

Arthur Dorsett: An ugly, hulking giant of a man, head of the world's second largest diamond empire, he has the personality of a pit bull and a sneering disdain for any human weakness. His master plan will destroy the global diamond market--and net him billions. . .

Maeve Fletcher: Dorsett's lithe and lovely blond daughter rebelled against laboring in her father's mines, changing her name and earning her master's degree in zoology without a penny of his fortune. But now her father has ordered her to spy on Dirk Pitt and NUMA, seizing the ultimate motivators of her twin six-year-old sons. . .

Mason Broadmoor: A revered totem-pole carver of Canada's Haida Indian tribe, he smuggled Pitt into the Dorsett mine on Kunghit Island where Pitt unlocked the key to the murderous blasting operations and was captured by Dorsett's thugs. But Broadmoor's daring rescue gave him the ride of his life. . .

Boudicca Dorsett: A towering Amazon beauty with the imperious poise of a tigress, she is in charge of security operations for Dorsett Consolidated Mining Limited. Her physical strength far surpasses that of most men, and her sadistic streak is rivaled only by her father's. . .

Deirdre Dorsett: A glamorous woman with copper hair and the flair of a fashion model, she is vividly attractive to Dirk Pitt, until he perceives that her sensuality and sophistication conceal a heart as cold as polar ice. . .

Hiram Yaeger: The iconoclastic chief of NUMA's computer network is filled with horror when the magnificent new graphics program targets the next area to be rocked by Dorsett's revolutionary mining technique. . .

RAFT OF THE GLADIATOR

January 17, 1856

The Tasman Sea

Of the four clipper ships built in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1854, one stood out from the others. She was the Gladiator, a big ship of 1,256 tons, 198 feet in length and a 34-foot beam, with three towering masts reaching for the sky at a rakish angle. She was one of the fleetest of the clippers ever to take the water, but she was a dangerous ship to sail in rough weather because of her too fine lines. She was hailed as a "ghoster," having the capability of sailing under the barest breath of wind. Indeed, the Gladiator was never to experience a slow passage from being becalmed.

Unfortunately, and unpredictably, she was a ship destined for oblivion.

Her owners fitted her out for the Australian trade and emigrant business, and she was one of the few clippers designed to carry passengers as well as cargo. But as they soon discovered, there weren't that many colonists who could afford the fare, so she was sailing with first- and second-class cabins empty. It **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, <http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html>**

was found to be far more lucrative to obtain government contracts for the transportation of convicts to the continent that initially served as the world's largest jail.

The Gladiator was placed under command of one of the hardest driving clipper captains, Charles

"Bully" Scaggs. He was aptly named. Though Scaggs did not use the lash on shirking or insubordinate crewmen, he was ruthless in driving his men and ship on record runs between England and Australia. His aggressive methods produced results. On her third homeward voyage, Gladiator set a sixty-three day record that still stands for sailing ships.

Scaggs had raced the legendary captains and clipper ships of his time, John Kendricks of the fleet Hercules and Wilson Asher in command of the renowned Jupiter, and never lost. Rival captains who left London within hours of the Gladiator, invariably found her comfortably moored at her dock when they arrived in Sydney Harbor.

The fast runs were a godsend to the prisoners, who endured the nightmarish voyages in appalling torment. Many of the slower merchant ships took as long as three and a half months to make the voyage.

Locked belowdecks, the convicts were treated like a cargo of cattle. Some were hardened criminals, some were political dissidents, all too many were poor souls who had been imprisoned for stealing a few pieces of cloth or scraps of food. The men were being sent to the penal colony for every offense, from murder to pickpocketing. The women, separated from the men by a thick bulkhead, were mostly condemned for petty theft or shoplifting. For both sexes there were few conveniences of any kind.

Skimpy bedding in small wooden berths, the barest of hygienic facilities and food with little nutrition was their lot for the months at sea. Their only luxuries were rations of sugar, vinegar and lime juice

ward off scurvy and a half-pint of port wine to boost their morale at night. They were guarded by a small detachment of ten men from the New South Wales Infantry Regiment, under the command of Lieutenant Silas Sheppard.

Ventilation was almost nonexistent; the only air came from hatchways with solidly built grills that were kept closed and heavily bolted. Once they entered the tropics, the air became stifling during the blazing hot days. They suffered even more during rough weather, cold and wet, thrown about by the waves crashing against the hull, living in a state of virtual darkness.

Doctors were required to serve on the convict ships, and the *Gladiator* was no exception.

Surgeon-Superintendent Otis Gorman saw to the prisoners' general health and arranged for small groups of them to come on deck for fresh air and exercise whenever the weather permitted. It became a source of pride for surgeons to boast, when finally reaching the dock in Sydney, that they hadn't lost a prisoner.

Gorman was a compassionate man who cared for his wards, bleeding them when required, lancing abscesses, dispensing treatment and advice on lacerations, blisters and purges, also overseeing the spreading of lime chloride in the water closets, the laundering of clothes and the scouring of the urinal tubs. He seldom failed to receive a letter of thanks from the convicts as they filed ashore.

Bully Scaggs mostly ignored the unfortunates locked below his decks. Record runs were his stock-in-trade. His iron discipline and aggressiveness had paid off handsomely in bonuses from happy shipping owners while making him and his ship immortal in the legends of clipper ships.

This trip he smelled a new record and was relentless. Fifty-two days out of London, bound for Sydney with a cargo of trade goods and 192 convicts, 24 of them women, he pushed *Gladiator* to her absolute limits, seldom taking in sail during a heavy blow. His perseverance was rewarded with a twenty-four hour run of an incredible 439 miles.

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And then Scaggs' luck ran out. Disaster loomed over the astern horizon.

A day after *Gladiator's* safe passage through the Bass Strait between Tasmania and the southern tip of Australia, the evening sky filled with ominous black clouds and the stars were blotted out as the storm grew vicious in proportion. Unknown to Scaggs, a full-blown typhoon was hurling itself upon his ship from the southeast beyond the Tasman Sea. Agile and stout as they were, the clipper ships enjoyed no amnesty from the Pacific's anger.

The tempest was to prove the most violent and devastating typhoon within memory of the South Sea islanders. The wind gained in velocity with each passing hour. The seas became heaving mountains that rushed out of the dark and pounded the entire length of the *Gladiator*. Too late, Scaggs gave the order to reef the sails. A vicious gust caught the exposed canvas and tore it to shreds, but not before snapping off the masts like toothpicks and pitching the shrouds and yards onto the deck far below. Then, as if attempting to clean up their mess, the pounding waves cleared the tangled wreckage of the masts overboard. A thirty-foot surge smashed into the stern and rolled over the ship, crushing the captain's cabin and tearing off the rudder. The deck was swept free of boats, helm, deckhouse and

galley. The hatches were stove in, and water poured into the hold unobstructed.

