

# THE OLD ROUND HOUSE

by Dave Hawkins

## CHAPTER TWO

### Lost in Paradise

Terry was unsure how long he stood motionless; surely time enough for things to change if they were going to. When they didn't, it was apparent the dream he must be having was continuing. The only other explanation was too wild to even consider. A high-pitched, agitated chattering filled the small clearing. It seemed to mock his thoughts. A glance in the direction of the sound picked up movement. A small, brown monkey shinned down the trunk of a palm tree clutching a banana. Nothing unusual here: if he was in a zoo, which he wasn't; or shouldn't have been.

So, where exactly was *here*? A brief but searching examination of the surrounding vegetation failed to resolve the mystery. There were tropical plants, exotic creepers and strange flowers he had never seen before. It was nothing like Melbourne, that much was certain. It even smelled different. Fear was on the rise and needed putting in its place. "Get real, dummy!" he said aloud to himself. "You didn't go anywhere. You're still in the old garden. You must be!" A second look around confirmed he was lying to himself.

His next step was particularly human. When things were turning out badly, the best bet was to find someone or something to blame. Try the cat: if it hadn't got trapped in the first place, he wouldn't have entered the old round house. Unfortunately, he reminded himself, there had been no cat, just a strange, wailing cry. And he wouldn't have heard that if he'd left straight away; instead of stopping to pick up some creepy medallion.

There was the culprit, his reason for being... well, wherever he was. Withdrawing the pendant from a pocket, a study of its now-dull, lifeless shape fired anger. "Devil's necklace!" he grated hoarsely. As punishment for an inanimate object that had brought nothing but trouble, he flung it across the clearing in disgust. Immediately, something tugged at him inside as if saying – bad move, bozo. Racing over to where it had landed, he snatched it up, heart pounding. Not with exertion, for sure - he'd only run a short distance. No, this was triggered by an overwhelming feeling of relief. Why, though? What was so important about this piece of jewellery that he felt he couldn't afford to lose it?

There was no real need to ask. It was, after all, a classic scenario, for Terry anyway. His imagination had lured him to the old round house; then the pendant had taken over. It was somehow connected with the voices he'd heard. Wherever it had brought him, and for whatever reason, it was the one link, mentally and physically, with normal, everyday life. If he discarded it, he would never see home again. Now, *that* was facing reality! He stared at the jewel for a while, hoping it might begin to shimmer again, willing the voices to return and

tell him where he was... what to do... how to get back. Not so much as a glimmer came from the pendant.

Alright, forget the pendant; what about the silver dome? "What about it?" he repeated aloud, mainly because the sounds of his voice were reassuring; and they helped mask those emanating from the tropical jungle. Also, talking to himself was what old Sheldon, the science master at school did; and he was smart. Smart was clearly in short supply and Terry could do with some. "Okay," he declared, decisively, "I am Sheldon and everything must conform to the laws of physics. I entered the round house." *The machine*, he corrected. "Pushed and touched some things I shouldn't have; then went from where I was to somewhere different. So, it's a vehicle, a transporter of some kind, the brainchild of a genius." And why hadn't anyone heard of this before? "Simple - it's still in the experimental stages."

That seemed pretty satisfactory – thank you, Sheldon. It didn't explain everything, but was getting there. So, let's continue: "According to Sir Isaac Newton, what goes up must come down." The theory unfortunately didn't apply to space travel. But: "It's also possible that what goes out must come back." The crew of Apollo 13 managed it. Admittedly, they knew exactly what they were doing. And, he added sourly: "They had no doubt as to where they *were* every step of the way."

He stood up and walked to the edge of the clearing, aware that he was shaking all over. Probably hunger, he lied to himself, pausing beneath a clump of banana palms to look up. The monkey and his friends had been at work, but they had since gone and had left a few hands of fruit at the lowest part of a drooping stalk. A number of futile leaps into the air missed every time. Well, if a monkey could climb, so could a boy who couldn't jump high enough. The delicate trunk of the banana palm reacted unexpectedly. Just over half way up, the plant heaved, bent like a flimsy cardboard tube, and dumped him onto the sand.

Only his pride was hurt, but the incident was a clear message to watch his step. Out of his normal environment, danger probably lurked at every turn. He looked back to the silver dome. Logically, he should return to it and try to reverse whatever process had been set in motion. But if he did manage to get back home, what would he have to recall? Nothing really. It would have been like a holiday with no happy snaps; worse even. Here was an opportunity which required no imagination; just the courage to explore, if only a little. What kind of wimpy adventurer would fly half-way round the world only to spend his limited stay in the hotel room?

Terry plucked up courage along with a hand of bananas from the broken plant and started making his way into the jungle. It wasn't that dense really, and he was pretty sure he could find his way back; but he took the precaution of breaking the occasional branch and draping strips of banana peel in conspicuous places, giving him a track to follow when he returned. Anyway, the intention wasn't to go far - just have a quick look around. He was on his third banana when the tropical vegetation thinned and he was at the back of a beach.

His chewing became extremely slow as he gazed around the bay. White sand stretched fifty metres to the water's edge where small waves lapped gently, survivors of the much larger ones breaking heavily on an exposed reef at the mouth of a horseshoe cove. Quite small, its sandy beach was skirted by a backdrop of green ferns and palm trees. Apart from the vegetation, there were no signs of recognisable life.

To his left the outlook was reasonably flat, but as the bay curved away to the right the hinterland rose gradually, finishing in a high outcrop of rock falling steeply as cliffs where it met the sea, and rounded on the landward side. A high place like that would make an excellent lookout. He started along the beach, absently peeling yet another banana, then realised that he was totally stoked and couldn't face another one. He turned to the greenery at the back of the beach and called: "Hey, monkeys - lunch!" Hurling the remainder of the fruit into the tropical jungle, he continued his trek.

