



Shōgun

The Epic Novel of Japan

James Clavell

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*SHŌGUN***

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- 1945 KING RAT
- 1963 NOBLE HOUSE
- 1979 WHIRLWIND

JAMES CLAVELL

SHŌGUN

The Epic Novel of Japan

DELTA TRADE PAPERBACKS

A Delta Book

PUBLISHING HISTORY

Dell mass market edition published May 1976

Delacorte Press hardcover edition published April 1983

Delta trade paperback edition / June 2009

Published by Bantam Dell

A Division of Random House, Inc.

New York, New York

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Part title calligraphy by Soo Jin Kang

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eISBN: 978-0-307-49089-6

www.bantamdell.com

v3.1_r2

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I would like to thank all those here, in Asia, and in Europe—the living and the dead—who helped make this novel possible.

Lookout Mountain, California

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Dedication

About the Author

PROLOGUE

The gale tore at him and he felt its bite deep within and he knew that if they did not make landfall in three days they would all be dead. Too many deaths on this voyage, he thought. I'm Pilot-Major of a dead fleet. One ship left out of five—eight and twenty men from a crew of one hundred and seven and now only ten can walk and the rest near death and one Captain-General one of them. No food, almost no water and what there is, brackish and foul.

His name was John Blackthorne and he was alone on deck but for the bowsprit lookout—Salamon the mute—who huddled in the lee, searching the sea ahead.

The ship heeled in a sudden squall and Blackthorne held on to the arm of the seachair that was lashed near the wheel on the quarterdeck until she righted, timbers squealing. She was the *Erasmus*, two hundred and sixty tons, a three-masted trader-warship out of Rotterdam armed with twenty cannon and sole survivor of the first expeditionary force sent from the Netherlands to ravage the enemy in the New World. The first Dutch ships ever to breach the secrets of the Strait of Magellan. Four hundred and ninety-six men, all volunteers. All Dutch except for three Englishmen—two pilots, one officer. Their orders: to plunder Spanish and Portuguese possessions in the New World and put them to the torch; to open up permanent trading concessions; to discover new islands in the Pacific Ocean that could serve as permanent bases and to claim the territory for the Netherlands; and, within three years, to come home again.

Protestant Netherlands had been at war with Catholic Spain for more than four decades, struggling to throw off the yoke of their hated Spanish masters. The Netherlands, sometimes called Holland, Dutchland, or the Low Countries, were still legally part of the Spanish Empire. England, their only allies, the first country in Christendom to break with the Papal Court at Rome and become Protestant some seventy-odd years ago, had also been warring on Spain for the last twenty years, and openly allied with the Dutch for a decade.

The wind freshened even more and the ship lurched. She was riding under bare poles but for storm tops'ls. Even so the tide and the storm bore her strongly toward the darkening horizon.

There's more storm there, Blackthorne told himself, and more reefs and more shoals. An unknown sea. Good. I've set myself against the sea all my life and I've always won. I always will.

First English pilot ever to get through Magellan's Pass. Yes, the first—and first pilot ever to sail these Asian waters, apart from a few bastard Portuguese or motherless Spaniards who still think they own the world. First Englishman in these seas...

So many firsts. Yes. And so many deaths to win them.

Again he tasted the wind and smelled it, but there was no hint of land. He searched the ocean but it was dull gray and angry. Not a fleck of seaweed or splash of color to give a hint of a sanding shelf. He saw the spire of another reef far on the starboard quarter but that told him nothing. For a month now outcrops had threatened them, but never a sight of land. The ocean's endless, he thought. Good. That's what you were trained for—to sail the unknown sea, to chart it and come home again. How many days from home? One year and eleven months and two days. The last landfall Chile, one hundred and thirty-three days aft, across the ocean Magellan had first sailed eighty years ago called Pacific.

Blackthorne was famished and his mouth and body ached from the scurvy. He forced his eyes to check the compass course and his brain to calculate an approximate position. Once the plot was written down in his rutter—his sea manual—he would be safe in this speck of the ocean. And if he was safe, his ship was safe and then together they might find the Japanese or even the Christian King Prester John and his Golden Empire that legend said lay to the north of Cathay, wherever Cathay was.

And with my share of the riches I'll sail on again, westward for home, first English pilot ever to circumnavigate the globe, and I'll never leave home again. Never. By the head of my son!

The cut of the wind stopped his mind from wandering and kept him awake. To sleep now would be foolish. You'll never wake from that sleep, he thought, and stretched his arms to ease the cramped muscles in his back and pulled his cloak tighter around him. He saw that the sails were trimmed and the wheel lashed secure. The bow lookout was awake. So patiently he settled back and prayed for land.

"Go below, Pilot. I take this watch if it pleases you." The third mate, Hendrik Specz, was pulling himself up the gangway, his face gray with fatigue, eyes sunken, skin blotched and sallow. He leaned heavily against the binnacle to steady himself, retching a little. "Blessed Lord Jesus, piss on the day I left Holland."

"Where's the mate, Hendrik?"