This one deadly, enormous wave had suddenly battered the once graceful clipper ship into a helpless, crippled derelict. She was tossed like a block of wood, made unmanageable by the mountainous seas.

Unable to fight the tempest, her unfortunate crew and cargo of convicts could only stare into the face of death as they waited in terror for the ship to take her final plunge into the restless depths.

Two weeks after the *Gladiator* failed to reach port, ships were sent out to retrace the known clipper passages through Bass Strait and the Tasman Sea, but they failed to turn up a trace of survivors, corpses or floating wreckage. Her owners wrote her off as a loss, the underwriters paid off, the relatives of the crew and convicts mourned their passing and the ship's memory became dimmed by time.

Some ships had a reputation as floating coffins or hell ships, but the rival captains who knew Scaggs and the *Gladiator* merely shook their heads and crossed off the vanished graceful clipper ship as a victim of her tender sailing qualities and Scaggs' aggressive handling of her. Two men who had once sailed on her suggested that she might have been abruptly caught in a following gust in unison with a wave that broke over the stern, the combined force pushing her bow beneath the water and sending her plummeting to the bottom.

In the Underwriting Room of Lloyd's of London, the famous maritime underwriters, the loss of the *Gladiator* was recorded in the logbook between the sinking of an American steam tugboat and the grounding of a Norwegian fishing boat.

Almost three years were to pass before the mysterious disappearance was solved.

Incredibly, unknown to the maritime world, the *Gladiator* was still afloat after the terrible typhoon had passed on to the west. Somehow the ravaged clipper ship had survived. But the sea was entering between sprung planks in the hull at an alarming rate. By the following noon, there were six feet of water in the hold, and the pumps were fighting a losing battle.

Captain Bully Scaggs' flinty endurance never wavered. The crew swore he kept the ship from foundering by sheer stubbornness alone. He issued orders sternly and calmly, enlisting those convicts who hadn't suffered major injuries from having been knocked about by the constant battering of the sea to man the pumps while the crew concentrated on repairing the leaking hull.

The rest of the day and night was spent in an attempt to lighten the ship, throwing overboard the cargo and any tool or utensil that was not deemed indispensable. Nothing helped. Much time was lost, and the effort achieved little. The water gained another three feet by the following morning.

By midafternoon an exhausted Scaggs bowed to defeat. Nothing he or anyone could do would save the *Gladiator*. And without boats there was only one desperate gamble to save the souls on board. He ordered Lieutenant Sheppard to release the prisoners and line them up on deck opposite the watchfire, the eyes of his armed detachment of soldiers. Only those who worked the pumps and members of the crew feverishly attempting to caulk the leaks remained at their labor.

Bully Scaggs didn't need the lash or a pistol to have complete domination of his ship. He was a giant of a man with the physique of a stonemason. He stood six feet two inches tall, with eyes that were olive gray, peering from a face weathered by the sea and sun. A great shag of inkblack hair and magnificent black beard that he braided on special occasions framed his face. He spoke with a deep, vibrant voice that enhanced his commanding presence. In the prime of life, he was a hard-bitten thirty-nine years old.

As he looked over the convicts he was startled by the number of injuries, the bruises, the sprains, the heads wrapped with blood-soaked bandages. Fear and consternation were revealed on every face. A uglier group of men and women he'd never laid eyes on. They tended to be short, no doubt due to a lifetime of insufficient diet. Their countenances were gaunt, their complexions, pallid. Cynical and impervious to the word of God, they were the dregs of British society, without expectation of seeing their homeland again, without hope of living out a fruitful life.

When the poor wretches saw the terrible damage above deck, the stumps of the masts, the shattered bulwarks, the missing boats, they were overwhelmed with despair. The women began uttering cries of terror, all except one, Scaggs noted, who stood out from the rest.

His eyes briefly paused on the female convict, who was nearly as tall as most of the men. The legs showing beneath her skirt were long and smooth. Her narrow waist was shadowed by a nicely shaped bosom that spilled over the top of her blouse. Her clothes appeared neat and clean, and her waist-length yellow hair had a brushed luster to it, unlike that of the other women, whose hair was unkempt and stringy.

She stood poised, her fear masked by a show of defiance as she stared back at Scaggs through eyes as blue as an alpine lake.

This was the first time Scaggs had noticed her, and he idly wondered why he hadn't been more observant. He refocused his wandering thoughts on the emergency at hand and addressed the convicts.

"Our situation is not promising," Scaggs began. "In all honesty I must tell you the ship is doomed, and with the sea's destruction of our boats, we cannot abandon her."

His words were greeted with a mixed reaction. Lieutenant Sheppard's infantrymen stood silent and motionless, while many of the convicts began to wail and moan piteously. Expecting to see the ship go to pieces within moments, several of the convicts fell to their knees and begged the heavens for salvation.

Turning a deaf ear to the doleful cries, Scaggs continued his address. "With the help of a merciful God, I will attempt to save every soul on this ship. I intend to build a raft of sufficient size to carry everyone on board until we are saved by a passing ship or drift ashore on the Australian mainland. We'll load ample provisions of food and water, enough to last us for twenty days."

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provisions of food and water, enough to last us for twenty days."

"If you don't mind me asking, Captain, how soon do you reckon before we'd be picked up?"

The question came from a huge man with a contemptuous expression who stood head and shoulders above the rest. Unlike his companions he was fashionably dressed, with every hair on his head fastidiously in place.

Before answering, Scaggs turned to Lieutenant Sheppard. "Who's that dandy?"

Sheppard leaned toward the captain. "Name is Jess Dorsett."

Scaggs' eyebrows raised. "Jess Dorsett the highwayman?"

The lieutenant nodded. "The same. Made a fortune, he did, before the Queen's men caught up with him. The only one of this motley mob who can read and write."

Scaggs immediately realized that the highwayman might prove valuable if the situation on the raft turned menacing. The possibility of mutiny was very real. "I can only offer you all a chance at life if Mr. Dorsett.

Beyond that I promise nothing."

"So what do you expect of me and my degenerate friends here?"

"I expect every able-bodied man to help build the raft. Any of you who refuse or shirk will be left behind on the ship."

"Hear that, boys?" Dorsett shouted to the assembled convicts. "Work or you die." He turned back to Scaggs. "None of us are sailors. You'll have to tell us how to go about it."

Scaggs gestured toward his first officer. "I have charged Mr. Ramsey with drawing up plans and framing the raft. A work party drawn from those of my crew not required to keep us afloat will direct the construction."

At six feet four, Jess Dorsett seemed a giant when standing among the other convicts. The shoulder beneath the expensive velvet coat stretched broad and powerful. His copper-red hair was long and hung loose over the collar of the coat. His head was large nosed, with high cheekbones and a heavy jaw.