By the time he had reached the start of the rise on the far side of the bay, he was tiring noticeably. The loose sand had made it hard going and there was still the climb up to the rock on the top of the cliffs. The first part wasn't too bad, except for having to push through waist-high, scrubby bushes and a forest of palm trees. Although these were quite high and blocking a view of the hill above, Terry was unconcerned: all he had to do was keep climbing and he would reach the top eventually.

The steep gradient was scattered with small rocks and protruding roots which changed a difficult climb into a mountaineering expedition. He was forced to stop frequently in order to regain his breath and reset his course. At last the trees began to thin, the rocks increased in size and he was finally leaning against a huge boulder perched on top of the cliffs. Once his breath had returned to normal, along with his heartbeat, he looked back in the direction he had come from, hoping to see some evidence of people that might have been missed at ground level – perhaps a camper van, or smoke from a barbecue – but it was not to be. There were just the trees and a few hills off in the distance. No sign of human habitation of any kind. At least the silver dome was still there – the top of it could be seen glinting in the midst of banana palms. That was a relief.

He shuffled around the huge rock so that he could see what was on the other side of the hill: just, another bay. That was the first impression; then his eyes widened. There was a boat! Not a small one, either. It was anchored offshore, a three-masted sailing vessel - probably one of those replicas like the Endeavour that everyone seemed to be building these days. Things were looking rosier all the time. Where there was a ship, there would be a crew; even if most of them were rich folk playing at being sailors in their designer clothes. And, sure enough, there they were: a small group of them was dragging a boat up onto the beach. Terry gave a little hop of delight. Excitement reached fever pitch as he plunged down the slope, slipping and sliding, stumbling and falling until he was at the bottom of the hill and racing out to the open beach.

"Hey!" He waved frantically. "Hey, I'm here... over here!"

With things seemingly returning to normal, out of habit he became the shipwrecked mariner who had not seen a human soul for years. Wonder of wonders - they had spotted him! One of them was pointing. A puff of smoke rose from what he had thought was an extended finger. Something whistled past his ear, followed a split-second after by what sounded like a small, distant explosion. Although it had never happened to him before, Terry knew that he had just been shot at! So much for normal.

He skidded to a halt and stared in bewilderment. Another individual was pointing at him. "Don't shoot!" he yelled. "It's only me - Terry. I'm just a kid! Don't shoot!" They did, so he turned and ran. He ran as he had never done before. Legs pumped, chest heaved, swinging arms fought desperately to keep up the rhythm. Another shot! This one was so close he felt it part his curly hair. Survival being paramount, there was nothing left to do but throw himself onto the sand and lie there to await his fate.

Panting, sweating and the sounds of exhaustion from a protesting body seemed to go on for a lifetime. Nothing happened to justify them; nobody came. Had it all been imagination, a further extension of the dream? Maybe he'd look up to find himself alone on a deserted beach; better still in the tangled Melbourne garden. Then the sounds of feet running in soft sand were closing and the dream, if that's what it was, continued to be a bad one.

Next, there was pain as his hair was grasped and almost wrenched from his scalp. With a hefty jerk, he was spun onto his back. "Well now, 'ere's a pretty picture." Terry's wide eyes stared up in the direction of the rasping voice. It came from a man with an evil, sneering face. Something else moved into the boy's field of vision - a vicious-looking blade which lowered to rest across his throat. Back to being plain frightened, he dared not even swallow; just closed his eyes and prayed that death would be swift and painless.

### **The Pride of Madagascar**

Dying seemed a long time coming. Terry opened his eyes to find out why. The man with the cutlass was still gloating at him. Piggy, grey eyes squinted out of deep caverns in the weathered countenance, a face so lean that the cheeks were sunken hollows. His hook nose had a large wart on the end making his appearance even more grotesque. The face split in a toothless grin. He stood up, letting out a watery cackle. "What ship yer from, lad?"

The words, the tone, the accent were all very theatrical. Logic said Terry had stumbled onto a movie set; however, the attitude of this motley crew of old-time sailors and the real live bullets they'd fired at him said otherwise. The boy sat up. "I don't know what you're talking about. I haven't got a ship."

"No, I'll bet you 'aven't, me bucko." Hooknose dragged Terry towards his mates. "Looks like we caught us a deserter, eh lads? Any o' you swabs know 'im?"

A bald-headed individual with a bare, tattooed chest lumbered forward, the pictures on his muscles rippling with every movement. He thrust an extremely ugly face at the boy. "I think I seen 'im." The voice was deeper than Hooknose's and his breath was foul, probably from his few remaining rotten teeth. "I reckon 'e's one of ours."

Hooknose pushed the man back and held up three fingers. "'Ow many fingers, Misty?"

Misty squinted. "You know I don't count so good."

"'Ow many?" Hooknose demanded again.

"Six... I think."

The crew roared with laughter as Hooknose pushed Misty away. "You got stones fer eyes, Misty. Maybe we can get yer some new 'n's." He turned back to Terry, twirling his sword like a skewer towards the boy's face. "Now, 'ere's a lad wi' eyes a-sparklin' like a blue lagoon." Terry backed away. Hooknose stretched out with his other hand and cuffed him round the ear. He cackled again. "Keep yer baby blues lad. You'll need 'em soon enough when we gets yer back on board. Kingston!" A huge dark-skinned individual pushed his way through the crowd. Hooknose stabbed the air over his shoulder as he walked away from the boy. "Stay 'ere wi' the boat. An' mind the boy don't run again."

