

A Torn Mind Short Story

James the Sea Dog

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1897 Words

James watched the birds scatter above him. Every gunshot sent them reeling into frenzy. He and his crew were sailing down the strait, trailing the Reds' ship.

"Oy, James!"

"Yea?"

"They shot Charleston."

"Fuckin' Christ."

He rolled onto his stomach and shoved a clip into his rifle. Poking his head above the railing, he scanned the enemy ship, making count of six guns aimed at his head, and threw himself downward. Bullets flew into the crow's nest, splintering the wood.

"No good," he said.

The birds continued darting east and west on queue with the fired shots. He sighed and slid toward the ladder, making his way down to the deck. His mates were chaotically running throughout the ship, some welding guns and others with the dead on their shoulders. James jogged his way to the lower cabin. It was flooded again. He trudged through the salt water toward a center porthole. Glancing quickly through the window, he leaned back and ran the scenario through his head. Pop up, shoot the two on the left, run down to the far port window, cap the three in the center, and then back to the middle for the last up top. He changed to his breathing drill, counting his breaths and duration, looking to synchronize into a pattern.

"1, 2 ..."

James raised the rifle and shot twice. The heads exploded like pumpkins. He crouched and darted toward the end of the cabin, and shot. Another pumpkin smashed, but his hearing blanked out. He crouched, looking at the algae in the water. Blood started to cloud in the pool. His hearing came rushing back with a high-toned ring. He raised his hands to his ears. His left hand rubbed over a squirrelly mess of a gaping wound.

"Bastards. There ain't no one takin' my ear."

He snatched it out of the water, pocketed it, and trudged back to the main deck. Twice the amounts of crew were carrying corpses. He grabbed the ladder to the crow nest and heaved himself up. Can't return to the lower cabin, he thought. One hand after another he scaled upwards, and slid into the nest.

"Argh. Fat Billy, you idiot."

He grabbed the dead man's ammunition.

"Right. Someone thinks they're a good shot. We'll bloody see. Right is right. Fuck."

He peered down the scope. Salt-water grime blocked his view.

"No good. No good. How's yours Billy?"

He took the scope and it spun it on with a flick.

"If he shot my left ear, he must be on my... Fuck. What side, Billy?"

The corpse's face was loose like a droopy dog.

"Well, fuck you. My guess is better than yours. He stuck his head up and scanned. One pair of eyes were on the far right. He lifted his gun and split the man's brain in half. He scanned again. His right arm shifted, causing him to sink next to Billy. He smiled.

"Bastard. He's shot me twice now. Fuckin' graze is all."

He popped up and jumped down, playing with death. Bullets flew into the nest's shield.

"Could use some backup!" he yelled.

"Right, on it, James!" called from below.

Hands slapped the rings of the ladder. A sailor slid into the nest.

"Oy, Tiny Tim. How you been?"

"I - am not tiny, James."

"That what the misses says?"

"Me 'misses' caught the flu six months ago. Probably dead - dead in the water, just like all of us. Oy, James, how come you're still alive?"

"I'll have my turn. But I've got more Red brains to explode 'fore that."

"Bloody right."

"Now, watch out, Tim. There's a sharp one out there. He boated a few days ago. This fella's invisible every time I stick my eyes out there. Can't even track him"

"Maybe it's more than one."

"I don't think so. He's on my level. Not a trait you see often."

"Well, fuckin' eh, maybe some sort of relative of yours."

James ground his teeth.

"Maybe. Oy, I'm gonna try the star burst."

"What should I do? Hold the nest?"

"Yea, though you might want to nail your head down to your shoulders before you pop your head up."

James grabbed the ladder and slid down. The plank below had a pool of blood sloshing back and forth. He scurried around corpses.

"James, little help with this one?"

A mate held the torso of a corpse.

"Haven't time."

"Yea, fuck you. Cause all I want to do is drag corpses day after day."

"Well, I'll be sure you get your watery grave if you happen to fall yourself."

"Thanks."

James rounded the corner to port side, dropped to prone, and crawled forward.

Gunshots fired endlessly. He held the barrel steady and leaned out. On the west bridge, a Red was drinking coffee. Could take his hand, he thought, and waited.

"C'mon, you bastard. Bait someone. A shot fired, ricocheting off the wall of James' cover. A face appeared on the top deck, aiming towards the nest. James pulled the trigger. The bullet pierced the Red's cheek and flew out the other.

"That takes care of that."

James crawled back and ran towards the back. He slipped in the pool of blood.

"Fuck! This shit's three times the size. Get a fucking broom."

"Yes, sir," a mate said.

"Oy, Tim!"

James climbed the ladder. Blood dripped down down the rungs. A drop splashed into his eye.

"Fuck!"