Despite two months of hardship, locked in the ship's hold, he looked as though he'd just stepped out of a London drawing room.

Before they turned from each other, Dorsett and Scaggs briefly exchanged glances. First Officer Ramsey caught the intensity. The tiger and the lion, he thought pensively. He wondered who would be left standing at the end of their ordeal.

Fortunately, the sea had turned calm, since the raft was to be built in the water. The construction began with the materials being thrown overboard. The main framework was made up from the remains of the masts, lashed together with a strong rope. Casks of wine along with barrels of flour meant for the taverns and grocery stores of Sydney were emptied and tied within the masts for added buoyancy.

Heavy planking was nailed across the top for a deck and then surrounded by a waist-high railing. Two

raft measured eighty feet in length by forty feet wide, and though it looked quite large, by the time the provisions were loaded on board, it was a tight squeeze to pack in 192 convicts, 11 soldiers and the ship's crew, which numbered 28, including Bully Scaggs, for a total of 231. At what passed for the stern, a rudimentary rudder was attached to a makeshift tiller behind the aft mast.

Wooden kegs containing water, lime juice, brined beef and pork, as well as cheese, and several pots of rice and peas cooked in the ship's galley, were lowered on board between the masts and tied down under a large sheet of canvas that was spread over two thirds of the raft as an awning to ward off the burning rays of the sun.

The departure was blessed by clear skies and a sea as smooth as a millpond. The soldiers were disembarked first, carrying their muskets and sabers. Then came the convicts, who were all too happy to escape sinking with the ship, now dangerously down by the bow. The ship's ladder was inadequate to support them all, so most came over the side, dangling from ropes. Several jumped or fell into the water and were recovered by the soldiers. The badly injured were lowered by slings. Surprisingly, the exodus was carried off without incident. In two hours, all 203 were safely stationed on the raft positions assigned by Scaggs.

The crew came next, Captain Scaggs the last man to leave the steeply slanting deck. He dropped a box containing two pistols, the ship's log, a chronometer, compass and a sextant into the arms of First Officer Ramsey. Scaggs had taken a position fix before dropping over the side and had told no one, not even Ramsey, that the storm had blown the Gladiator far off the normal shipping routes. They were drifting in a dead area of the Tasman Sea, three hundred miles from the nearest Australian shore, and what was worse, the current was carrying them even farther into nothingness where no ships sailed. He consulted his charts and determined their only hope was to take advantage of the adverse current and winds and sail east toward New Zealand.

Soon after settling in, everyone in their place on the crowded deck, the raft's passengers found to their dismay that there was only enough space for forty bodies to tie down at any one time. It was obvious to the seamen from the ship that their lives were in great jeopardy; the planked deck of the raft was only four inches above the water. If confronted with a rough sea, the raft and its unfortunate passengers would be immersed.

Scaggs hung the compass on the mast forward of the tiller. "Set sail, Mr. Ramsey. Steer a heading of one-fifteen degrees east-southeast."

"Aye, Captain. We'll not try for Australia, then?"

"Our best hope is the west coast of New Zealand."

"How far do you make it?"

"Six hundred miles," Scaggs answered as if a sandy beach lay just over the horizon.

Ramsey frowned and stared around the crowded raft. His eyes fell on a group of convicts who were

hushed conversation. Finally, he spoke in a tone heavy with gloom. "I don't believe any of us God-fearin'

men will see deliverance while we're surrounded by this lot of scum."

The sea remained calm for the next five days. The raft's passengers settled into a routine of discipline.
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rationing. The cruel sun beat down relentlessly, turning the raft into a fiery hell. There was a desperate longing to drop into the water and cool their bodies, but already the sharks were gathering in anticipation of an easy meal. The seamen threw buckets of saltwater on the canvas awning, but it only served to heighten the humidity beneath.

Already the mood on the raft had begun to swing from melancholy to treachery. Men who had endured two months of confinement in the dark hold of the *Gladiator* now became troubled without the security of the ship's hull and with being encompassed by nothingness. The convicts began to regard the sailors and the soldiers with ferocious looks and mutterings that did not go unnoticed by Scaggs. He ordered Lieutenant Sheppard to have his men keep their muskets loaded and primed at all times.

Jess Dorsett studied the tall woman with the golden hair. She was sitting alone beside the forward mast. There was an aura of tough passivity about her, a manner of overlooking the hardships without expectations. She appeared not to notice the other female convicts, seldom conversing, choosing to remain aloof and quiet. She was, Dorsett decided, a woman of values.

He snaked toward her through the bodies packed on board the raft until he was stopped by the haughty gaze of a soldier who motioned him back with a musket. Dorsett was a patient man and waited until the guards changed shifts. The replacement promptly began leering at the women, who quickly taunted him.

Dorsett took advantage of the diversion to move until he was at the imaginary boundary line dividing the men from the women. The blond woman did not notice, her blue eyes were fixed on something only she could see in the distance.

"Looking for England?" he asked, smiling.

She turned and stared at him as if making up her mind whether to grace him with an answer. "A small village in Cornwall."

"Where you were arrested?"

"No, that was in Falmouth."

"For attempting to murder Queen Victoria?"

Her eyes sparkled and she laughed. "Stealing a blanket, actually."

"You must have been cold."

She became serious. "It was for my father. He was dying from the lung disease."

"I'm sorry."

"You're the highwayman."

"I was until my horse broke her leg and the Queen's men ran me down."

"And your name is Jess Dorsett." He was pleased that she knew who he was and wondered if she had inquired of him. "And you are . . .?"

"Betsy Fletcher," she answered without hesitation.

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"Betsy," Dorsett said with a flourish, "consider me your protector."

"I need no fancy highwayman," she said smartly. "I can fend for myself."

He motioned around the horde jammed on the raft. "You may well need a pair of strong hands before we see hard ground again."

"Why should I put my faith in a man who never got his hands dirty?"

He stared into her eyes. "I may have robbed a few coaches in my time, but next to the good Captain Scaggs, I'm most likely the only man you can trust not to take advantage of a woman."

Betsy Fletcher turned and pointed at some evil-looking clouds scudding in their direction before a freshening breeze. "Tell me, Mr. Dorsett, how are you going to protect me from that?"

"We're in for it now, Captain," said Ramsey. "We'd better take down the sails."

Scaggs nodded grimly. "Cut short lengths of rope from the keg of spare cordage and pass them around the raft. Tell the poor devils to fasten themselves to the raft to resist the turbulence."

The sea began to heap up uncomfortably, and the raft lurched and rolled as the waves began to sweep over the huddled mass of bodies, each passenger clutching their individual length of rope for dear life, the smart ones having tied themselves to the planks. The storm was not half as strong as the typhoon that did in the *Gladiator*, but it soon became impossible to tell where the raft began and the sea left off. The waves rose ever higher as the whitecaps blew off their crests. Some tried to stand to get their heads above water, but the raft was pitching and rolling savagely. They fell back on the planking almost immediately.