"In his bunk. He can't get out of his *scheit voll* bunk. And he won't—not this side of Judgment Day."

"And the Captain-General?"

"Moaning for food and water." Hendrik spat. "I tell him I roast him a capon and bring it on a silver platter with a bottle of brandy to wash it down. *Scheit-huis! Coot!*"

"Hold your tongue!"

"I will, Pilot. But he's a maggot-eaten fool and we'll be dead because of him." The young man retched and brought up mottled phlegm. "Blessed Lord Jesus, help me!"

"Go below. Come back at dawn."

Hendrik lowered himself painfully into the other seachair. "There's the reek of death below. I take the watch if it pleases you. What's the course?"

"Wherever the wind takes us."

"Where's the landfall you promised us? Where's the Japans—where is it, I ask?"

"Ahead."

"Always ahead! *Gottimhimmel*, it wasn't in our orders to sail into the unknown. We should be back home by now, safe, with our bellies full, not chasing St. Elmo's fire."

"Go below or hold your tongue."

Sullenly Hendrik looked away from the tall bearded man. Where are we now? he wanted to ask. Why can't I see the secret rutter? But he knew you don't ask those questions of a pilot, particularly this one. Even so, he thought, I wish I was as strong and healthy as when I left Holland. Then I wouldn't wait. I'd smash your gray-blue eyes now and stamp the maddening half-smile off your face and send you to the hell you deserve. Then I'd be Captain. Pilot and we'd have a Netherlander running the ship—not a foreigner—and the secrets would be safe for us. Because soon we'll be at war with you English. We want the same thing: to command the sea, to control all trade routes, to dominate the New World, and to strang-

Spain.

“Perhaps there is no Japans,” Hendrik muttered suddenly. “It’s *Gottbe-wonden* legend.”

“It exists. Between latitudes thirty and forty north. Now hold your tongue or go below.”

“There’s death below, Pilot,” Hendrik muttered and put his eyes ahead, letting himself drift.

Blackthorne shifted in his seachair, his body hurting worse today. You’re luckier than most he thought, luckier than Hendrik. No, not luckier. More careful. You conserved your fruit while the others consumed theirs carelessly. Against your warnings. So now your scurvy is still mild whereas the others are constantly hemorrhaging, their bowels diarrhetic, their eyes sore and rheumy, and their teeth lost or loose in their heads. Why is it men never learn?

He knew they were all afraid of him, even the Captain-General, and that most hated him. But that was normal, for it was the pilot who commanded at sea; it was he who set the course and ran the ship, he who brought them from port to port.

Any voyage today was dangerous because the few navigational charts that existed were so vague as to be useless. And there was absolutely no way to fix longitude.

“Find how to fix longitude and you’re the richest man in the world,” his old teacher, Albar Caradoc, had said. “The Queen, God bless her, ‘ll give you ten thousand pound and dukedom for the answer to the riddle. The dung-eating Portuguese’ll give you more—a golden galleon. And the motherless Spaniards’ll give you twenty! Out of sight of land you’re always lost, lad.” Caradoc had paused and shaken his head sadly at him as always. “You’re lost, lad. Unless ...”

“Unless you have a rutter!” Blackthorne had shouted happily, knowing that he had learned his lessons well. He was thirteen then and had already been apprenticed a year to Albar Caradoc, pilot and shipwright, who had become the father he had lost, who had never beaten him but taught him and the other boys the secrets of shipbuilding and the intimate way of the sea.

A rutter was a small book containing the detailed observation of a pilot *who had been there before*. It recorded magnetic compass courses between ports and capes, headlands and channels. It noted the sounding and depths and color of the water and the nature of the seabed. It set down the *how we got there and how we got back*: how many days on a specific tack, the pattern of the wind, when it blew and from where, what currents to expect and from where; the time of storms and the time of fair winds; where to careen the ship and where to water; where there were friends and where foes; shoals, reefs, tides, havens; best, *everything* necessary for a safe voyage.

The English, Dutch, and French had rutters for their own waters, but the waters of the rest of the world had been sailed only by captains from Portugal and Spain, and these two countries considered all rutters secret. Rutters that revealed the seaways to the New World unraveled the mysteries of the Pass of Magellan and the Cape of Good Hope—both Portuguese discoveries—and thence the seaways to Asia were guarded as national treasures by the Portuguese and Spanish, and sought after with equal ferocity by their Dutch and English enemies.

But a rutter was only as good as the pilot who wrote it, the scribe who hand-copied it, the very rare printer who printed it, or the scholar who translated it. A rutter could therefore contain errors. Even deliberate ones. A pilot never knew for certain *until he had been there*

himself. At least once.

At sea the pilot was leader, sole guide, and final arbiter of the ship and her crew. Alone he commanded from the quarterdeck.

That's heady wine, Blackthorne told himself. And once sipped, never to be forgotten, always to be sought, and always necessary. That's one of the things that keep you alive when others die.

He got up and relieved himself in the scuppers. Later the sand ran out of the hourglass behind the binnacle and he turned it and rang the ship's bell.

