

Flights of Fantasy

Play equipment to fuel the imagination

The Golden Dagger



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The Golden Dagger

Chapter 1



As Jamie, Henry and Wilf came into the clearing on the edge of the woods, near where the big house stood, set back, pale among the trees, across lawns with banks of yellow daffodils in the distance, they saw, as if it were the most normal thing in the world, a pirate ship floating on a sea of grass.

“Look at that”, shouted Jamie – “I told you I’d seen it”, and all three ran across the lawns to the ship and climbed aboard. They swarmed up the ladders to the rear deck and Jamie, the ringleader, being slightly bigger and bolder than the others, took the wheel and started to sing an old sea shanty.

“Oh, we are the bloodthirsty men of the sea,
Wherever there’s trouble then that’s where we be,
Stand by your gunwhales and pay tribute to we
Or we’ll board, and throw you into the sea
For we are the foulest of pirates, we three!”

He would have started on the second verse but a huge gout of spray splashed over the rear deck and the ship suddenly heeled over hard a port, the wind filling the sails and catching the ship off guard, threatening to broach into the surf running on her port side.

“Reef the mainsail” shouted Jamie the Jackal, as Henry the Holey (so called because of the holes in his pirate pants) and Wilf the Wicked – so called because he was the opposite of good, ran forward to haul on the ropes to pull in the huge mainsail for the ship had too much sail up and was bucking like a wild sea horse.

“Hard a starboard” shouted the pirate captain, throwing the wheel hard over, as the great

rudder groaned and the stern of the ship lifted out of the water in huge breakers that were threatening to cast her onto the shoals where she would lay over and break up ever so quickly, as out of her element as a whale upon a storm ridden beach.

“Hold on men!” he shouted as she heeled round and came up into the wind, suddenly driven back by the warm blasts of southern ocean tempest.

“Stand to, we’ll bring her about” as he swung the wheel again until the ship heaved over onto her starboard beam, and caught the wind, beginning a new tack with the sluggishness of a submerged barrel.

“Ship Ahoy, Cap’n, on the port quarter” shouted Wilf, and at that moment they all turned and saw stark, white sails against the deep blue of the evening sky, racing up the sandbar on a following course, a Royal Navy frigate, lean, fast and heavily armed. First they saw the red and orange muzzle flashes, one after the other in a row, perfectly timed, flashing down the length of the ship, the short puffs of smoke whisking away across the decks. Then came the boom, boom, boom, in perfect time, like the beat of a war drum – followed by the screeching howl as the grapeshot and cannon balls fell into the sea on the port side and astern of The Golden Dagger.

“Make full sail – full speed ahead” shouted the Jackal “Bend your backs, you vermin, pull those sails tight or the Royal Navy will scupper us all tonight”, and the ship, big though she was, threw up her head, kicked her heels and flew away.

The frigate continued to slide past the sand bar until it reached the end and put about in clouds of spray as she hit the head sea and the rough water at the point of the spit, and rounding it, the pirates could fairly see her



masts bending as she raced after them into the burning embers of the flaming sunset.

“She’s after us boys and she’s faster!” shouted Henry, standing on the rear deck, his holey trousers flapping in the wind that tugged at his long, curly locks and positively made his pirate earring jangle up and down. Both ships were heeled over in a frantic race into the night, a race for life, for the pirates knew the Navy frigate was far better equipped and the men far better trained, and that they were no match for her bloodthirsty skills. As they looked back, they could just make out the small bunch of officers in their blue and gold braided coats on the quarter deck of their pursuer, watching them through spyglasses.



Chapter 2

The pirates ran before the increasing wind, the surf running far below the ship as she plunged off the top of green, rolling wave after wave, spray and foam flying back, smacking into the stern faces and the bare chests of the hunted, and the wind grew. The waves became huge with chasms between them, the ship plunging into the depths, bursting forth onto the pinnacles of the waves, to plunge again into the troughs, booms of spray spewing out into the darkening sky, curiously white, the scuppers pouring solid green sea water as she shed the green waves that overwhelmed her prow, the wicked figurehead dipping into the green water, disappearing into the backward tumbling from that came flying across the foredeck to soak every pirate in its path. Never had they had such a bath – never had they all been so clean. Even Wicked Wilf’s pigtails were washed clean of the black ash dye he used, to make him look more terrifying, revealing golden pigtails just like those of a little girl.

She rode into the heavy seas, sails taut, prancing through the green waves. The cold spray sluiced across the decks, running into the pirate’s mouths, cold and salty, burning their eyes and cheeks, and running down their tanned chests to splash onto the heavy canvas trousers.

The sharp boom of a cannon behind and the ball came screeching across the space between the two ships. They saw it coming; too slow to be invisible, too fast to move out of the way; to blast a hole through the mainsail with a dull “thock”.

“Cut inside the sandbar” shouted Henry, “there’s a small channel – we’ll just get through”, and Wilf swung the wheel to bring her to bear onto the narrow channel between misfortune and disaster.

The Navy frigate, much faster, with a sleeker hull and more sail, was gaining now, although she could no longer bring her guns to bear, the only escape lay in the thin blue ribbon of water – but the slightest mistake would result in beaching and disaster, for the frigate, although she could not overhaul The Golden Dagger, had far more men and the pirates would soon be boarded and cut to pieces.