Dorsett used both his and Betsy's ropes to fasten her to the mast. Then he wrapped himself in the shroud lines and used his body to shield her from the force of the waves. As if to add insult to injury, rainsqualls pelted them with the force of stones cast by devils. The disorderly seas struck from every direction.

The only sound that came above the fury of the storm was Scaggs' vehement cursing as he shouted orders to his crew to add more lines to secure the mound of provisions. The seamen struggled to lay down the crates and kegs, but a mountainous wave reared up at that moment and crashed down on

the raft and pushed it deep under the water. For the better part of a minute there was no one on the pathetic craft who didn't believe they were about to die.

Scaggs held his breath and closed his eyes and swore without opening his mouth. The weight of the water felt as though it was crushing the life out of him. For what seemed an eternity the raft sluggishly rose through a swirling mass of foam into the wind again. Those who hadn't been swept into the sea inhaled deeply and coughed out the saltwater.

The captain looked around the raft and was appalled. The entire mass of provisions had been carried away and had disappeared as if they had never been loaded aboard. What was even more horrendous was that the bulk of the crates and kegs had carved an avenue through the pack of convicts, maiming and thrusting them from the raft with the force of an avalanche. Their pathetic cries for help were unanswered.

The savage sea made any attempt at rescue impossible, and the lucky ones could only mourn the bitter death of their recent companions.

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death of their recent companions.

The raft and its suffering passengers endured the storm through the night, pounded by the wash that constantly rolled over them. By the following morning the sea had begun to ease off, and the wind dwindled to a light southerly breeze. But they still kept an eye out for the occasional renegade wave that lurked out of sight before sweeping in and catching the half-drowned survivors off guard.

When Scaggs was finally able to stand and appraise the total extent of the damage, he was shocked to find that not one keg of food or water had been spared from the violence of the sea. Another disaster.

The masts were reduced to a few shreds of canvas. He ordered Ramsey and Sheppard to take a count of the missing. The number came to twenty-seven.

Sheppard shook his head sadly as he stared at the survivors. "Poor beggars. They look like drowned rats."

"Have the crew spread what's left of the sails and catch as much rainwater as possible before the squalls stop," Scaggs ordered Ramsey.

"We no longer have containers to store it," Ramsey said solemnly. "And what will we use for sails?"

"After everybody drinks their fill, we'll repair what we can of the canvas and continue on our east-southeast heading."

As life reemerged on the raft, Dorsett untied himself from the mast shrouds and gripped Betsy by the shoulders. "Are you harmed?" he asked attentively.

She peered at him through long strands of hair that were plastered against her face. "I won't be attending no royal ball looking like a drenched cat. Soaked as I am, I'm glad to be alive."

"It was a bad night," he said grimly, "and I fear it won't be the last."

Even as Dorsett comforted her, the sun returned with a vengeance. Without the awning, torn away by the onslaught of the wind and waves, there was no protection from the day's heat. The torment of hunger and thirst soon followed. Every morsel of food that could be found among the planks was quickly eaten.

The little rainfall caught by the torn canvas sails was soon gone.

When their tattered remains were raised again, the sails had little effect and proved almost worthless for moving the raft. If the wind came from astern, the vessel was manageable. But attempting to tack only served to twist the raft into an uncontrollable position crosswise with its beam to the wind. The inability to command the direction of the raft only added to Scaggs' mounting frustrations. Having saved his precious navigational instruments by clutching them to his breast during the worst of the deluge, he now took a fix on the raft's position.

"Any nearer to land, Captain?" asked Ramsey.

"I'm afraid not," Scaggs said gravely. "The storm drove us north and west. We're farther away from New Zealand than we were at this time two days ago."

"We won't last long in the Southern Hemisphere in the dead of summer without fresh water."

Scaggs gestured toward a pair of fins cutting the water fifty feet from the raft. "If we don't sight a boat within four days, Mr. Ramsey, I fear the sharks will have themselves a sumptuous banquet."

The sharks did not have long to wait. The second day after the storm, the bodies of those who succumbed from injuries sustained during the raging seas were slipped over the side and quickly disappeared in a disturbance of bloody foam. One monster seemed particularly ravenous. Scaggs recognized it as a great white, feared as the sea's greediest murder machine. He estimated its length to be somewhere between twenty-two and twenty-four feet.

The horror was only beginning. Dorsett was the first to have a premonition of the atrocities that the poor wretches on the raft would inflict upon themselves.

"They're up to something," he said to Betsy. "I don't like the way they're staring at the women."

"Who are you talking about?" she asked through parched lips. She had covered her face with a tattered scarf, but her bare arms and her legs below the skirt were already burned and blistered from the sun.

"That scurvy lot of smugglers at the stern of the raft, led by the murderin' Welshman, Jake Huggins. He'd as soon slit your gullet as give you the time of day. I'll wager they're planning a mutiny."

Betsy stared vacantly around the bodies sprawled on the raft. "Why would they want to take command of this?"

"I mean to find out," said Dorsett as he began making his way over the convicts slouched about the damp planking, oblivious to everything around them while suffering from a burning thirst. He moved

awkwardly, annoyed at how stiff his joints had become with no exercise except holding onto ropes. He was one of the few who dared approach the conspirators, and he muscled his way through Huggins'

henchmen. They ignored him as they muttered to themselves in low tones and cast fierce looks at Sheppard and his infantrymen.

"What brings you nosin' around, Dorsett?" grunted Huggins.

The smuggler was short and squat with a barrel chest, long matted sandy hair, an extremely large flattened nose and an enormous mouth with missing and blackened teeth, which combined to give him a hideous leer.

"I figured you could use a good man to help you take over the raft."

"You want to get in on the spoils and live a while longer, do you?"

"I see no spoils that can prolong our suffering," Dorsett said indifferently.

Huggins laughed, showing his rotting teeth. "The women, you fool."

"We're all dying from thirst and the damnable heat, and you want sex?"

"For a famous highwayman, you're an idiot," Huggins said irritably. "We don't want to lay the little darlins. The idea is to cut them up and eat their tender flesh. We can save the likes of Bully Scaggs and his sailor boys and the soldiers for when we really gets hungry."

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The first thought that struck Dorsett was that Huggins was making a disgusting joke, but the inspired evil that lurked in his eyes and the ghastly grin plainly demonstrated it was no play of words. The thought was so vile it filled Dorsett with horror and revulsion. But he was a consummate actor and gave an uncaring shrug.

"What's the hurry? We might be rescued by this time tomorrow."

"There won't be no ship or island on the horizon anytime soon." Huggins paused, his ugly face contorted with depravity. "You with us, highwayman?"