"Can you stay awake, Hendrik?"

"Yes. Yes, I believe so."

"I'll send someone to replace the bow lookout. See he stands in the wind and not in the lee. That'll keep him sharp and awake." For a moment he wondered if he should turn the ship into the wind and heave to for the night but he decided against it, went down the companionway, and opened the fo'c'sle door. The companionway led into the crew's quarters. The cabin ran the width of the ship and had bunks and hammock space for a hundred and twenty men. The warmth surrounded him and he was grateful for it and ignored the ever-present stench from the bilges below. None of the twenty-odd men moved from his bunk.

"Get aloft, Maetsukker," he said in Dutch, the lingua franca of the Low Countries, which he spoke perfectly, along with Portuguese and Spanish and Latin.

"I'm near death," the small, sharp-featured man said, cringing deeper into the bunk. "I'm sick. Look, the scurvy's taken all my teeth. Lord Jesus help us, we'll all perish! If it wasn't for you we'd all be home by now, safe! I'm a merchant. I'm not a seaman. I'm not part of the crew.... Take someone else. Johann there's—" He screamed as Blackthorne jerked him out of the bunk and hurled him against the door. Blood flecked his mouth and he was stunned. A brutal kick in his side brought him out of his stupor.

"You get your face aloft and stay there till you're dead or we make landfall."

The man pulled the door open and fled in agony.

Blackthorne looked at the others. They stared back at him. "How are you feeling, Johann?"

"Good enough, Pilot. Perhaps I'll live."

Johann Vinck was forty-three, the chief gunner and bosun's mate, the oldest man aboard. He was hairless and toothless, the color of aged oak and just as strong. Six years ago he had sailed with Blackthorne on the ill-fated search for the Northeast Passage, and each man knew the measure of the other.

"At your age most men are already dead, so you're ahead of us all." Blackthorne was thirty-six.

Vinck smiled mirthlessly. "It's the brandy, Pilot, that an' fornication an' the saintly life I've led."

No one laughed. Then someone pointed at a bunk. "Pilot, the bosun's dead."

"Then get the body aloft! Wash it and close his eyes! You, you, and you!"

The men were quickly out of their bunks this time and together they half dragged, half carried the corpse from the cabin.

"Take the dawn watch, Vinck. And Ginsel, you're bow lookout."

"Yes sir."

Blackthorne went back on deck.

He saw that Hendrik was still awake, that the ship was in order. The relieved look on Salamon, stumbled past him, more dead than alive, his eyes puffed and red from the cut of the wind. Blackthorne crossed to the other door and went below. The passageway led to the great cabin aft, which was the Captain-General's quarters and magazine. His own cabin was starboard and the other, to port, was usually for the three mates. Now Baccus van Nekk, the chief merchant, Hendrik the third mate, and the boy, Croocq, shared it. They were all very sick.

He went into the great cabin. The Captain-General, Paulus Spillbergen, was lying half-conscious in his bunk. He was a short, florid man, normally very fat, now very thin, the skin of his paunch hanging slackly in folds. Blackthorne took a water flagon out of a secret drawer and helped him drink a little.

"Thanks," Spillbergen said weakly. "Where's land—where's land?"

"Ahead," he replied, no longer believing it, then put the flagon away, closed his ears to the whines and left, hating him anew.

Almost exactly a year ago they had reached Tierra del Fuego, the winds favorable for them to stab into the unknown of Magellan's Pass. But the Captain-General had ordered a landing search for gold and treasure.

"Christ Jesus, look ashore, Captain-General! There's no treasure in those wastes."

"Legend says it's rich with gold and we can claim the land for the glorious Netherlands."

"The Spaniards have been here in strength for fifty years."

"Perhaps—but perhaps not this far south, Pilot-Major."

"This far south the seasons're reversed. May, June, July, August're dead winter here. The rutter says the timing's critical to get through the Straits—the winds turn in a few weeks then we'll have to stay here, winter here for months."

"How many weeks, Pilot?"

"The rutter says eight. But seasons don't stay the same—"

"Then we'll explore for a couple of weeks. That gives us plenty of time and then, if necessary, we'll go north again and sack a few more towns, eh, gentlemen?"

"We've got to try now, Captain-General. The Spanish have very few warships in the Pacific. Here the seas are teeming with them and they're looking for us. I say we've got to go on now."

But the Captain-General had overridden him and put it to a vote of the other captains—none to the other pilots, one English and three Dutch—and had led the useless forays ashore.

The winds had changed early that year and they had had to winter there, the Captain-General afraid to go north because of Spanish fleets. It was four months before they could sail. By then one hundred and fifty-six men in the fleet had died of starvation, cold, and the flux and they were eating the calfskin that covered the ropes. The terrible storms within the Strait had scattered the fleet. *Erasmus* was the only ship that made the rendezvous off Chile. They had waited a month for the others and then, the Spaniards closing in, had set sail into the unknown. The secret rutter stopped at Chile.