"Tim! Oy!"

He reached the top of the nest and flung himself in.

"I can't fuckin' see, Tim. I got our man in the cheek. Bastard won't be takin' shots anytime soon. Oy."

"Just a minute, James. I swear I saw one on the east rise. Though, sometimes I dunno if I saw what I saw. Tim flew back with both arms out and a stream of blood. James grabbed his hand. Tim's nose was blown inward. Blood poured out in gallons.

"Argh!"

James could feel his shoulder being pulled out of the socket.

"Fuck!"

He dropped Tim. The body smacked against the ladder and hooked his leg like impalement. James smeared his scope to get the scud away.

"Bastards!"

He stood up, giving full vulnerability. A head on the west cage exploded. He aimed to the right. Another head popped up and exploded. Two men on the west were running back with a corpse. James shot each in the head and tagged the corpses head. He threw himself to his back and sighed. He rolled over and looked below to the ladder. Three men had freed Tim and were tossing him over.

"Get that fucking blood swapped up," he called.

"Piss off. We'll get to it."

James pulled an opened can of clam chowder out of his coat and lifted it to his mouth. It tasted like maggots in slime.

"I'm takin' rest," James called, coming down the ladder. He entered the mid cabin and laid on the floor. All of the beds had the wounded. Maggots were eating half of them alive. James picked up a beetle and chewed it. Salty and like the dead, he thought.

A death shriek woke him.

"Intruders on board! Intruders on board!"

"What the fuck?"

James ran towards the back of the cabin and snatched his revolver from his leg.

"Oy, James, look at this one."

George stood over a redcoat. Bullets had torn through his legs. His eyes were closed but fidgeting underneath.

"Not the time, George." James pointed his gun in all directions, spinning in circles.

"Aw, I just want an eye for a souvenir."

He popped a blade and held the red's face down.

"Simple surgery. Done it about – oh, a dozen and a half times. Guess you could call me a sort of improvised medic. Yea? James! Watch him squirm!"

James crept around the corner. The entire west defense was down. Both his mates and the Reds hung over the railing, stacked on top of each other.

"Oy, George, I thought we had intruders. What the fuck? Was catchin' some sleep - first time in a week for fuck sake. Well, you got lots of eyes to be cutting on this side. George! You seen this?"

"Yea, but this one's live! You can go ahead and start on that side. I'll be just a few moments."

"Right."

James sat next to the pile of corpses. He lifted a Red's arm and put it around his shoulder.

"How you doin', mate? Well, that's alright. Don't have to speak. Been a long day for us all. Don't worry about that. I know good and well what this voyage has been. I haven't a single mate that's been around as long as myself. It's as if they know there's something - someplace better than this and they go straight there. Bit like you. I'll bet you said 'fuck this place', and walked your way straight into the oncoming fire. I can't blame you, or any of the others. This certainly is no way to live. I make do though. It's probably not a good thing, too. Not like I could just waltz onto land and grab me a wife, have a few beers, make her scream out a few lads, raise 'em like I was, and then fall asleep in a napping chair till I'm gray and burned till I wake no more. Nah, can't do that. My eyes have been fine-tuned for enemy movement. When I see a Red, much like yourself, I kill 'em dead, or at least shoot 'em vitally."

James let out a long sigh.

"You care to say anything, mate? Perhaps spill a bit of what's it like on the red ship? Ah, it's fine. I'm sure it's much like ours. Not like you have broads you're spinning, or card games with a glass of scotch, smiling and crackin' jokes. Nah, I'm sure it's just like us. Keeping our eyes on scan-mode no matter how high or low the sun may be at that specific time. Fuck, we'd have trumped you had it been that way. We're practically brothers. Oy, you don't mind if I take an eye from you and some of your mates, do you? Didn't think so. Generous token that is there. You'll be kindly rewarded wherever you're heading. That's assuming you don't stick to your

bones. This straight must have thousands of bodies by now. Flesh swells up, dissipates away, and all that's left is a skeleton. Nah, even that I bet is some good fun. Bet they're in their water grave havin' a good time. Prob'ly forget about us fools on the top, fightin' it out for God knows what. By the way, didn't catch your name, Red."

He pinched open the corpse's eye.

"Well, you look like a Trever of sorts. Which eye you want me to take, Trev? How about the left? Always liked the left side of things. Sort of a devil's trade type-of-thing."

He patted his pockets frantically.

"You are not gonna believe this, mate. I haven't my knife. I bet I can just scrape it out though."

He stuck his finger into the Red's eye and circled the inner socket. He tried to snatch it with his thumb and forefinger, but kept slipping. The eyeball exploded with puss.

"Ah, fuck. That's no good. George can't do anything with that. Fuck it, back to the crow nest for me."