"I've got nothing to lose by throwing in with you, Jake," Dorsett said with a tight smile. "But the blond woman is mine. Do what you will with the rest."

"I can see you've taken a likin' to her, but my boys and I share and share alike. I'll let you have first claim. After that, she's divided up."

"Fair enough," Dorsett said dryly. "When do we make our move?"

"One hour after dark. At my signal we attack the soldier boys and go for their muskets. Once we're armed we'll have no trouble with Scaggs and his crew."

"Since I've already established a place by the forward mast, I'll take care of the soldier guarding the women."

"You want to be first in line for supper, is that it?"

"Just hearing you talk about it," said Dorsett sardonically, "makes me hungry."

Dorsett returned to Betsy's side but said nothing to her about the terror about to be unleashed by the convicts. He knew Huggins and his men were observing his every move, making certain he was not making a furtive effort to warn the Gladiator's crew and the soldiers. His only opportunity would come with darkness, and he had to move before Huggins gave his signal to launch the horror. He lay as near to Betsy as the guard would allow and appeared to doze away the afternoon.

As soon as dusk covered the sea and the stars appeared, Dorsett left Betsy and snaked his way within a few feet of First Officer Ramsey and hailed him in a hushed whisper.

"Ramsey, do not move or act as if you're listening to anyone."

"What is this?" Ramsey blurted under his breath. "What do you want?"

"Listen to me," Dorsett said softly. "Within the hour, the convicts, led by Jake Huggins, are going to attack the soldiers. If they are successful in killing them all, they will use their arms against you and your crew."

"Why should I believe the words of a common criminal?"

"You'll all be dead if you don't."

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"I'll tell the captain," Ramsey said grudgingly.

"Just remind him it was Jess Dorsett who warned you."

Dorsett broke off and crawled back to Betsy. He removed his left boot, twisted off the sole and he removed a small knife with a four-inch blade. Then he sat back to wait.

A quarter-moon was beginning to rise over the horizon, giving the pitiful creatures on board the raft the look of ghostly wraiths, some of whom suddenly began rising to their feet and moving toward the prohibited area in the center.

"Kill the swine!" Huggins shouted, leaping forward and leading a surge of flesh toward the soldiers.

Half out of their minds with thirst the mass of prisoners unleashed their hatred for authority and made a rush toward the middle of the raft from all sides.

A volley of musket fire cut holes in their ranks, and the unexpected resistance stunned them momentarily.

Ramsey had passed on Dorsett's alarm to Scaggs and Sheppard. The infantrymen, muskets loaded and bayonets fixed, waited along with Scaggs and his crew, who had been armed with the soldiers'—

sabers, the carpenter's hammers and hatchets, and any other weapon they could scrape up.

"Don't give 'em time to reload, boys!" Huggins roared. "Strike hard!"

The mass of maddened mutineers rushed forward again, met this time with thrusting bayonets and slashing sabers. Yet, nothing diminished their rage. They threw themselves against the cold steel, several of them grasping the sharpened blades in their bare hands. Desperate men grappled and sliced each other on a black sea under the eerie moonlight.

The soldiers and sailors fought furiously. Every inch of the raft was occupied by men fighting savagely to kill each other. The bodies piled up, entangling the feet of combatants. Blood flowed over the deck planking, making it difficult to stand if not impossible to rise after falling. In the darkness, now oblivious to their thirst and hunger, they blindly fought and slaughtered. The only sounds made by the combatants were the cries of the wounded and the moans of the dying.

The sharks, as if sensing a bounty, began circling ever closer. The high-pointed fin of the Executioner, the name the seamen gave the great white, silently carved through the water less than five feet from the raft. None of the unfortunates who fell in the water climbed on board again.

Pierced by five saber wounds, Huggins staggered toward Dorsett, a large splintered board in his upraised hand. "You bloody traitor!" he hissed.

Dorsett hunched and held the knife out in front of his body. "Step forward and die," he said calmly.

Infuriated, Huggins yelled back. "It is you who will feed the sharks, highwayman!" Then he put his head down and charged, swinging the board like a scythe.

At the instant Huggins lunged at him, Dorsett dropped to his hands and knees. Unable to check his momentum, the enraged Welshman stumbled over him and fell, crashing heavily to the deck. Before he could raise himself up, Dorsett had leaped on the immense back, reversed the knife in his hand and

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slashed Huggins' throat.

"You'll not be dining on the ladies this night," Dorsett said fiercely as Huggins' body stiffened before going limp in death.

Dorsett killed three more men that fateful night. At one stage of the battle he was assaulted by a small group of Huggins' followers who were set on ravaging the women. Foot to foot, man to man, they struggled and labored to murder each other.

Betsy appeared and fought at his side, screaming like a banshee and clawing at Dorsett's enemies like a tiger. Dorsett's only wound came from a man who gave out a fiendish yell before biting him cruelly in the shoulder.

The bloody brawl raged on for another two hours. Scaggs and his seamen, Sheppard and his

infantrymen, fought desperately, beating off every assault and then counterattacking. Again and again the mad rush was pushed back by the ever-thinning ranks of the defenders who desperately clung to the center of the raft. Sheppard went down, garroted by two convicts. Ramsey suffered several contusions and Scaggs had two ribs broken. Sadly, the convicts had managed to kill two of the women and toss them overboard during the melee. Then at last, having been decimated with dreadful casualties, one by one, two by two, the mutineers began ebbing back to the outer perimeter of the raft.

By daylight the dead were seen sprawling grotesquely around on the raft. The stage was set for the next hideous act of the macabre drama. As the surviving sailors and soldiers looked on incredulously, the convicts began cutting up and devouring their former comrades. It was a scene out of a nightmare.

Ramsey made a rough count of the remaining survivors and was shocked to see that only 78 out of the 231 were still alive. In the senseless battle, 109 convicts had perished. Five of Sheppard's soldiers had vanished, presumably thrown overboard, and Ramsey counted 12 of the Gladiator's crewmen dead or missing. It seemed inconceivable that so few could have subdued so many, but the convicts were not trained for combat as were Sheppard's infantrymen, or as physically toughened by hard work at sea as Scaggs' crew.

The raft rode noticeably higher in the water now that its passenger list was sharply scaled down by 120 or so. Those parts of the corpses not eaten by the mob, crazed by the agony of hunger, were thrown to the waiting sharks. Unable to stop them, Scaggs restrained his revulsion and looked the other way. His crewmen, also maddened by the demands of shrinking stomachs, began cutting the flesh from three of the bodies.

Dorsett and Betsy and most of the other women, though weakened by the relentless torment of starvation, could not bring themselves to survive on the flesh of others. A rain squall came up in the afternoon and slaked their thirst, but the hunger pangs never let up.

