.

“You were quite right, Admiral Grog,” said Hewlett. “I, and my valet,” (here he indicated Corky by kicking him in the gut) “do indeed possess the keys to the deepest mysteries of Captain Sprat’s secret.”

“Aaarrrr, I’m being betrayed by me own scribes, the two men more knowledgeable than e’en meself about me life’s work. The only ones who, if ye were to take and haul them five or six times, might spill what they know and make ye rich for life.”

“Ith that tho?” said Admiral Grog and stepped right up to Captain Sprat, and put his face right up to him, thus threatening to put an eye out (the one that remained) with his long, pointed nose; but Captain Sprat’s bad breath drove him back a step or two.

“I think,” Admiral Grog continued, “that I will take thome memberth of your crew aboard my thip, to prevent their drowning and being lotht at thea.”

Several hands went up.

“Hmm,” said Grog, and scanned the ranks of men. His eye fell upon Corky and Hewlett. “The the two. Where ith my firtht mate?”

A dumb guy sprang to his side and saluted.

“Thtrap the the two thoroughly with thtring, tho they cannot ethcape.”

Hewlett pretended to struggle as the guy bound him. He didn’t want to *actually* struggle, because if by some small chance he managed to struggle free, they might harm him. So he acted like he was immensely strong and straining against powerful captors, even though it was just one skinny first mate guy tying him with string; this way, people wouldn’t think he was a wimp.

Corky was a wimp, and so did not struggle. Admiral Grog noticed Corky’s lack of resistance, and concluded that Corky must be stoic and unafraid, and not someone to be trifled with. He saw Hewlett’s theatrical squirming and strained facial expression, and decided Hewlett was an average coward.

"My notes," said the average coward, "I can't tell you anything without my papers."

Admiral Grog narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

"They're in the cabin," said Hewlett. He noticed a handy dinghy tied alongside the Admiral's ship, and thought he could make it if given only the shortest moment. "If you'll just untie me for a minute, I'll go and grab them."

Captain Sprat hissed out a laugh and nodded. He had that Something Up His Sleeve look so prominent on his great great great great grandson.

Admiral Grog surveyed the situation with dubious caution. "Untie that one," he said to his first mate, but pointed his rapier at Corky.

"No, me," said Hewlett with a worried brow. The first mate cut off Corky's strings and helped him up. Hewlett was indignant. He tried winking to Corky, and tried to gesture by jerking his head around to say "Grab that dinghy, fight your way to me, rescue me and escape."

The message did not get through to Corky in its entirety, but Corky resolved to do his best anyway. He walked past Captain Sprat on his way toward the main cabin.

"Aaarrrr," whispered the Captain to Corky. "Get ye down to the powder stores and blow up the ship, and Grog along with us."

Corky smiled and nodded as if he found favor with the Captain's order. He wended his way through the burning debris to the half submerged poop deck and climbed in through the shattered door.

Admiral Grog expected him to bring confidential notes describing celestial navigation.

Captain Sprat expected him to blow up the ship.

Hewlett expected something he had tried to indicate with indecipherable head movements.

Corky expected to drown.

He swam into the Captain's cabin, awash nearly to the ceiling. The mighty *Flying Nudibranch* was settling into her watery grave, and as the massive structure crumpled and sank, great shivering snaps shook through her timbers. Loud creaks groaned from the submerged decks below.

Pages from the ship's log floated everywhere, as well as numerous corks that Captain Sprat had gnipped across the cabin. In Corky's day, fat guys who drink beer and watch TV always snap their bottle caps across the room. Captain Sprat's gnipping of corks was analogous to this. A proper gnip consists of gripping the cork firmly by the flat ends between the thumb and bent forefinger, and then applying pressure until the cork pops out and is gnipped across the room. Captain Sprat had a caged parrot on the receiving end of most gnips; that parrot was now collecting its belongings and stretching its wings at a cannonball hole for an extended holiday.

Corky rummaged through a shelf containing titles like "*Ye Naked Wenches*" and "*Songf to be fung at fea.*" For some reason, people back then didn't know the difference between the letters F and S. Often, when they meant S, they'd write F instead. Corky was aware of this, so when he saw a logbook with "*Celestial Navigation*" scrawled on the cover in ink, he knew he'd found what he was looking for.

Moments later, Corky emerged on deck. Admiral Grog and Captain Sprat both looked at him with hopeful enthusiasm, but Hewlett was gritting his teeth angrily and jerking around. Corky observed that it may not be possible to please everyone all the time, but it may still be accomplished...

"You have the important paperth needed by the thcribe?"

"Yes sir," said Corky, but winked at Captain Sprat to reassure him that his precious research was not in jeopardy.

Corky handed a volume to the Admiral. The Admiral held it out a ways, rotated it one way and then the other, then brought it in close and squinted at it.

"The dinghy," hissed Hewlett when Corky was close enough. "I told you specifically to make a break for that dinghy."

"We'll be all right once we're aboard the Admiral's ship."

"The Admiral's going to haul us once he finds out we don't know anything."

"Of course we do," said Corky. "We're modern guys, right? We can certainly fool a 1766 guy. We can tell him whatever we like."

Hewlett perked up at that suggestion. Any opportunity to profit through deception was more than appealing.

"Thcribe," said Admiral Grog, stepping forward with the volume, "It ith not the duty of admiralth to perform menial tathkth of literathy."

"Oh," laughed Hewlett. "You mean you can't read."

A wave of fierce glowering swept over the Admiral's face, chipping off a bit more mustache wax. Nevertheless, he held the book out for Hewlett to read aloud.

Hewlett cleared his throat and examined the book, ignoring Corky's frantic gestures to shut up:

"Ye Nakked Wenches," Hewlett read. "Cool!"

"What!" shouted Admiral Grog, and his rapier flicked from its sheathe in an instant. Captain Sprat roared with the proverbial Last Laugh, as Corky grabbed the bound Hewlett by the middle and lunged for the dinghy.

"After them! Thieze them! Hoitht them to the matht head!"

All the Admiral's dumb guys flocked over the debris just as Corky and Hewlett landed in the dinghy. Aboard the Admiral's ship, more dumb guys loaded the swivel guns.

"Can't even read!" shouted Hewlett with a vulgar laugh. "You...you stupid head, you!"

“You will thuffer for that thnide remark!”

Corky rifled through the backpack, dug past the *Celestial Navigation* notebook and found the controls to the machine. He hit all the buttons at once, and there was a flash.