As the crew moved off, Kingston took Terry's arm in a gigantic black fist and pulled him along the beach towards the longboat. When they reached it, he expected to be flung to the sand. Instead, the man released him and nodded to a patch of shade cast on the beach by the bow of the vessel. Kingston moved away a few feet then sat cross-legged facing his captive. He flashed a white smile.

At least one of them had good teeth, thought Terry. But, apart from his grin and his build, Kingston seemed to have little else going for him. He had one good arm, the other being a mere stump which was covered by a piece of leather held in place by a knotted thong. His entire upper body was a mass of scars and welts. The sailor's most striking feature, however, was a ragged scar which ran from the centre of his forehead, across the left eye (now permanently closed) and continuing down in an arc to the chin.

That he was big was not in doubt, but big men had a tendency to be clumsy. Adding to that the fact that Kingston had only one eye and one arm, Terry thought he would stand a better chance of making a break for it with him than any of the others; logically, anyway. He let his right hand dig into the sand then shifted his feet, ready to spring. "I knows what you thinkin' boy," drawled Kingston's lazy, West Indian accent. He stood up. "I see prob'ly better wid one eye dan you can wid two. An' I only needs one hand ta use dis." He whipped his cutlass from side to side, practising a series of lightning slashes that seemed just a blur of reflected sunlight from the polished blade. "I can cut a banana, peel it, an' slice it before it touches da groun'." He demonstrated the technique with a few more slashes.

Terry swallowed hard. "I can imagine," he said meekly, then tried give to the impression that escape had been furthest from his mind; or if it had been considered in the first place, even in the slightest, it had since been abandoned as an option.

"Now dat's better. Jus' you enjoy da sunshine, boy."

Terry was going to ask how he could possibly do that when he was sitting in the shade, but decided the sarcasm might not be appreciated. Battered Kingston might be, but he was no fool. Terry took a deep breath instead. The strong sea air stung his nostrils, causing eyes to water which blurred the surroundings, much like his contrived view of the world during his former bionic dash. It would be nice to be back there in the Melbourne street, reliving the fantasy; unfortunately, the planks of the longboat were pressing realistically hard against his back and the real-enough sensation dispelled "nice" as a definite figment of imagination. Thumping his head lightly against the hull exemplified the here and now, so the dream theory was unacceptable. "Excuse me," he said to the sailor, "But where are we?"

Kingston eyed him with suspicion. "You makin' fun o' me, boy?"

"No, really – It's just that I don't know."

The man looked puzzled. "You not one of ours, are you boy? What ship you jump?"

Terry thought quickly. "... I don't know. Can't remember. Must have hit my head. I... er, just woke up here."

Kingston nodded as if he understood only too well. "I don't know da name of dis 'ere island. Maybe it 'asn't got one."

"And the year?" Terry tried to hurry him on. "What year is this?"

Kingston frowned. "1817, o' course."

Terry felt like screaming again. It couldn't be! It just couldn't! One minute he was in a strange garden in Melbourne and it was 1997; the next he was 180 years in the past on some un-named desert island - impossible! You'd need a time machine to...

A tingle of excitement intermingled with fear swept through him. "Now you're making fun of me, aren't you? Come on, tell me you're really here to make a film."

Kingston scratched his head. It was obvious he had no idea what a film was. "I'm here ta make ma fortune. A litt'a bit a pay-back for deez." He tapped the side of his head and the leather stump with his sword.

Terry lapsed into dismayed silence. At that point he was confused and disbelieving; not terrified yet, but that was sure to come - *if* this nightmare proved to be real. For the moment there was little to do except go along with the fantasy, pretend for sanity's sake that he actually was a time traveller. He remembered reading somewhere about sleepwalkers, how you should never wake them - it could be dangerous. Maybe he ought to humour himself by acting out this play until his mind got back to normal.

Assuming the silver dome was a time machine that had carried him back into the past, in hindsight he should never have left it. That was stupid. Water under the bridge, now, however. The current priority was to return to the machine. Logically, it was the one hope of getting back to his own time. *If* he could figure out how to start up the travel process again, which would mean more messing with stuff he didn't understand; or maybe not... A word resounded in his head - something the machine had said: "Reverse," it had droned dispassionately, "Reverse activated and waiting...."

It sounded pretty easy, now. All he apparently had to do was start the ball rolling and the machine would do the rest. A piece of cake! Well, it would have been if he was still in the silver dome; but he in his wise wisdom had to rush off and explore. Now he was stuck on a bygone beach with a minder who was very unlikely to let him go walkabout. Hopes of escape faded with the murmur of approaching voices. The other men were returning from the hinterland laden with fruit and wooden casks. Terry felt a sharp pain in his ribs. Kingston was poking him with the point of the cutlass. "In da boat, boy."

"But..." The feeble protest was cut short by a warning growl and another jab of the sword. Terry couldn't find anything to say that wouldn't make his situation worse and scrambled over the side of the longboat. It wasn't easy - not being built with midgets in mind. Kingston assisted with a push which sent him sprawling over the gunwale and onto the planks of the hull.

He was pulling himself up by one of the seats when a full bunch of bananas hit him on the shoulder causing him to fall back again. More bananas followed along with sacks containing coconuts and some kind of potato. Once the casks were stowed - presumably they contained fresh water - the men climbed aboard, jostling for positions on the seats. The boy was treated as part of the cargo and had to be content with perching himself on the lid of a barrel.