Ramsey came over and spoke to Dorsett. "The captain would like a word with you."

The highwayman accompanied the first officer to where Scaggs was lying, his back against the mast. Surgeon-Superintendent Gorman was binding up the captain's rib cage with a torn shirt. Before the dead were rolled into the sea, the ship's surgeon stripped the bodies of their clothes to use as bandages.

Scaggs looked up at Dorsett, his face taut with pain.

"I want to thank you, Mr. Dorsett, for your timely warning. I daresay the honest people who are still left on this hellish vessel owe their lives to you."

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"I've led a wicked life, Captain, but I don't mingle with foul-smelling rabble."

"When we reach New South Wales, I'll do my best to persuade the governor to commute your sentence."

"I'm grateful to you, Captain. I'm under your orders."

Scaggs stared at the small knife that was shoved into Dorsett's belt-sash. "Is that your only weapon?"

"Yes, sir. It performed admirably last night."

"Give him a spare saber," Scaggs said to Ramsey. "We're not through with those dogs yet."

"I agree," said Dorsett. "They'll not have the same fury without Jake Huggins to lead them, but they're too unhinged by thirst to give up. They'll try again after dark."

His words were prophetic. For reasons known only to men deranged by lack of food and water, the convicts assaulted the defenders two hours after the sunset. The attack was not as fierce as the night before. Wraithlike figures reeled against each other, recklessly clubbing and slashing, the bodies of convicts, sailors and soldiers intermingling as they fell.

The convicts' resolve had been weakened by another day on the raft without food or drink, and their resistance suddenly faded and broke as the defenders counterattacked. The enfeebled convicts stopped and then stumbled back. Scaggs and his faithful seamen smashed into their center as Dorsett, along with Sheppard's few remaining infantrymen, struck from the flank. In another twenty minutes it was all over.

Fifty-two died that night. With the dawn, only twenty-five men and three women were left, out of the seventy-eight from the night before sixteen convicts, including Jess Dorsett, Betsy Fletcher and two other women; two soldiers and ten of the Gladiator's crew, including Captain Scaggs. First Officer Ramsey was among the dead. Surgeon-Superintendent Gorman was mortally wounded and passed on later that afternoon like a lamp that slowly runs out of oil. Dorsett had received a nasty gash in his right thigh, and Scaggs had suffered a broken collarbone to add to his broken ribs. Amazingly, Betsy had emerged with only minor bruises and cuts.

The convicts were thoroughly beaten; there wasn't one who didn't suffer from ugly wounds. The insupportable battle for the raft of the Gladiator was over.

By the tenth day of their grisly ordeal, another six had died. Two young lads, a cabin boy no more than twelve and a sixteen-year-old soldier, decided to seek death by throwing themselves into the sea. The other four were convicts who perished from their wounds. It was as if the rapidly dwindling number of survivors were watching a terrifying vision. The sun's blazing torment returned like a burning fever accompanied by delirium.

On day twelve they were down to eighteen. Those who could still move were in rags, their bodies covered with wounds from the massacre, faces disfigured by the burning sun, skin covered with sores from scraping against the constantly moving planking and immersion in saltwater. They were far beyond despondency, and their hollow eyes began to see visions. Two seamen swore they saw the Gladiator, dove off the raft and swam toward the imaginary ship until they went under or were taken by the ever **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, <http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html>**

present Executioner and his voracious friends.

Hallucinations conjured up every image from banquet tables laden with food and drink, to populated cities or homes none had visited since childhood. Scaggs fancied he was sitting in front of a fireplace

with his wife and children in his cottage overlooking the harbor at Aberdeen.

He suddenly stared at Dorsett through strange eyes and said, "We have nothing to fear. I have signalled the Admiralty and they have sent a rescue ship."

In as much of a stupor as the captain, Betsy asked him, "Which pigeon did you use to send your message, the black or the gray?"

Dorsett's cracked and peeling lips curled in a painful smile. Amazingly, he had managed to keep his wits and had assisted the few seamen who could still move about in repairing damage to the raft. He found a few scraps of canvas and erected a small awning over Scaggs while Betsy tended to the captain's injuries and showed him the kindest attention. The sea captain, the highwayman and the thief struck up a friendship as the long hours dragged on.

His navigational instruments having been lost over the side during the fighting, Scaggs had no idea of their position. He ordered his men to make an attempt at catching fish using twine and nails for hooks.

Bait was human flesh. The smaller fish completely ignored the offer of free food. Surprisingly, even the sharks failed to show an interest.

Dorsett tied a rope to the hilt of a saber and thrust it into the back of a large shark that swam close to the raft. Lacking his former strength to fight the monster of the deep, he wrapped the free end of the rope around a mast. Then he waited for the shark to die before dragging it on board. His only reward was an empty saber blade that was bent into a ninety-degree angle. Two sailors tried attaching bayonets to poles as spears. They punctured several sharks that did not seem at all disturbed by the wounds.

They had given up attempting to catch a meal when later that afternoon a large school of mullet passed under the raft. Between one and three feet long, they proved far easier to spear and throw on the deck of the raft than the sharks. Before the school swam past, seven cigar shaped bodies with forked tails were flopping on the waterlogged planks.

"God hasn't forsaken us," mumbled Scaggs, staring at the silvery fish. "Mullet usually inhabit shallow seas. I've never seen them in deep water."

"It's as though he sent them directly to us," murmured Betsy, her eyes wide at the sight of her first meal in nearly two weeks.

Their hunger was so great and the number of fish so meager that they added the flesh of a woman who had died only an hour before. It was the first time Scaggs, Dorsett and Betsy had touched human flesh.

Somehow eating one of their own seemed oddly justified when mixed with the fish. And since the taste was partially disguised it also seemed less disgusting.

Another gift arrived with a rain squall that took nearly an hour to pass over and provided them with a catch of two gallons of water.

Despite having their strength temporarily renewed, despondency was still painted on their faces. Their wounds and contusions, irritated by the saltwater, caused unending agony. And there was still the sun

which continued to torture them. The air was stifling and the heat intolerable. The nights brought relief and ~~Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, <http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html>~~

cooler temperatures. But some of the raft's passengers could not endure the misery of one more day.

Another five, four convicts and the last soldier, quietly slipped into the sea and perished quickly.

By the fifteenth day, only Scaggs, Dorsett, Betsy Fletcher, three sailors and four convicts, one woman, were left alive. They were beyond caring. Death seemed unavoidable. The spark of self-preservation had all but gone out. The mullet was long gone, and although those who died had sustained the living, the lack of water and the torrid heat made it impossible to hold out for more than another forty-eight hours before the raft would float empty of life.

