

Captain John Paul Jellyfish Serialized



15.

Night Glow

The old blue lobster served Captain John Paul Jellyfish well. Not only did he prove to be a skilled sailor, but an expert navigator as well. For the next week, as the fleet cruised up and down the coast in search of the man-of-war armada, he pointed out to the captain important islands, inlets, harbors, and headlands. John Paul, who wished to make a thorough survey of the new land, was much obliged.

Even when the fleet left sight of land, the lobster never lost his bearings. By day, he followed the familiar hills and gullies of the ocean floor, and at night, he followed the stars.

"The heavens are like our ocean, me beauties," he instructed the younger jellies one evening, while pointing skyward with his single claw. "The sky is filled with marine creatures—sea constellations, don't you know. Look there to the west...that's Pisces, the fish. And across the sky...there's Cancer, the crab. Now look overhead, and you'll find Cygnus, the swan, and near that is Delphinium, the dolphin. By Neptune, ain't they a glorious sight!"

Indeed, the night was filled with enchantment. Not only did the thousands of stars make thousands of squiggling reflections upon the water, but also, beneath the surface was the Night Glow. The undersea world teemed with jellyfish, phosphorescent ones that gave off eerie flashes of blue, red, and yellow. The entire sea glowed like a Fourth-of-July sky.

John Paul Jellyfish enjoyed chatting with these American jellies.

"This is an enormous continent you've sailed into, Captain," a brilliant white compass jellyfish told him. "People say it goes from sea to shining sea."

"And that other sea is far bigger than the Atlantic, Captain," explained a beefy barrel jellyfish. "It's called the Pacific Ocean, although to sail across it is anything but pacifying."

Next, a fierce lion's mane jellyfish, whose jelly sac measured at least six feet across, mentioned, "And to the north, Captain, lies still another ocean. It covers the top of the world, and it lies under a thick sheet of ice!"

One conversation with three by-the-way sailor jellyfish provided John Paul with a vital piece of information. These small blue jellies, which looked like little glass dishes, told the captain about meeting the man-of-war navy.

"They're laying pillage along the entire Atlantic seaboard," explained one by-the-way sailor. "Plaguing every beach they are blown upon. Stinging any person they find swimming."

"And they're after your jelly, Captain," said the second small jellyfish. "They put a whopping price upon your sac."

"The man-of-war commodore, he says to give you a message, Captain," said the third by-the-way sailor.

"Indeed, my glassy friend," said John Paul. "And what could that be?"

"He says you'd better leave this coast, John Paul Jellyfish, or, he says, they'll hunt you down and send your entire fleet to a watery grave. He says, they'll turn your jelly sac inside out, and rip every tentacle off your hide, he says. After that, he says, they'll spread your jelly from here to the Sandwich Islands. That's what he says."

For the rest of the evening, the captain drifted alone. A full moon sat on the horizon.

"Hello again, bald man," he said to the white circle. "Is that a smirk on your shiny face I see? Are you scoffing at me? Do you think I shall be defeated this time?"