Blackthorne walked back along the corridor and unlocked his own cabin door, relocking behind him. The cabin was low-beamed, small, and orderly, and he had to stoop as he crossed to sit at his desk. He unlocked a drawer and carefully unwrapped the last of the apples he had hoarded so carefully all the way from Santa Maria Island, off Chile. It was bruised and tiny.

with mold on the rotting section. He cut off a quarter. There were a few maggots inside. He ate them with the flesh, heeding the old sea legend that the apple maggots were just as effective against scurvy as the fruit and that, rubbed into the gums, they helped prevent your teeth from falling out. He chewed the fruit gently because his teeth were aching and his gums sore and tender, then sipped water from the wine skin. It tasted brackish. Then he wrapped the remainder of the apple and locked it away.

A rat scurried in the shadows cast by the hanging oil lantern over his head. Timber creaked pleasantly. Cockroaches swarmed on the floor.

I'm tired. I'm so tired.

He glanced at his bunk. Long, narrow, the straw palliase inviting.

I'm so tired.

Go to sleep for this hour, the devil half of him said. Even for ten minutes—and you'll be fresh for a week. You've had only a few hours for days now, and most of that aloft in the cold. You must sleep. Sleep. They rely on you....

"I won't, I'll sleep tomorrow," he said aloud, and forced his hand to unlock his chest and take out his rutter. He saw that the other one, the Portuguese one, was safe and untouched and that pleased him. He took a clean quill and began to write: "April 21 1600. Fifth hour. Dusk. 133d day from Santa Maria Island, Chile, on the 32 degree North line of latitude. Sea still high and wind strong and the ship rigged as before. The color of the sea dull gray-green and bottomless. We are still running before the wind along a course of 270 degrees, veering to North North West, making way briskly, about two leagues, each of three miles this hour. Large reefs shaped like a triangle were sighted at half the hour bearing North East by North half a league distant.

"Three men died in the night of the scurvy—Joris sailmaker, Reiss gunner, 2d mate of Haan. After commending their souls to God, the Captain-General still being sick, I cast them into the sea without shrouds, for there was no one to make them. Today Bosun Rijckloff died.

"I could not take the declension of the sun at noon today, again due to overcast. But I estimate we are still on course and that landfall in the Japans should be soon....

"But how soon?" he asked the sea lantern that hung above his head, swaying with the pitch of the ship. How to make a chart? There must be a way, he told himself for the millionth time. How to set longitude? There must be a way. How to keep vegetables fresh? What about scurvy ...?

"They say it's a flux from the sea, boy," Alban Caradoc had said. He was a huge-bellied, great-hearted man with a tangled gray beard.

"But could you boil the vegetables and keep the broth?"

"It sickens, lad. No one's ever discovered a way to store it."

"They say that Francis Drake sails soon."

"No. You can't go, boy."

"I'm almost fourteen. You let Tim and Watt sign on with him and he needs apprentice pilots."

"They're sixteen. You're just thirteen."

"They say he's going to try for Magellan's Pass, then up the coast to the unexplored region—to the Californias—to find the Straits of Anian that join Pacific with Atlantic. From the Californias all the way to Newfoundland, the Northwest Passage at long last ..."

“The *supposed* Northwest Passage, lad. No one’s proved that legend yet.”

“He will. He’s Admiral now and we’ll be the first English ship through Magellan’s Pass, the first in the Pacific, the first—I’ll never get another chance like this.”

“Oh, yes, you will, and he’ll never breach Magellan’s secret way ‘less he can steal a rutt or capture a Portuguese pilot to guide him through. How many times must I tell you—a pilot must have patience. Learn patience, boy. You’ve plen—”

“Please!”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because he’ll be gone two, three years, perhaps more. The weak and the young will get the worst of the food and the least of the water. And of the five ships that go, only his will come back. You’ll never survive, boy.”

“Then I’ll sign for his ship only. I’m strong. He’ll take me!”

“Listen, boy, I was with Drake in *Judith*, his fifty tonner, at San Juan de Ulua when we and Admiral Hawkins—he was in *Minion*—when we fought our way out of harbor through the dung-eating Spaniards. We’d been trading slaves from Guinea to the Spanish Main, but we had no Spanish license for the trade and they tricked Hawkins and trapped our fleet. They had thirteen great ships, we six. We sank three of theirs, and they sank our *Swallow*, *Angel Caravelle*, and the *Jesus of Lubeck*. Oh, yes, Drake fought us out of the trap and brought us home. With eleven men aboard to tell the tale. Hawkins had fifteen. Out of four hundred and eight jolly Jack Tars. Drake is merciless, boy. He wants glory and gold, but only for Drake and too many men are dead proving it.”