Soon they were bobbing their way over the swell towards the moored sailing ship. The men at the oars handled them like the experts they obviously were and the distance closed fast. In the space of a few minutes, the name on the bow of the magnificent vessel became easier to read - The Pride of Madagascar. By then they were beyond the protection of the reef and into choppy water; and, unlike the ship which rolled gracefully at anchor, the longboat was pitching awkwardly. They plunged through the waves, showered by cascades of salty water spraying back over the bow. Then they were on the leeward side in the shelter of the mother ship. Terry was saturated as were the others, but he seemed to be the only one to notice.

The longboat secured, a rope ladder was dropped down from above. Some of the men grabbed at the net which followed and began to load it with the provisions they had foraged on the island. Terry was pushed roughly aside as his 'seat' was taken from him. The boat might have been perfectly becalmed for all the effect it had on the crew. Terry, however, still had his land-legs and found it easier to sit in the bottom, bilge water soaking into his pants and washing over his shoes.

Men began to shin up the rope ladder effortlessly. Terry watched the supply net being hauled up and wished he had hitched a ride. It was too late now. Someone pushed him towards the ship. He stumbled and just managed to stop himself from diving into the sea. "Get goin', lad," one of his captors growled. "It's up, or in!" With one crewman still lurching his way up, the ladder was twitching backwards and forwards erratically. Terry made three vain attempts to catch it as it swept past. "Lord, love us!" grumbled Hooknose and caught hold of a rung. "Now, nimbly, boy or I'll shake 'e off!"

Terry tried his hardest to be nimble and managed the first few rungs adequately. Overconfidence caused him to miss his next footing. He hung swaying by his fingertips. Roars of laughter boomed down from the main deck. He looked up to see a dozen gnarled, weather-beaten faces grinning and calling to him. Spurred on, not by the taunting faces but the memory of Hooknose's threat, he continued his ungainly climb. Nearly at the top, he reached for the rail and felt rough hands grip his arms and haul him on board. A rousing cheer accompanied his arrival on board *The Pride of Madagascar*. As for *his* pride, some might have been preserved had he been able to walk a few steps; but his legs were trembling like jelly, and as soon as he tried, he collapsed in a heap on the wooden deck.

From what he had read about old sailing ships, their Captains usually took great care over the appearance of their vessels. This one, however, was the exception. The decks were stained and dirty; empty bottles rolled back and forth; leftover food decayed in small corners or was squashed underfoot. The one saving grace was the condition of the... ARMAMENTS...? The sight of the shining, spotless cannons somehow shocked Terry. It never dawned on him that this might be a fighting ship. The bronze guns were not merely decoration, that was for sure. Forget movie make-believe: the gun tackles and the wheels of the carriages were all clean, well-greased and ready for some *real* action!

A pair of naked, hairy legs obliterated his view. The owner of the limbs was a good match for the rest of the crew, wearing only dirty, striped trousers frayed badly where they flapped around a pair of knobby knees. His long black hair was tied in a pony-tail at the back of his neck with a stained blue kerchief. The (by now) familiar cutlass dangled from a wide, leather baldric hanging diagonally across his scarred chest from right shoulder to left hip. The sailor's face broke into a wide grin, revealing the seemingly obligatory decaying and broken teeth.

The boy's eyes widened with fear, a response that obviously pleased the man. Terry, however was not looking at, but past him, way up through the rigging, ratlines and spars to a point high on the mainmast. There, a comparatively small square of cloth flapped in the breeze. He was no sailor – a sad fact already proved - but he didn't have to be to recognise a time-worn, classic icon. There was only one black flag he knew of bearing the simple design in white of a human skull above two crossed bones. Above him flew the Jolly Roger. *The Pride of Madagascar* was a *pirate* ship!

## **Battle at Sea**

"An' wot we got 'ere, then?" the pirate snarled from a gravel throat, leering down at the boy on the deck at his feet. "A deserter, I'll be bound." Terry's attention returned from the flag at the masthead to the man standing over him; and as he listened, he couldn't help thinking, wishing this really was a scene from *Treasure Island, the Movie*. "Don't look like no-one'd

miss 'm though." The sailor tested the boy's muscles as if selecting his Christmas turkey. "Still, dare say 'e'd eat 'is fair share o' vi't'als. Seein' we're all near starvin' as is, 'ow about I feeds 'im to the sharks. What say you, lads?" He turned to his mates for approval. Terry groaned as they agreed noisily.

With that, despite his captive's pleas and cries, the man lifted him off the deck and carried him to the side of the ship like a sack of wheat. The boy struggled and fought but was no match for the strong sailor. The fact that he was an exhibitionist spurred him on; that and the cheers of his mates who gathered round to watch the fun. Terry felt himself being swung backwards. An appealing look to the bystanders for help just prompted more laughter. Then he was in the air, flying out to the open sea. With arms and legs flailing, he clutched desperately for anything that might save him. A hand caught a ratline, nearly pulling his arm from its socket and spinning him back into the rigging.

There was no time now to worry about sea-legs - he was fighting for his life! He hopped around the rigging and slithered to the deck, dodging the hands of his tormenter as he ran for the mast. The man had hold of his arm again. Terry caught one of the smooth pieces of wood on the mast. To his dismay it was not fixed but hung loosely in a rack from which it slipped as the man dragged him back towards the sea. The sudden freeing of the wooden stick caused the pirate to lose his balance. He rolled across the deck, taking Terry with him. As he scrambled for his feet, the boy glanced at the belaying pin he was holding. He had no idea what it was really for, but it looked and felt like it might make a good club.