Then an event occurred that diverted attention from the unspeakable horrors of the past two weeks. A large greenish-brown bird suddenly appeared out of the sky, circled the raft three times and then landed with a flutter on a yardarm of the forward mast. It stared down through yellow eyes with beady black pupils at the pathetic humans on the raft, their clothes in shreds, limbs and faces scarred from combat and the scorching rays of the sun. The thought of trying to snare the bird for food instantly flooded everyone's mind.

"What kind of strange bird is that?" Betsy asked, her tongue so swollen her voice was like a whisper.

"It's a kea," Scaggs murmured. "One of my former officers kept one."

"Do they fly over the oceans like gulls?" asked Dorsett.

No, they're a species of parrot that lives on New Zealand and the surrounding islands. I never heard of one flying over water unless . . ." Scaggs paused. "Unless it's another message from the Almighty." His eyes took on a distant look as he painfully rose to his feet and peered at the horizon. "Land!" he exclaimed with joy. "Land to the west of us."

Unnoticed in their apathy and lethargy until now, the raft was being pushed by the swells toward a pair of green mounds rising from the sea no more than ten miles distant. Everyone turned their eyes westward and saw a large island with two low mountains, one on each end, and a forest of trees between. For a long moment no one spoke, each suspended in expectation but fixed with a fear that they might be swept by the currents around their salvation. Almost all the haggard survivors struggled to their knees and prayed to be delivered on the beckoning shore.

Another hour passed before Scaggs determined that the island was growing larger. "The current is pushing us toward it," he announced gleefully. "It's a miracle, a bloody miracle. I know of no island on any chart in this part of the sea."

Probably uninhabited," guessed Dorsett.

"How beautiful," Betsy murmured, staring at the lush green forest separating the two mounts. "I hope it has pools of cool water."

The unexpected promise of continued life revived what little strength they had left and inspired them to take action. Any desire of trapping the parrot for dinner quickly vanished. The feathered messenger

was considered a good omen. Scaggs and his few seamen set a sail made from the tattered awning while Dorsett and the remaining convicts tore up planks and feverishly used them as paddles. Then, if to guide them, the parrot took wing and flew back toward the island.

The landmass rose and spread across the western horizon, drawing them like a magnet. They rowed like madmen, determined their sufferings should come to an end.

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A breeze sprang up from behind, pushing them ever faster toward sanctuary, adding to their delirium of hope. There would be no more waiting for death with resignation. Deliverance was down to less than three miles away.

With the last of his strength, one of the sailors climbed the mast shrouds to a yardarm. Shielding his eyes from the sun, he squinted over the sea.

"What do you make of the shoreline?" demanded Scaggs.

"Looks like we're coming to a coral reef surrounding a lagoon."

Scaggs turned to Dorsett and Fletcher. "If we can't make entry through a channel, the breakers will pile us up on the reef."

Thirty minutes later, the sailor on the mast called out. "I see a blue-water passage through the outer reef two hundred yards off to starboard."

"Rig a rudder!" Scaggs ordered his few crewmen. "Quickly!" Then he turned to the convicts. "Every man and woman who has the brawn, grab a plank and paddle for your life."

A dreadful fear appeared with the crashing of breakers onto the outer reef. The waves struck and burst in an explosion of pure white foam. The boom of water crashing into coral came like the thunder of a cannon. The waves grew to a mountainous height as the seafloor rose when they neared land. Terror replaced desperation as the occupants of the raft envisioned the destruction that would occur if they were dashed against the reef by the crushing force of the breakers.

Scaggs took the jury-rigged tiller under one arm and steered toward the channel as his sailors worked the tattered sail. The convicts, looking like ragged scarecrows, paddled ineffectually. Their feeble efforts did very little to propel the raft. Only with everyone paddling on the same side at the same time, as Scaggs ordered, could they assist him in steering for the channel.

The raft was overtaken by a wall of churning froth that swept it forward at a terrible speed. For one brief moment it was elevated on the crest, the next it plunged into the trough. Two of the men and convicts were swept into the blue-green turbulence and never seen again. The seaworn raft was breaking up. The ropes, chafed and stretched by the constant rolling of the sea, began to fray and part. The framework of masts that supported the deck planking twisted and began splitting. The raft groaned when inundated by the following wave. To Dorsett, the immovable coral reef looked close enough to reach out and touch.

And then they were swept into the channel between the jagged edges of the reef. The surge carried

them through, the raft spinning around, pieces of it whirling into the sun-sparkled sea like a Roman candle. As the main frame of the raft disintegrated around them, the survivors were thrown into the water.

Once past the barrier reef the blue, contorted sea became as gentle as a mountain lake and turned bright turquoise. Dorsett came up choking, one arm locked around Betsy's waist.

"Can you swim?" he coughed.

She shook her head violently, sputtering out the seawater she'd swallowed. "Not a stroke."

He pulled her along as he swam toward one of the raft's masts, which was floating less than ten feet away. He pulled her along as he swam toward one of the raft's masts, which was floating less than ten feet away. **Generated by ABC Amber LIT Converter, <http://www.processtext.com/abclit.html>**

away. He soon reached it and draped Betsy's arms over the curved surface. He hung on beside her, gasping for breath, heart pounding, his weakened body exhausted from the exertion of the last hour.

After taking a minute or two to recover, Dorsett looked about the floating wreckage and took count.

Scaggs and two of his sailors were a short distance away and still among the living, climbing aboard a small section of planking that was miraculously still tied together. Already they were ripping off the boards to use as paddies. Of the convicts, he spotted two men and the woman floating in the water, clinging to various bits and pieces of what remained of the raft of the Gladiator.

Dorsett turned and looked toward the shore. A beautiful white sandy beach beckoned less than a quarter of a mile away. Then he heard a nearby shout.

"You and Betsy hang on," Scaggs hailed him. "We'll pick you and the others up and then work toward shore."

Dorsett waved in reply and gave Betsy a kiss on the forehead. "Mind you don't let me down now, girl. We'll be walking dry land in half an hour--"

He broke off in sudden panic, his joy short lived.

The tall fin of a great white shark was circling the wreckage in search of new prey. The Executioner had followed them into the lagoon.

It wasn't fair, Dorsett screamed inside his mind. To have endured suffering beyond imagination only to have salvation snatched from their fingertips by the jaws of death was a foul injustice. Few were the men and women to have been more unfortunate. He clutched Betsy tightly in his arms and watched with morbid terror as the fin stopped circling, headed in their direction and slowly slipped beneath the surface.

His heart froze as he waited helplessly for the jagged teeth to snap shut on his body.

Then, without warning, the second miracle occurred.

The calm waters of the lagoon under them abruptly turned into a boiling cauldron. Then a gre

fountainlike gush burst into the air, followed by the great white shark. The murderous beast thrashed about wildly, its awesome jaws snapping like a vicious dog's at a huge sea serpent that was coiled around it.

Everyone clutching the floating wreckage stared dumbstruck at the life-and-death struggle between the two monsters of the deep.