“But I won’t die. I’ll be one of—”

“No. You’re apprenticed for twelve years. You’ve ten more to go and then you’re free. But until that time, until 1588, you’ll learn how to build ships and how to command them—you obey Alban Caradoc, Master Shipwright and Pilot and Member of Trinity House, or you never have a license. And if you don’t have a license, you’ll never pilot *any* ship in English waters, you’ll never command the quarterdeck of *any* English ship in *any* waters because that was good King Harry’s law, God rest his soul. It was the great whore Mary Tudor’s law, may her soul burn in hell, it’s the Queen’s law, may she reign forever, it’s England’s law, and the best sea law that’s ever been.”

Blackthorne remembered how he had hated his master then, and hated Trinity House, the monopoly created by Henry VIII in 1514 for the training and licensing of all English pilots and masters, and hated his twelve years of semibondage, without which he knew he could never get the one thing in the world he wanted. And he had hated Alban Caradoc even more when, to everlasting glory, Drake and his hundred-ton sloop, the *Golden Hind*, had miraculously come back to England after disappearing for three years, the first English ship to circumnavigate the globe, bringing with her the richest haul of plunder aboard ever brought back to those shores: an incredible million and a half sterling in gold, silver, spices, and platinum.

That four of the five ships were lost and eight out of every ten men were lost and Tim and Watt were lost and a captured Portuguese pilot had led the expedition for Drake through the Magellan into the Pacific did not assuage his hatred; that Drake had hanged one officer, excommunicated the chaplain Fletcher, and failed to find the Northwest Passage did not detract from national admiration. The Queen took fifty percent of the treasure and knighted

him. The gentry and merchants who had put up the money for the expedition received three hundred percent profit and pleaded to underwrite his next corsair voyage. And all seamen begged to sail with him, because he did get plunder, he did come home, and, with their share of the booty, the lucky few who survived were rich for life.

I would have survived, Blackthorne told himself. I would. And my share of the treasure then would have been enough to—

“Rotz vooruiiiiiit!” Reef ahead!

He felt the cry at first more than he heard it. Then, mixed with the gale, he heard the wailing scream again.

He was out of the cabin and up the companionway onto the quarterdeck, his head pounding, his throat parched. It was dark night now and pouring, and he was momentarily exulted for he knew that the canvas raintraps, made so many weeks ago, would soon be full to overflowing. He opened his mouth to the near horizontal rain and tasted its sweetness then turned his back on the squall.

He saw that Hendrik was paralyzed with terror. The bow lookout, Maetsukker, cowered near the prow, shouting incoherently, pointing ahead. Then he too looked beyond the ship.

The reef was barely two hundred yards ahead, great black claws of rocks pounded by the hungry sea. The foaming line of surf stretched port and starboard, broken intermittently. The gale was lifting huge swathes of spume and hurling them at the night blackness. A forepeak halliard snapped and the highest top gallant spar was carried away. The mast shuddered in its bed but held, and the sea bore the ship inexorably to its death.

“All hands on deck!” Blackthorne shouted, and rang the bell violently.

The noise brought Hendrik out of his stupor. *“We’re lost!”* he screamed in Dutch. *“Oh, Lord Jesus, help us!”*

“Get the crew on deck, you bastard! You’ve been asleep! You’ve both been asleep!” Blackthorne shoved him toward the companionway, held on to the wheel, slipped the protecting lashing from the spokes, braced himself, and swung the wheel hard apart.

He exerted all his strength as the rudder bit into the torrent. The whole ship shuddered. Then the prow began to swing with increasing velocity as the wind bore down and soon they were broadside to the sea and the wind. The storm tops’ls bellied and gamely tried to carry the weight of the ship and all the ropes took the strain, howling. The following sea towered above them and they were making way, parallel to the reef, when he saw the great wave. He shouted a warning at the men who were coming from the fo’c’sle, and hung on for his life.

The sea fell on the ship and she heeled and he thought they’d floundered but she shook herself like a wet terrier and swung out of the trough. Water cascaded away through the scuppers and he gasped for air. He saw that the corpse of the bosun that had been put on deck for burial tomorrow was gone and that the following wave was coming in even stronger. It caught Hendrik and lifted him, gasping and struggling, over the side and out to sea. Another wave roared across the deck and Blackthorne locked one arm through the wheel and the water passed him by. Now Hendrik was fifty yards to port. The wash sucked him back alongside, then a giant comber threw him high above the ship, held him there for a moment shrieking, then took him away and pulped him against a rock spine and consumed him.

The ship nosed into the sea trying to make way. Another halliard gave and the block and tackle swung wildly until it tangled with the rigging.

Vinck and another man pulled themselves onto the quarterdeck and leaned on the wheel for help. Blackthorne could see the encroaching reef to starboard, nearer now. Ahead and to port were more outcrops, but he saw gaps here and there.

“Get aloft, Vinck. Fores’ls ho!” Foot by foot Vinck and two seamen hauled themselves into the shrouds of the foremast rigging as others, below, leaned on the ropes to give them a hand.

“Watch out for’ard,” Blackthorne shouted.

The sea foamed along the deck and took another man with it and brought the corpse of the bosun aboard again. The bow soared out of the water and smashed down once more bringing more water aboard. Vinck and the other men cursed the sail out of its ropes. Abruptly it fell open, cracked like a cannonade as the wind filled it, and the ship lurched.