The man renewed his attack. Terry swung his newly discovered weapon. It connected with a loud crack on the seaman's shin. The pirate yelped and bent to nurse the pain, eyes wild with fury and humiliation. Snarling like an angry tiger, he stood up slowly, pure hatred burning in his cloudy face. Terry shuffled backwards, ready with the club. The crew were jeering and cheering. It was unclear which of the contestants they supported. It just seemed an excuse to let off steam. But the noise and enthusiasm faded instantly as a voice boomed across the deck. Terry watched the faces. They registered uncertainty, fear even.

"Belay there!" A ripple shuddered through the crowd of sailors. "Bring the young pup 'ere. I'm Cap'n 'o this ship, an' I decides 'oo goes overboard." There was a panic of movement as the crew scattered, leaving a pathway between them for the Captain. He was a giant-of-a-man dressed in leather from top to toe. Only the ruffled front and balloon sleeves of his fancy shirt interrupted the mountain of black which commanded so much respect.

The man who had been denied his perverse pleasure was holding Terry's gaze, gritting his yellow teeth as if to say, "*I'll get you for this, lad!*" He spun on the Captain and grated angrily: "We got too many mouths to feed already. We bin on 'arf rations fer days. I say we toss 'im over!"

The Captain's ring-studded hand moved from where it had been resting on the butt of a pistol to the hilt of a fancy sword at his hip. "Are... YOU... challengin'... ME, Mister?" The voice built in volume until it was almost deafening. "I'm still runnin' this crew, an' if 'e want the job, back up yer claim wi' cold steel. Elsewise, 'old yer scurvy tongue!"

The face of Terry's attacker went a deep purple. A gnarled hand trembled over the hilt of his cutlass, hovered there, uncertain whether to take up the challenge. It finally decided and dropped loosely by the man's side. He slunk off along the deck, muttering curses under his breath.

The Captain flashed a glance at the other men. They needed no words. The look was enough and they scattered to their places of work, casting the odd resentful glance at the man they feared more than death itself. Terry watched as he approached. The high, black sea boots clumped towards him. Then he was looking up, expecting to see yet another old, cruel face. Instead, the Captain's was young and relatively unblemished. Despite his apparent lack of years, he could probably tell countless tales of adventure on the high seas. The imposing man stroked a neatly-trimmed moustache and smiled. A gust of wind blew across the deck. He removed his three-cornered hat to run fingers through dark, shoulder-length hair. Replacing the hat carefully he watched Terry, his eyes twinkling. "Well, now. Where'd you come from? You ain't one o' mine - too clean an' dandy fer that." Spreading his legs, he placed hands on hips, signifying that he intended to get an answer.

Kingston bustled up and started to explain, but the Captain waved him silent. Terry fought for the right words, ones that would satisfy the pirate leader; but when he opened his mouth, no sound issued from a dry throat. "Speak up, boy. Cat got yer tongue?"

Terry needed time: time to find an explanation that wouldn't sound as if he was poking fun; time to find a way out of this situation. If only he had someone to tell him what to do. Standing up, he absently brushed sand from his wet clothing; and as he did so, his hand felt the lump in his pocket - the medallion! Perhaps if he could contact the voices...? Without thinking, his hand dived into the pocket, just to feel the pendant for reassurance, nothing more.

A sudden movement caused him to look up, and he found himself staring open-mouthed into the barrel of the Captain's pistol. "Easy there, me bucko. Stay ve-ry easy afore I gets nervous." He leant forward to remove Terry's hand from the pocket. As he did so the barrel of the weapon almost touched the boy's nose. The smell of gunpowder made nostrils tingle; the thought of what it could do caused Terry to tremble with fright. The pirate withdrew the pendant and examined it.

Terry panicked: what if the man decided to keep it? Then how would he get back to his own country, his own time? It was not a game anymore. The idea of play-acting had been abandoned. Whether this was a dream or plain insanity, there was nothing to be done about that. But without the medallion he could be lost forever in purgatory, and the thought was too horrifying to contemplate. Snatching it back, he cowered on the deck, clutching the salvation-jewel to his breast. The Captain hesitated momentarily; then he was bellowing with laughter. "Just a bauble, lad. If it means so much to you, keep it - I got chests full of 'em below. Now," He uncocked the hammer of the pistol and thrust it back into his belt alongside the matching twin. "'Ow come you be all alone on that there island?"

Providence stepped in and there was no need to think of an answer because a voice from high up the mainmast was heralding: "Sail on the starboard bow."

The question of the boy completely forgotten, the Captain spun on his heel and strutted along the deck, pushing his men roughly aside as he headed for a ladder which led up to the quarter deck. At the top he snatched a telescope from the mate and focussed it on a distant speck, at the same time calling back to the man in the crow's nest. "Can yer see 'er colours?"

"It's no ship 'o the line, Cap'n. Could be a Frenchie," echoed the reply.

"All 'ands to quarters. Clear fer action!" roared the pirate skipper. "You two!" He pointed at couple of sailors nearby. "Run for'ard an' tie an empty cask to the anchor cable, then cut us adrift. Lively, now!"

Things around Terry started to buzz as men ran everywhere. Bare-footed sailors scrambled up the rigging to inch their way along the yard arms. It seemed to take only seconds for them to untie the canvas and for it to fall, catch the wind and become a grand, billowing sail. Timbers creaked and they were underway. More sails were set and The Pride of Madagascar picked up speed until, with every stitch of canvas spread, she was flying across the blue ocean. She heeled over sharply as the helmsman spun the wheel to alter course. Unprepared for this, Terry lost his balance and went sliding across the deck. He stopped short when he became tangled in the legs of a running crewman. Expecting another reprisal, the boy put his arms up to defend himself, but the man ignored him and disappeared down an open hatch.

"Mister Aimes!" The Captain looked for the mate.

Aimes ran to the quarter deck ladder. "Cap'n?"

