

Captain John Paul Jellyfish Serialized



22.

The Battle Part II

At this point, the English fleet might have lost the battle but for a stroke of good luck. A squall sprang up. The stiff wind drove the Portuguese northward, giving John Paul's weary band time to rest and regroup.

Captain John Paul Jellyfish lay still in the water. The first mate and lieutenant gaped at the gap in his jelly sac where the two tentacles were missing.

"Gentlemen!" John Paul rasped. "Stop gawking and give me your reports!"

"Cap'n, five jellies in our column have been sunk-o!" said the moon jelly. "Three more were knocked out of action. The lobster brought down four men-o'-war, but the rest of us sank only three."

"Sir, we're licked, sir," said the yellow sea nettle. "My column took a terrible beating, sir. Surely their next attack will be the end of us."

The blue lobster came topside. "Beg pardon, Cappy," he said. "We have a visitor. While below, I spotted the underside of the seagull spy."

Sure enough, a few yards to starboard, the fat seagull floated like dirty soapsuds.

"Tsk! Tsk, chump!" he called out. "I say, old bean, you simply *must* take better care of yourself. The dear old man-of-war commodore gave me first dibs on your jelly. And now, chump, I notice some of my yummy dessert is missing. Catch my drift?"

John Paul turned his weakened side away from the bird. "Scat, gullible gull!" he stormed.

"Why, old bean, how rude of you. I've flown all this way out to sea to watch this little fray, and you shoo me away."

"Spare us your squawking, seaswine!" the captain sneered.

"But alas, chump. I'm here to deliver another message from the man-of-war commodore," said the bird. "As I said, he's quite a fine and fair chap. He said to tell you, and I quote:

'Dear Captain John Paul Jellyfish,

Your death will be quick and painless if you strike your colors at once and surrender.' End of quote, old bean."

John Paul jolted as if struck by a bolt of lightning. "Surrender?" he muttered. "Surrender, did you say?"

A new life seemed to swell in the captain's jelly. He swam up to the seagull and bobbed beneath his bloody bill.

"Surrender! Never!" he thundered. "Catch *my* drift? And now, my foul-feathered foe, I have a message for *you* to take back to the Portuguese commodore. Tell that big blue windbag...

I HAVE NOT YET BEGUN TO FIGHT!"

With these immortal words still ringing in the salty air, the jellies followed their wounded leader back into battle. Soon, the deadly business began again. Within minutes, the sea was thick with stinging tentacles and dodging jellyfish.

Despite his wound, John Paul fought on with added vigor. Blinded by rage and flying sea spray, he wheeled in circles, lashing out at anything that approached him.

The moon jelly and yellow sea nettle fought by their captain's side. Darting back and forth, the lieutenant whooped wild battle cries and stung in a mad flurry. The first mate fought savagely, taking on men-of-war three times his size.

In time, four men-of-war converged upon the jellyfish officers. Four solid walls of blue formed around them.

"Break out! Break out for all kind sea creatures!" John Paul cried and surged toward the barrier.

Two men-of-war, however, wrapped a web of tentacles around his middle. They dragged the captain below and began a gruesome game of tug-of-war.

John Paul looked upward through a foot of ocean. The sun danced around the watery blue sky. Suddenly, he saw something else. Scores of black missiles were falling toward him. With great splashes, the black streaks hit the water and shot under him like torpedoes.

Calmness came over the captain. He no longer heard the battle. He no longer felt the men-of-war trying to pull him apart.

"Oh, death," he uttered, "where is thy sting?"
Then everything went black.