Vinck and his helpers hung there, swaying over the sea, then began their descent.

“Reef—reef ahead!” Vinck screamed.

Blackthorne and the other man swung the wheel to starboard. The ship hesitated then turned and cried out as the rocks, barely awash, found the side of the ship. But it was an oblique blow and the rock nose crumbled. The timbers held safe and the men aboard began to breathe once more.

Blackthorne saw a break in the reef ahead and committed the ship to it. The wind was harder now, the sea more furious. The ship swerved with a gust and the wheel spun out of their hands. Together they grabbed it and set her course again, but she bobbed and twisted drunkenly. Sea flooded aboard and burst into the fo’c’sle, smashing one man against the bulkhead, the whole deck awash like the one above.

“Man the pumps!” Blackthorne shouted. He saw two men go below.

The rain was slashing his face and he squinted against the pain. The binnacle light and a riding light had long since been extinguished. Then as another gust shoved the ship farther off course, the seaman slipped and again the wheel spun out of their grasp. The man shrieked as a spoke smashed the side of his head and he lay there at the mercy of the sea. Blackthorne pulled him up and held him until the frothing comber had passed. Then he saw that the man was dead so he let him slump into the seachair and the next sea cleaned the quarterdeck of him.

The gulch through the reef was three points to windward and, try as he could, Blackthorne could not gain way. He searched desperately for another channel but knew there was none, so he let her fall off from the wind momentarily to gain speed, then swung her hard to windward again. She gained way a fraction and held course.

There was a wailing, tormented shudder as the keel scraped the razor spines below and aboard imagined they saw the oak timbers burst apart and the sea flood in. The ship reeled forward out of control now.

Blackthorne shouted for help but no one heard him so he fought the wheel alone against the sea. Once he was flung aside but he groped back and held on again, wondering in his thickening mind how the rudder had survived so long.

In the neck of the pass the sea became a maelstrom, driven by the tempest and hemmed in by the rocks. Huge waves smashed at the reef, then reeled back to fight the incomer until the waves fought among themselves and attacked on all quarters of the compass. The ship was sucked into the vortex, broadside and helpless.

“Piss on you, storm!” Blackthorne raged. “Get your dung-eating hands off my ship!”

The wheel spun again and threw him away and the deck heeled sickeningly. The bowsprit caught a rock and tore loose, part of the rigging with it, and she righted herself. The foremast was bending like a bow and it snapped. The men on deck fell on the rigging with axes to cut it adrift as the ship floundered down the raging channel. They hacked the mast free and it went over the side and one man went with it, caught in the tangled mess. The man cried out trapped, but there was nothing they could do and they watched as he and the mast appeared and disappeared alongside, then came back no more.

Vinck and the others who were left looked back at the quarterdeck and saw Blackthorne defying the storm like a madman. They crossed themselves and doubled their prayers, some weeping with fear, and hung on for life.

The strait broadened for an instant and the ship slowed, but ahead it narrowed ominously again and the rocks seemed to grow, to tower over them. The current ricocheted off one side taking the ship with it, turned her abeam again and flung her to her doom.

Blackthorne stopped cursing the storm and fought the wheel to port and hung there, his muscles knotted against the strain. But the ship knew not her rudder and neither did the sea.

“Turn, you whore from hell,” he gasped, his strength ebbing fast. “Help me!”

The sea race quickened and he felt his heart near bursting but still he strained against the press of the sea. He tried to keep his eyes focused but his vision reeled, the colors wrong and fading. The ship was in the neck and dead but just then the keel scraped a mud shoal. The shock turned her head. The rudder bit into the sea. And then the wind and the sea joined to help and together they spun her before the wind and she sped through the pass to safety. In the bay beyond.

One



CHAPTER ONE

Blackthorne was suddenly awake. For a moment he thought he was dreaming because he was ashore and the room unbelievable. It was small and very clean and covered with soft mats. He was lying on a thick quilt and another was thrown over him. The ceiling was polished cedar and the walls were lathes of cedar, in squares, covered with an opaque paper that muted the light pleasantly. Beside him was a scarlet tray bearing small bowls. One contained cold cooked vegetables and he wolfed them, hardly noticing the piquant taste. Another contained a fish soup and he drained that. Another was filled with a thick porridge of wheat or barley and he finished it quickly, eating with his fingers. The water in an odd-shaped gourd was warm and tasted curious—slightly bitter but savory.

Then he noticed the crucifix in its niche.

This house is Spanish or Portuguese, he thought, aghast. Is this the Japans? or Cathay?

A panel of the wall slid open. A middle-aged, heavy-set, round-faced woman was on her knees beside the door and she bowed and smiled. Her skin was golden and her eyes black and narrow and her long black hair was piled neatly on her head. She wore a gray silk robe and short white socks with a thick sole and a wide purple band around her waist.

“Goshujinsama, gokibun wa ikaga desu ka?” she said. She waited as he stared at her blankly, then said it again.