"The longboat's still alongside," said the pirate leader, " 'Ave it shifted astern afore it gets swamped or breaks apart."

"I could 'ave 'er on deck in two shakes, Cap'n."

The skipper cast his gaze out to sea. The other ship appeared much larger, much closer. He shook his head. "No time, Mister. Tie 'er off astern. We'll take 'er in tow – a long painter, mind."

Mister Aimes scrambled down the ladder, grabbed two men and relayed the Captain's orders; then he turned his attention to more pressing matters - the cannons. There was a flurry of activity as the gun ports were opened and bronze muzzles were rolled through. The gun crews stood waiting, tense and perspiring. Behind them stood the powder monkeys, boys no older than Terry, some even looked younger. If their faces registered fear at all, that particular expression was masked by layers of grease and dirt.

Terry took to watching their eyes which seemed to sparkle with the excitement. Then they shivered in unison as a known and dreaded word rippled through the ship like a gust of wind across a field of corn - Frenchie! Eyes turned from the approaching vessel back to their Captain. "This prize is wot we bin waitin' for, lads," he hissed with delight. A hush fell over the assembly. The Captain's sword was in his hand as if to add power to his speech. "Until I

gives the word, I don't want no sound - not a whisper. If I even so much as 'ears anyone breathe I'll keel 'aul 'im. We'll take this Frenchie, or I'll 'ang ev'ry man jack o' yer!"

Nobody spoke. Nothing moved. The only sounds that could be heard were the creaking of the masts and the rush of water as the ship glided on her deadly mission. The tricolours of the French flag were easily identifiable now, and what had previously been dark shapes moving about the vessel's decks had become men. They must have had faith in their own colours, because the French galleon kept coming, showing no fear or respect for the Jolly Roger fluttering at the masthead of The Pride of Madagascar.

The pirate Captain had the helmsman swing the ship so that the starboard side faced the approaching French vessel; then he put a cupped hand to his cheek and called out: "Ahoy, there! 'Eave to or I open fire!" The bow of the French galleon dipped and rose as she kept on coming, giving no hint that she had even heard the warning. "Last chance, Frenchie." The Captain repeated the warning, his sword was poised high, ready to signal the start of battle. "'Aul down yer colours!"

The French commander ignored the request and his ship suddenly turned as she changed course to face her port side to the other vessel. Seeing this, the pirate Captain's sword sliced down. "Open fire!" Silence was shattered by a deafening roar as the big guns obeyed the command. The ship heeled over with the recoil. Gun crews pulled frantically on ropes, dragging back the cannons so that they might be swabbed, reloaded and rolled out again.

Terry began to choke as a thick fog blanketed the decks. The air was filled with noise, with shouting; then another sound, further away. A second later the great iron balls of the French cannons reached them. They tore canvas, splintered wood and swept away men like toys. A nearby cannon exploded with a fearful crash, sending showers of broken metal into the air. One piece whistled past Terry's head; another glanced off the deck and ripped open his shoe.

Before The Pride of Madagascar was able to reply to the French attack, another salvo ripped across her decks and into the sails. Terry ran, even though there was nowhere safe to run to. Someone caught him and flung him towards a ladder. Terry lashed out. His hand struck a huge, scarred black chest. It was Kingston. "Get to da longboat, boy." The pirate was spluttering, obviously in pain. "Don' wait for survivors - dare won' be any."

Terry felt himself pushed towards the stern of the vessel. Kingston limped after him using his cutlass as a walking cane. The boy halted at the rail. He looked out at the boat tied to a long rope and trailing behind in the ship's wake. He could see no way of getting to it. "Jump, boy!" Kingston hissed through clenched teeth as his pain intensified. Terry's obstinate shake of the head sparked the man's frustration. "You got no choice, boy!" The man's lips twisted in agony as he lurched closer. "A curse on you for makin' me hurt so," he hissed; then he was barging Terry over the side. His deed of mercy almost done, he leaned panting on the rail to watch the splash far below, then waited for a head to appear. "Swim, boy!" he called. "Swim!"

Terry did just that. The thought of sharks helped increase his speed to almost Olympic standards. Next, he was hauling his dripping body into the boat and looking back to the ship. It was still being pounded by the French guns. Fire and smoke was everywhere. Kingston was still at the rail and gave him a wave of farewell. "Come with me," called Terry. "You won't make your fortune if you stay here!"

The big pirate laughed. "Fortunes aren't for da likes o' me, boy." With one slash of his cutlass he parted the rope and the longboat was adrift.

"Kingston! Kingston!!" But Kingston had gone. Alone once more, Terry was faced with another problem - how could a mere boy row a boat which had been built for six big, strapping oarsmen. After a few vain attempts, he swapped the clumsy oar for a piece of floating wood, probably originally part of the ship. It was slow work, painfully slow, and almost impossible to set a straight course for the island. Occasionally he glanced back to where the battle raged and watched for a short while before resuming his paddling.

Just after one of these examinations, a tremendous explosion, louder than even the cannon fire, echoed across the sea. When he looked for the cause, he was barely in time to see the pirate ship rise momentarily out of the water. Then she just seemed to disappear in a balloon of fire, blown apart by the gunpowder in her own magazine. The *Pride of Madagascar* was first a ball of flame and a mass of airborne debris; then she was sinking. Pieces of her continued to float down like great, black snowflakes which dived into the surrounding water, surfaced and finally bobbed on their way to some distant shore where they would be dried for use as firewood - a sad end to a once fine old sailing ship.

