

Captain John Paul Jellyfish Serialized



12.

Striking North

The next morning, the jellyfish rose early and struck out for parts unknown. Once upon the open sea, Captain John Paul Jellyfish caught a steady current that carried the fleet northward at a good clip.

This morning, the jellies were in high spirits. The weather was splendid, and the speedy current spared them a load of work. While sailing along, they told salty jokes and sang sea shanties. One rousing song went like this:

Jellyfish Shanty

*Oh, life on the sea is for me... Hey ho!
To be free and made of jelly... Hey ho!
We drink our fill and wobble when we will.
As we sing the Jellyfish Shanty. ... Hey ho!*

Refrain:

*Our jellied fleet can never be beaten,
Led by the fearless Captain John Paul.
You should never meddle with this sea nettle.
He's the bravest jelly of all.
Oh, our sacs will flow where the wind does blow.
As we dangle on tendrils down below.
Foes fear our sting while we are fighting.
Along the long seaboard we go. Hey hooooooooo!*
(Listen to [Jellyfish Shanty](#))



Toward noon, however, conditions changed. The horizon, soft and smooth all morning, became a puffy gray pillow. The closer the jellyfish sailed to the gloom, the

more somber their mood grew.

"Bags!" the captain muttered, realizing what he was about to enter. "A fog bank."

Into the dreary ghost-world the fleet drifted. The sun faded and then vanished altogether. The air turned thick and chilly.

John Paul stared into the swirling drizzle. He alone knew the perils of cruising along an uncharted coast in thick fog. For starters, by now plenty of Portuguese men-of-war would be roving about, perhaps sailing along the same current. Then who knew what sharp-toothed or wide-clawed creature might emerge from these murky depths? Then again, how many jellyfish had run aground upon hidden rocks in similar soupy weather?

Later, something else disturbed the captain. Out of the fog tumbled a deep, distant bellowing.

Beeeeeeeeeee Ooooooooooooo! Beeeeeeeeeee Ooooooooooooo!

"Sir! Sir!" called the lieutenant. "That belching sound. What could it be, sir?"

Before the captain could reply, another *Beeeeeeeeeee Ooooooooooooo!* shook the mist.

The moon jelly appeared at John Paul's side. "Sounds like someone is sick-o, Cap'n," he said.

John Paul's steely stare remained forward. "Steady as she goes, gentlemen," he said.

For the next hour, the jellyfish drifted through the colorless world, while the deep, repeating *Beeeeeeeeeee Ooooooooooooo!* grew louder. When the sound was almost deafening, a beam of light, a single stiff white rod, pierced the mist. Yet as suddenly as it appeared, it vanished. *Flash!* It came again. *Poof!* It was gone.

The lieutenant sailed close behind the captain. "It's a sea monster, sir," he uttered. "A demon of the deep. Some phantom of the ocean."

"It's a blinking sea god!" said the first mate. "Perhaps mighty Neptune himself!"

At that moment, a breeze parted the fog, and there on a rocky island the thing stood, tall, round, and striped like a candy cane. *Beeeeeeeeeee Ooooooooooooo!* it sounded. *Flash! Flash! Flash!* went the light at its top.

"Just look at the eye on that cyclops, Cap'n!" said the first mate.

"It sounds hungry, sir?" cried the lieutenant.

The rest of the fleet gathered around their leader.

"What is it, Captain?" asked Smucker, the young mushroom jelly.

“It gives me the willies, Captain,” said a large cannonball jelly named Big Welch. “Where did it come from?”

Every jellyfish waited breathlessly to hear the words from their captain that would set their minds at ease.

Beeeeeeeeeee Oooooooooooooo!

Flash! Flash! Flash!

The captain scrutinized the curiosity before him. He took a long time before answering. Finally, he cleared his throat and said in a voice wrought with authority, “Fellow jellies, you have nothing to fear. This thing is harmless. Now let us leave this dreary place.”

“Aye, aye, sir!” said the lieutenant.

“Right-o, Cap’n,” piped the first mate. “Everyone, back to your stations.”

The entire fleet, swollen with renewed admiration for their bold leader’s wisdom, sailed off into the fog, singing a merry shanty.

John Paul Jellyfish waited until his crew was clear of the rocks before drifting off by himself. Once alone, he let out a long, slow sigh. Behind him, another *Beeeeeeeeeee Oooooooooooooo* sounded, and the light beam cut through the mist.

“Bags,” the captain muttered to himself. “I haven’t the foggiest idea what that thing was.”