“Is this the Japans?” he asked. “Japans? Or Cathay?”

She stared at him uncomprehendingly and said something else he could not understand. Then he realized that he was naked. His clothes were nowhere in sight. With sign language he showed her that he wanted to get dressed. Then he pointed at the food bowls and she knew that he was still hungry.

She smiled and bowed and slid the door shut.

He lay back exhausted, the untoward, nauseating nonmotion of the floor making his head spin. With an effort he tried to collect himself. I remember getting the anchor out, he thought. With Vinck. I think it was Vinck. We were in a bay and the ship had nosed a shoal and stopped. We could hear waves breaking on the beach but everything was safe. There were lights ashore and then I was in my cabin and blackness. I don't remember anything. Then there were lights through the blackness and strange voices. I was talking English, the Portuguese. One of the natives talked a little Portuguese. Or was he Portuguese? No, I think he was a native. Did I ask him where we were? I don't remember. Then we were back in the reef again and the big wave came once more and I was carried out to sea and drowning—was freezing—no, the sea was warm and like a silk bed a fathom thick. They must have carried me ashore and put me here.

“It must have been this bed that felt so soft and warm,” he said aloud. “I've never slept on silk before.” His weakness overcame him and he slept dreamlessly.

When he awoke there was more food in earthenware bowls and his clothes were beside him in a neat pile. They had been washed and pressed and mended with tiny, exquisite stitching.

But his knife was gone, and so were his keys.

I'd better get a knife and quickly, he thought. Or a pistol.

His eyes went to the crucifix. In spite of his dread, his excitement quickened. All his life he

had heard legends told among pilots and sailormen about the incredible riches of Portugal's secret empire in the East, how they had by now converted the heathens to Catholicism and held them in bondage, where gold was as cheap as pig iron, and emeralds, rubies, diamonds and sapphires as plentiful as pebbles on a beach.

If the Catholic part's true, he told himself, perhaps the rest is too. About the riches. Yes. But the sooner I'm armed and back aboard *Erasmus* and behind her cannon, the better.

He consumed the food, dressed, and stood shakily, feeling out of his element as he always did ashore. His boots were missing. He went to the door, reeling slightly, and put out a hand to steady himself but the light, square lathes could not bear his weight and they shattered, the paper ripping apart. He righted himself. The shocked woman in the corridor was staring up at him.

"I'm sorry," he said, strangely ill at ease with his clumsiness. The purity of the room was somehow defiled.

"Where are my boots?"

The woman stared at him blankly. So, patiently, he asked her again with sign language and she hurried down a passage, knelt and opened another lathe door, and beckoned him. Voices were nearby, and the sound of running water. He went through the doorway and found himself in another room, also almost bare. This opened onto a veranda with steps leading to a small garden surrounded by a high wall. Beside this main entrance were two old women, three children dressed in scarlet robes, and an old man, obviously a gardener, with a rake in his hand. At once they all bowed gravely and kept their heads low.

To his astonishment Blackthorne saw that the old man was naked but for a brief, narrow loincloth, hardly covering his organs.

"Morning," he said to them, not knowing what to say.

They stayed motionless, still bowing.

Nonplussed, he stared at them, then, awkwardly he bowed back to them. They straightened and smiled at him. The old man bowed once more and went back to work in the garden. The children stared at him, then, laughing, dashed away. The old women disappeared into the depths of the house. But he could feel their eyes on him.

He saw his boots at the bottom of the steps. Before he could pick them up, the middle-aged woman was there on her knees, to his embarrassment, and she helped him to put them on.

"Thank you," he said. He thought a moment and then pointed at himself. "Blackthorne," he said deliberately. "Blackthorne." Then he pointed at her. "What's your name?"

She stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"*Black-thorne*," he repeated carefully, pointing at himself, and again pointed at her. "What's your name?"

She frowned, then with a flood of understanding pointed at herself and said, "*Onna! Onna!*"

"*Onna!*" he repeated, very proud of himself as she was with herself. "*Onna.*"

She nodded happily. "*Onna!*"

The garden was unlike anything he had ever seen: a little waterfall and stream and small bridge and manicured pebbled paths and rocks and flowers and shrubs. It's so clean, he thought. So neat.

"Incredible," he said.

"'Nkerriberr?" she repeated helpfully.

“Nothing,” he said. Then not knowing what else to do, he waved her away. Obediently she bowed politely and left.

Blackthorne sat in the warm sun, leaning against a post. Feeling very frail, he watched the old man weeding an already weedless garden. I wonder where the others are. Is the Captain General still alive? How many days have I been asleep? I can remember waking and eating and sleeping again, the eating unsatisfactory like the dreams.

The children flurried past, chasing one another, and he was embarrassed for them at the gardener’s nakedness, for when the man bent over or stooped you could see everything and he was astounded that the children appeared not to notice. He saw tiled and thatched roofs and other buildings over the wall and, far off, high mountains. A crisp wind broomed the sky and kept the cumulus advancing. Bees were foraging and it was a lovely spring day. His body begged for more sleep but he pushed himself erect and went to the garden door. The gardener smiled and bowed and ran to open the door and bowed and closed it after him.