The hot blast from the explosion reached him; and after, a very small tidal wave which at least helped to speed him on his way. He would need all the help he could get, Terry decided, paddling nervously. He kept looking behind at the French galleon. His efforts increased measurably when he noticed a boat being lowered. As soon as the crew was aboard, it began moving about the ocean where the pirate ship had once sailed, its occupants stopping occasionally to pick up a survivor of the *Pride's* crew.

Terry was praying they wouldn't see him when he heard a shout. It couldn't be him they were calling, could it? Surely he would be lucky just this once. A musket ball whistled overhead. Luck has deserted him yet again!

### **Just a Matter of Time**

A plank of wood floated by and bumped the side of Terry's boat, a reminder of Kingston, the Captain, and even the pirate who had tried to feed him to the fish. In a way it was a relief that he hadn't suffered their same fate; but there was something else happening that confirmed his narrow escape was only temporary. The French longboat had abandoned the search for survivors and was heading straight for him. With the extra manpower they were

bound to catch him. Setting to with his makeshift paddle was a token gesture; but that in itself might unknowingly have bought some precious time. The French weren't shooting at him anymore, and they certainly seemed in no hurry to overtake him, perhaps confident they could catch him soon enough without expending energy unnecessarily.

The bow of Terry's boat swung and he was suddenly heading in a different direction – straight towards the reef just out from horseshoe bay. He leapt to the starboard side and paddled furiously to correct the swing of the boat as a strong current continued to drag the vessel towards the breakers. It was hopeless – he was at the mercy of the undertow. Accompanied by the incoming tide, the stream of water swirled and bubbled; yet it seemed concentrated as if it was pouring into a funnel. Evidence was ahead of him: flotsam from the sunken pirate ship caught in the foaming torrent was leading the way through what appeared to be a narrow gap in the reef. Arms ached from the frantic back-paddling to stay out of the current, but his feeble efforts proved useless. He gave up, deciding that being dashed to bits on the rocks was better than becoming a prisoner again.

Holding tightly as he rocked from side to side, he let the sea take the boat. Would it follow the debris into the lagoon? It was at least a chance, which was more than he had if the French caught him. Two whistles screeched past his head followed by two distant reports. They were shooting again! Terry slid to the bottom of the boat for cover. His fate was up to the sea now. The sound of the occasional lead ball whistling overhead confirmed his pursuers hadn't given up the chase. Once or twice a small thud resounded from the hull as a marksman found his target. But the boat didn't sink, or even take in water. It merely switched and pitched in the rushing stream like a bicycle with its wheel caught in a deep rut.

A terrible scraping from below made Terry's heart leap. Clearly the channel wasn't as deep as he'd hoped. The longboat hesitated for a second before sweeping on with a lurch. He breathed again, but knew he wasn't quite through yet: he could hear breakers crashing on the rocks all about him. The side of the boat was buffeted by one. The bow swung away violently to hit another. His heart in his mouth, Terry clung to a seat and waited. A deluge of water from a breaking wave cascaded down, almost swamping the boat. The boy spluttered and coughed, spitting salt water from his mouth.

Then came a different sound as timber splintered. In his imaginary world Terry would have stood and shouted defiantly at the enemy, a Viking warlord going down with his ship. But this was very much reality, at least it seemed to be; so he simply hung on for dear life and prayed as he had never done before. He was still praying with eyes squeezed tightly shut when he realised that the boat was no longer pitching erratically. He peered over the gunwale to find that he was in the lagoon, bobbing lazily. Despite the battering, the longboat had made it into horseshoe bay.

His paddle was floating on the water swilling around in the bottom of his boat. Snatching it up, the boy began to paddle once more, keeping low. The French, however, had stopped firing for some reason. He chanced a quick turn to see what they were doing. All but two of the sailors were holding their oars at the ready to push them clear of the rocks as they

followed the stream through the dangerous foaming reef. Their boat stopped suddenly as it caught on the reef. Unlike Terry's vessel with only him on board, all the men added extra weight which had set their craft far deeper in the water. The tide being apparently low, they would never make it through. As if to prove the point, one of the oars snapped and the Frenchie who had been holding it fell overboard.

Terry left them to their problem and concentrated on one of his own – the damage to his boat was obviously worse than at first thought and it was taking in water fast. He renewed his paddling with a will, not daring to stop, and luckily made it to the shallows before the boat finally sank. He waded the last few metres, relieved to feel solid sand under his feet, cheered by the warm water which seemed to melt the chill of fear in his bones. A quick glance out to sea was reassuring - the French had apparently given up the chase and were heading back to their ship. There was no hurry now; but even so, Terry's pace quickened as he began retracing his original footprints in the soft sand.

The welcome sound of chattering monkeys reached him as he followed the track through the small jungle. The broken branches showed the way, as did the banana peels, some of which had been moved or thrown to the ground, no doubt by some inquisitive but ungrateful creature. The screech of a parrot heralded his arrival in the clearing. A major and growing concern was for the silver dome and the fact that it might not be there: dreams did strange things like that. As it happened, he was worrying over nothing: the machine was waiting for him. Once inside, he made sure he wasn't taking along any stowaways, then pressed the pad by the door.

The metal panel swished across, closing the entrance. It was all quite easy, he told himself. Why bother over-thinking things? That just got you into strife. He went over to the control panel and waited for the window shutters to block out the light, and for the machine to cleanse the room. He absently brushed his clothes and kicked the sand from his shoes. The antiseptic odour was still in the air as the centre column lit up.

"Reverse program activated and waiting. Transmit or Over-ride," said the metallic servant. Sure enough, both words were illuminated on their respective panels. There was only one Terry was interested in. He placed a hand on the Transmit square and waited. It was so simple, especially when you were exhausted; when there wasn't the energy or inclination to look for a complicated solution. Even the video screens seemed to perform naturally; well, presumably: they were doing things, even if he didn't have a clue what they were.