They raced up the channel, gleaming sandbanks gliding past, shoulder high, at running speed, the frigate jostling the stern of the pirate boat, the bow sprit splintering into the aft deck railings, figurehead of Ajax plunging up and down, so close they could see the snarl on his face. The Navy crew, cutlasses in their belts, knives in their mouths, crowded onto the foredeck ready to leap aboard the moment the ships locked into a stable juxtaposition. Henry drew his pistols – both hands – took careful aim, and fired twice, two crimson holes appearing in white bibs and two naval officers fell writhing to the bloodied decks, rivulets of blood running to the scuppers to dissolve into the seawater running across the decks.

A howl of anger rose from the foredeck of the pursuer – just let these boats lock together for one moment and we’ll be aboard – but the pirates threw The Golden Dagger around, her stern swinging across the channel, and the frigate could not lock on.

Following up behind, sinister dark shapes slid up the channel.

The sharks swam close behind the Navy frigate like a shoal of tadpoles, excited by the taste of the bloodied water running from the scuppers; they thrashed alongside the ship, their black eyes rolling in anticipation of the uniformed figures above them. The frigate made her thrust to come alongside The Golden Dagger – Henry firing repeatedly into the mass of men on the



foredeck, and with a groaning, splintering of timbers, she pushed her way up alongside, the crew gathering to the rail ready to jump. Wilf swung the wheel and brought The Golden Dagger hard into the wind, forcing the frigate obliquely across her stern, out of the small channel and onto the sandbank. She sloughed quickly to a halt, men falling about her decks, one or two falling over the rail, to land, as luck would have it, on the sandbank with the sharks thrashing in the shallows trying to get to them. Being in full sail, the frigate quickly heeled over and lay rendered useless and immobile.

Wilf swung the wheel back to bring The Golden Dagger round before she, too, suffered the same fate, and they felt the sandbank drag along her hull before she finally caught the wind and broke free into the deep water in the centre of the channel. By now, the crew had recovered themselves, and no longer ready to board, were taking aim with muskets. A smattering of musket balls pockmarked the sails and splintered timber and tackle; the pirates cowered low beneath the railings and none were hit.

Quickly, they put distance between them and their pursuers.

“What’ll we do Cap’n?” asked Wilf, “Let’s go back and finish them off” for it would have been so easy to turn around, sail back down the sandbar, up the channel, and blast holes in the naked upturned hull of the Navy ship – her cannons pointing uselessly at the sky.

“Come on Cap’n – what’ll we do?” All eyes turned to the Captain. Jamie the Jackal stood for a moment – deep in thought – head down, eyes on the deck. He suddenly straightened up; he knew what they wanted.

“Ok boys, we’ll sink her” and a huge shout rose to the sky.

The Golden Dagger bore out of the channel and tacked out into the open sea. They could see the Navy boat, heeled over and beached, with a frantic throng of men heaving and pushing, trying to re-float her – but there was not a chance, like ants heaving at a beached barrel. The Navy men knew exactly what the pirates were about and redoubled their efforts as The Golden Dagger entered the channel for the second time.

The pirates below deck were loading their cannons and fifteen angry muzzles were wheeled out, butting through the wide open hatches, and slowly The Golden Dagger moved up the channel.

“Have your second charges ready men – ready to re-load” coolly shouted the Jackal, “Reef the mainsail, steady as she goes steers man, and Wilf gave him a cock eyed smile as he held her on course.

The Navy crew were now running across the sandbar, muskets in hand, lining up along the waters edge. The channel now filled with expectant sharks – they rammed wadding into their muskets and pushed the balls home as The Golden Dagger inched up the channel. It was to no avail, they would never stop their ship from being destroyed, but they would pick off a pirate or two at such close range.

The Captain stood to the rail – he cupped his hands and shouted ”If you fire on us, we’ll mow you down! Stop firing or we will turn the guns on you!”

The firing ceased and all went quiet as they slid alongside.

“Fire at will – get two shots in”, shouted Jamie the Jackal, and the first gun fired point blank into the beached hull. White splinters of shattered timber whirled away to splash into



the water, sharks twisting and turning among the debris, tearing at each other to get at the chunks of wood raining down, thinking food was on its way. The second gun fired, and the third, whilst the sweating crew of the first re-loaded – and the second, and so on until the shivering wreck was reduced to a hulk filled with holes. 30 close range cannon balls screaming into the shuddering body of the ship.

As The Golden Dagger heaved past and the last gun fired, the prow of the Navy cutter erupted into a shower of splinters; the pirate Captain saluted the men on the sandbank, the head of the navy figurehead lay blown off on the far side of the sandbank, his angry snarl so much less menacing now, vacant wooden eyes staring at the evening sky.

The blue clad Navy Captain stood to attention and saluted back – he knew he'd been well and truly beaten – but under his breath he muttered a curse. "I'll follow you Jackal, you cursed pirate – to the ends of the earth and there I will sink your ship and kill you!"

The pirates had spared them, and they would in due course make their way across the bay to the safety of the mainland in the small ships boats which still remained unshattered.

The threat now passed, the pirates danced and sang upon the decks until the sun went down. They sailed quietly away up the coast and onto their next adventure.

As the sun went down and the night began to fall, the sea became calm, almost dead flat, and a deep green.

The three pirates slipped down the net onto the lawn of the big house. The ship was still and quiet – and their noisy crew of pirate mates seemed to have disappeared.

"Come on boys, we'd better get home or we'll be in trouble" said Jamie as they walked back across the lawn into the darkening woods.

They looked back at the ship – a cold hard silhouette against the last glows of daylight in the sky, and it was hard to believe what an adventure they had just been through.