The village was set around the crescent harbor that faced east, perhaps two hundred houses unlike any he’d ever seen nestling at the beginning of the mountain which spilled down to the shore. Above were terraced fields and dirt roads that led north and south. Below, the waterfront was cobbled and a stone launching ramp went from the shore into the sea. A good safe harbor and a stone jetty, and men and women cleaning fish and making nets, a unique designed boat being built at the northern side. There were islands far out to sea, to the east and to the south. The reefs would be there or beyond the horizon.

In the harbor were many other quaintly shaped boats, mostly fishing craft, some with one large sail, several being sculled—the oarsmen standing and pushing against the sea, not sitting and pulling as he would have done. A few of the boats were heading out to sea, others were nosing at the wooden dock, and *Erasmus* was anchored neatly, fifty yards from shore, in good water, with three bow cables. Who did that? he asked himself. There were boats alongside her and he could see native men aboard. But none of his. Where could they be?

He looked around the village and became conscious of the many people watching him. When they saw that he had noticed them they all bowed and, still uncomfortable, he bowed back. Once more there was happy activity and they passed to and fro, stopping, bargaining, bowing to each other, seemingly oblivious of him, like so many multicolored butterflies. But he felt eyes studying him from every window and doorway as he walked toward the shore.

What is it about them that’s so weird? he asked himself. It’s not just their clothes and behavior. It’s—*they’ve no weapons*, he thought, astounded. No swords or guns! Why is that?

Open shops filled with odd goods and bales lined the small street. The floors of the shops were raised and the sellers and the buyers knelt or squatted on the clean wooden floors. He saw that most had clogs or rush sandals, some with the same white socks with the thick soles that were split between the big toe and the next to hold the thongs, but they left the clogs and sandals outside in the dirt. Those who were barefoot cleansed their feet and slipped on clean, indoor sandals that were waiting for them. That’s very sensible if you think about it, he told himself, awed.

Then he saw the tonsured man approaching and fear swept sickeningly from his testicles into his stomach. The priest was obviously Portuguese or Spanish, and, though his flowing robe was orange, there was no mistaking the rosary and crucifix at his belt, or the cold hostility on his face. His robe was travel stained and his European-style boots besmirched

with mud. He was looking out into the harbor at *Erasmus*, and Blackthorne knew that he must recognize her as Dutch or English, new to most seas, leaner, faster, a merchant fighting ship patterned and improved on the English privateers that had wreaked so much havoc on the Spanish Main. With the priest were ten natives, black-haired and black-eyed, one dressed like him except that he had thong slippers. The others wore varicolored robes or loose trousers, or simply loincloths. But none was armed.

Blackthorne wanted to run while there was time but he knew he did not have the strength and there was nowhere to hide. His height and size and the color of his eyes made him alien in this world. He put his back against the wall.

“Who are you?” the priest said in Portuguese. He was a thick, dark, well-fed man in his middle twenties, with a long beard.

“Who are you?” Blackthorne stared back at him.

“That’s a Netherlander privateer. You’re a heretic Dutchman. You’re pirates. God have mercy on you!”

“We’re not pirates. We’re peaceful merchants, except to our enemies. I’m pilot of that ship. Who are you?”

“Father Sebastio. How did you get here? How?”

“We were blown ashore. What is this place? Is it the Japans?”

“Yes. Japan. Nippon,” the priest said impatiently. He turned to one of the men, older than the rest, small and lean with strong arms and calloused hands, his pate shaved and his hair drawn into a thin queue as gray as his eyebrows. The priest spoke haltingly to him in Japanese, pointing at Blackthorne. All of them were shocked and one made the sign of the cross protectively.

“Dutchmen are heretics, rebels, and pirates. What’s your name?”

“Is this a Portuguese settlement?”

The priest’s eyes were hard and bloodshot. “The village headman says he’s told the authorities about you. Your sins have caught up with you. Where’s the rest of your crew?”

“We were blown off course. We just need food and water and time to repair our ship. Then we’ll be off. We can pay for every—”

“Where’s the rest of your crew?”

“I don’t know. Aboard. I suppose they’re aboard.”

Again the priest questioned the headman, who replied and motioned to the other end of the village, explaining at length. The priest turned back to Blackthorne. “They crucify criminals here, Pilot. You’re going to die. The *daimyo*’s coming with his samurai. God have mercy on you.”

“What’s a *daimyo*?”

“A feudal lord. He owns this whole province. How did you get here?”

“And *samurai*?”

“Warriors—soldiers—members of the warrior caste,” the priest said with growing irritation. “Where did you come from and who are you?”

“I don’t recognize your accent,” Blackthorne said, to throw him off balance. “You’re Spaniard?”

“I’m Portuguese,” the priest flared, taking the bait. “I told you, I’m Father Sebastio from Portugal. Where did you learn such good Portuguese. Eh?”

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