His attention switched to the clock. The unit figure was a blur but there was no mistaking the other numbers as they clicked forward through the years... nineteen ten, twenty, thirty... It was just a matter of time, really. The swishing sound stopped as did all movement on the screens. The clock showed 11:17 September 17 1997. He had returned to the exact date he had left, and just a minute later, as he recalled. Or had he?

"Program completed in both phases," droned hollow-voice, "Survival factor normal for exit."

"Thanks for the ride," said Terry to the machine. His knees were trembling as he walked to the door to activate the switch. Disappointingly, a hand placed on the panel did nothing!

Then the humming started as the console and the glowing pillar began their gradual descent through the floor. Hopefully that was the reason for the delay in opening the door – there were protocols to follow. Fine, as long as it did open eventually, once the machine had done its thing. The instant the control assembly was below floor-level, the hole disappeared. The window shutters were sliding down into their recesses revealing spiders' webs on grubby glass. Almost there. After a brief pause, the steel door panel slid aside. And there before him was the old wooden door with its brass knob! Terry was home, back in his own time, his own world.

His trudge through the streets was very different to the way it had been in the past. He was noticing the finer details of everything in passing; all the things he had taken for granted before. Like litter on the sidewalk, impatient motorists, and the smell of real, modern people. Appetising smells from a takeaway led him in that direction and he realised how hungry he was.

"Hello, young Terry. What've you been up to?"

Terry trudged up to the counter. "Hello, Mike. Nothing really. Could I have a pie with sauce, please?"

The proprietor grinned. "Sure thing. But you look like you need a laundromat. You'll get shot when your Mum sees you."

Terry was at the fridge and could see his reflection in the glass door. Mike was right - he looked like a drowned rat. He took his can of Coke back to the counter and waited for Mike to hand over the pie. An awkward fumble through damp pockets found them empty, except for the strange medallion. Withdrawing it, he fingered the jewel absently and blushed. "I... er, seem to have lost my money, Mike. Could you...?"

Mike's head shook as he tutted. "I don't know. You kids. Okay, Terry. Next time'll do." He peered at the gem in the boy's hand with interest. "What's that you've got there?"

Terry stuffed it hurriedly back into his pocket. "Just some junk I found." Grabbing the pie and his drink, he dived for the door. "Thanks Mike. I'll drop the money in later."

He ate the pie as he walked and, naturally, succeeded in spilling some of its contents down his shirt front. The stain hardly noticed, layered as it was on grime already present - a token reminder of his recent escapade. Who needed happy snaps? Terry sank down on the grass beside a small pond where ducks were swimming, eagerly awaiting titbits of food from anyone with their heart in the right place. The birds watched on as the greedy human finished all but one corner of his meal; then they were scrabbling for the tiny square of pie crust that was so generously tossed into the water.

Despite the breeze, it was still quite warm, so Terry stripped off his shirt and spread it beside him, then removed his socks and shoes. With any luck they would dry before it was time to go home. There was nothing that could be done about the gash in his shoe from the exploding cannon. For now he needed rest; so he lay back and closed his eyes, letting the

warm sun bathe the aches. His mind drifted. How had he *really* wrecked his shoe? What had he *really* done to get soaking wet? It had to be all a dream. Of course it was...

When he awoke at last and discovered he was still in the park, he no longer doubted that what had happened must have been imagination. It didn't explain the state he and his clothes were in, but no theory was perfect – old Sheldon said so. The one thing that did worry him was the reception he would find at home.

His mother was nowhere to be seen as he approached his front gate. Terry felt relieved. She popped up suddenly from behind a bush, rubber gloves on and secateurs at the ready. Terry's gloom returned. "Hi, mum." It was a good attempt at casual, normal speech that failed miserably when it stuck in his throat.

Mrs Savage frowned first; then took to glaring as she inspected her son's appearance from sooty top to battered toe. "I'll give you 'Hi' young man! Where the devil have you been all day? And look at the state of you!"

"I... er, had a sort of... um, accident... kind-of."

Anger boiled in his Mother's face. Miraculously, she re-gained control. When she spoke, it was in a quiet, defeated tone. "And I thought you really understood. Oh, Terry, how could you?"

"Sorry, Mum." The apology was barely a whisper as the boy's chin dropped to his chest.

"Sorry?" Her voice began to rise. "Sorry? Sorry never paid the bills! Sorry won't buy a new pair of shoes! Wait till your Dad..."

Terry knew how the slip must have hurt her. Her eyes were glazed, ready to cry; but all he could offer was another apology which fell on deaf ears. "Get to your room!" his mother snapped; then she turned away to wipe tears from her eyes with the back of a gardening glove.

Even after his shower and wearing fresh clothes, Terry still felt dirty - not in the physical sense, but for the hurt he had caused his Mum. Nothing he could do or say could change that. Now he did feel alone. Rolling onto the bed, his head found the pillow and his hand snaked under as it usually did. The pendant was there where he had hidden it. He began turning it over between his fingers, not noticing how warm and smooth it was. He must have dropped off to sleep almost instantly.

But it was a restless sleep, full of hideous dreams, broken by explosions and flashes, faces and numbers. His arms flailed about as he fought invisible enemies. Then came a drifting calm. It rolled in sweet, moaning sounds, soft and gentle, calling him.

"Te....rrrr....eeeeee. Te....rrrr....eeeeee."

He seemed to sway with the voices. They were so peaceful, so friendly. And their touch on his forehead was so... so c o l d. So icy COLD...?