From his position on his scrap of raft, Scaggs had a good seat to observe the struggle. The body of the enormous eel-like creature stretched from a blunt head to a long, tapering tail. Scaggs estimated the length of the body to be sixty to sixty-five feet, with the circumference of a large flour barrel. The mouth on the end of the head opened and closed spasmodically, revealing short fanglike teeth. The skin appeared smooth and was a dark brown on the upper surface of the body, almost black, while the belly was an ivory white. Scaggs had often heard tales of ships sighting serpentine sea monsters, but had laughed them off as the visions of sailors after drinking too much rum in port. Frozen in awe, he was not laughing now as he watched the once-feared Executioner writhe violently in a futile attempt to shake off its deadly attacker.

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The compact cartilaginous body of the shark prevented it from contorting its head and jaws far enough backward to bite into the serpent. Despite its tremendous strength and its frenzied convulsions, it could not shake the death grip. Revolving around in complete circles with great speed, the shark and the serpent writhed beneath the surface before reappearing in an explosion of spray that beat the water into froth again.

The serpent then began biting into the shark's gill slits. After another few minutes, the gargantuan combat faded, the shark's agonized struggle ceased and the two monsters slowly sank out of sight into the deepest part of the lagoon. The hunter had become the meal of another hunter.

Scaggs wasted no time after the epic battle in pulling the bedraggled convicts from the water onto the small piece of the raft that still hung together. Stunned by what they had witnessed, the pitifully few survivors finally reached the white sandy beach and staggered ashore, carried at last from the nightmare world to a Garden of Eden as yet unknown to European mariners.

A stream of pure water was soon found that ran from the volcanic mountain that rose above the southern end of the island. Five different varieties of tropical fruit grew in the forested area, and the lagoon was teeming with fish. Their perils over, only eight out of the original 231 who set out on the raft of the Gladiator lived to tell about the horrors of their fifteen days adrift in the sweltering emptiness of the sea.

Six months after the tragic loss of the Gladiator, its memory was briefly revived when a fisherman coming ashore to repair a leak in his small boat, discovered a hand gripping a sword protruding from the beach. Digging the object from the sand, he was surprised to find a life-sized image of an ancient warrior.

He carried the wooden sculpture fifty miles north to Auckland, New Zealand, where it was identified as the figurehead of the lost clipper ship Gladiator.

Eventually cleaned and refinished, the warrior was placed in a small maritime museum, where onlookers often stared at it and pondered the mystery of the ship's disappearance.

The enigma of the clipper ship *Gladiator* was finally explained in July of 1858 by an article that ran in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

RETURN FROM THE DEAD

The seas around Australia have witnessed many a strange sight, but none so strange as the sudden appearance of Captain Charles "Bully" Scaggs, reported missing and presumed dead when his clipper the *Gladiator*, owners Carlisle & Dunhill of Inverness, vanished in the Tasman Sea during the terrible typhoon of January 1856 when only 300 miles southeast of Sydney.

Captain Scaggs astonished everyone by sailing into Sydney Harbor in a small vessel he and his only surviving crewman had constructed during their sojourn on an uncharted island.

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The ship's figurehead, washed up on the west coast of New Zealand one and a half years ago, confirmed the loss of the ship. Until Captain Scaggs' miraculous return, no word on how his ship was lost or the fate of the 192 convicts being transported to the penal colony or the 11 soldiers and 20 crewmen was known.

According to Captain Scaggs, only he and two others were cast up on an uninhabited island, where they survived extreme hardships for over two years until they could build a vessel with tools and materials salvaged from the wreckage of another unfortunate ship that was driven ashore a year later with the loss of her entire crew. They constructed the hull of their craft from wood cut from the native trees they found growing on the island.

Captain Scaggs and his crewman, Thomas Cochran, the ship's carpenter, seemed remarkably fit after their ordeal and were anxious to board the next ship bound for England. They expressed their profound sorrow for the tragic deaths of the *Gladiator's* passengers and their former shipmates, all of whom perished when the clipper sank during the typhoon. Incredibly, Scaggs and Cochran managed to cling to a piece of floating wreckage for several days before currents carried them onto the deserted island beach, more dead than alive.

The tiny piece of land where the men existed for over two years cannot be precisely plotted since Scaggs lost all his navigational instruments at the time of the sinking. His best reckoning puts the uncharted island approximately 350 miles east-southeast of Sydney, an area other ships' captains claim is devoid of land.

Lieutenant Silas Sheppard, whose parents reside in Hornsby, and his detachment of ten men from the New South Wales Infantry Regiment, who were guarding the convicts, were also listed among the lost.

THE LEGACY

September 17, 1876

Aberdeen, Scotland

After Scaggs' return to England and a brief reunion with his wife and children, Carlisle & Dunhill offered him command of their newest and finest clipper ship, the Culloden, and sent him to engage the China tea trade. After six more gruelling voyages, in which he set two records, Bully Scaggs retired to his cottage in Aberdeen, worn out at the early age of forty-seven.

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The captains of clipper ships were men grown old before their time. The demands of sailing the world's fleetest ships took a heavy toll on body and spirit. Most died while still young. A great number went down with their ships. They were an elite breed, the famed iron men who drove wooden ships at unheard-of speeds during the most romantic era of the sea. They went to their graves, under grass beneath the waves, knowing they had commanded the greatest sailing vessels ever built by man.

Tough as the beams inside his ships, Scaggs was taking his last voyage at fifty-nine. Having built up a tidy nest egg by investing in owners' shares on his last four voyages, he was providing his children with a sizable fortune.

Alone after the death of his beloved wife, Lucy, and his children grown with families of their own, he maintained his love for the sea by sailing in and around the firths of Scotland in a small ketch he built with his own hands. It was after a brief voyage through bitterly cold weather, to visit his son and grandchildren at Peterhead, that he took sick.

A few days before he died, Scaggs sent for his longtime friend and former employer, Abner Carlisle.

A respected shipping magnate, who built a sizable fortune with his partner, Alexander Dunhill, Carlisle was a leading resident of Aberdeen. Besides his shipping company, he also owned a mercantile business and a bank. His favorite charities were the local library and a hospital. Carlisle was a thin, wiry man, completely bald. He had kindly eyes and walked with a noticeable limp, caused by a fall off a horse when he was a young man.

He was shown into Scaggs' house by the captain's daughter, Jenny, whom Carlisle had known since she was born. She embraced him briefly and took him by the hand.

"Good of you to come, Abner. He's been asking for you every half hour."

"How is the old sea dog?"

"I fear his days are numbered," she answered with a trace of sadness.

Carlisle looked around the comfortable house filled with nautical furniture, the walls holding charts marked with daily runs during Scaggs' record voyages. "I'm going to miss this house."

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