***Treasure Island***

***Chapter 21:***

# *The Attack*

***Brief Summary:***

* Captain Smollett goes back into the fort and finds none of the men where they were supposed to be except Gray.
* He is surprised at their lack of discipline.
* They all start loading the muskets to prepare for battle. Captain Smollett says they have a good chance, since they're fighting from a protected place.
* Captain Smollett orders everyone to the posts he assigns all around the walls of the fort.
* An hour passes and nothing happens.
* Joyce is the first to fire his gun and then everyone is shooting.
* They realize, after the smoke has cleared, that the main attack is going to come from the north.
* Captain Smollett orders the group to hold their positions.
* Just then, a bunch of pirates emerge from the north side of the fort and bullets rain out from the forest.
* One of the bullets shatters Doctor Livesey's gun.
* Squire Trelawney and Abraham Gray open fire; three men fall and one gets up again and runs into the trees.
* Four of the pirates keep rushing straight for the house while seven or eight stay in the woods shooting.
* The leader of the four is Job Anderson.
* A pirate grabs Hunter's gun muzzle through the hole in the wall Hunter is using, takes the gun, and knocks Hunter unconscious with it.
* A third pirate starts using his sword to attack Doctor Livesey.
* Captain Smollett yells for them to give up on the guns and turn to swords for close combat.
* Jim comes face to face with Job Anderson. Job Anderson raises his sword to kill Jim, but Jim slips and falls down.
* Abraham Gray kills Job Anderson before he can raise his sword for a second blow.
* As Jim stands up, he finds that another pirate has been shot just as he was preparing to fire on the house.
* Doctor Livesey has killed the pirate who attacked him.
* So, of the four pirates who directly attacked the fort, only one is still alive, and he is running for the forest having dropped his sword. Altogether, they have killed five of the pirates in this battle.
* Back at the fort, Hunter is still unconscious and Joyce has been shot through the head. Captain Smollett is also injured.
* Captain Smollett is cheerful, though: it looks like it's now four of them to nine pirates.
* Captain Smollett has no way of knowing this, but it's actually four to eight – they find out later that the pirate who Squire Trelawney shot when they were rowing away from the *Hispaniola* died of his wounds.

***Synopsis:***

After roughly turning Silver away, Captain Smollett predicts that the pirates will attack the stockade in retribution, and he orders the men to prepare themselves. They wait in anxious expectation for an hour, then hear a few shots and see the pirates scrambling over the stockade fence. Gray and Squire Trelawney fire on the pirates, wounding several of them. A fight ensues, and in the end, Smollett, Dr. Livesey, Jim, and most of the others return safely to the stockade, having lost fewer men than the mutineers.

***Critical Study(Ch 16-21):***

Stevenson has several reasons for switching narrators from Jim to Livesey for three chapters. The first is a practical reason: because Jim is on shore, he is unable to narrate what is happening on board the ship at the same time. Additionally, however, the switch in narrators gives us insight into the two characters’ different perspectives. As with any first-person narrative, Jim’s tale includes subjective feelings and thoughts, and so does Livesey’s. We immediately notice that there is a change in the tone of the narrative when Livesey takes over: Livesey at times appears a bit insincere or shallow, as when he refers to the dead Tom Redruth as a “[p]oor old fellow.” The most notable feature of Livesey’s narrative, however, is the fact that he largely limits his narration to coverage of the events, excluding the psychological and emotional details that Jim frequently includes. Jim constantly comments about regretting an action he takes, or expresses how he hates one person or likes another. The change in narrative voice subtly reminds us that Jim’s story is not simply a recounting of a series of events involving pirates and treasure, but is also a tale of his own personal and moral development.

In these chapters Stevenson continues to explore the conflict between social organization and anarchy. The half-mad Ben Gunn is an example of what happens to a man when he is removed from the protection of social structure: he loses his abilities to communicate and to be fully human. Indeed, Captain Smollett openly asks Jim whether Ben is a man, as Ben’s isolation from notmal society has lasted such a long time. The pirates also represent an inhuman departure from social rules and organization: as they climb over the stockade fence, Jim remarks that they resemble monkeys. Indeed, the pirates’ impulsiveness and lack of forethought does lend them a somewhat animal character. The pirates have no concept of themselves as a community; while Smollett keeps a careful social register of his men and lists each of their names in his logbook, the pirates seem unconcerned with the structure or membership of their group. Additionally, whereas Smollett faithfully bids farewell to the dying Tom, the pirates pay no heed to the dead and dying among their ranks. The pirates are quick to drink rum, losing themselves in a stupor, while Smollett’s men remain keen-eyed, vigilant, and capable of teamwork at all times. On the whole, while Smollett facilitates social cohesion in his group, the pirates clearly favor anarchy.

The interesting character of Long John Silver gains added depth in these chapters, especially in the scene of the attempted truce with Smollett in Chapter XXI. Here, Stevenson clearly contrasts the personalities of the two opposing leaders. Silver, in an act of brazenness, even adopts the title of captain, introducing himself as such. Though both men are resolute and persistent, insisting on their respective demands, they handle the meeting very differently. Silver heroically heaves himself over the stockade fence, climbs up the knoll, and salutes the captain in a way that Jim describes as “the handsomest style.” Silver may be a mutineer, but he acts with grace and nobility. Smollett, by contrast, sits almost ridiculously in his doorway, whistling the tune “Come, Lasses and Lads,” a frivolous melody arguably inappropriate to his high station. In this way, Stevenson continues to imply that while the pirates may be socially irresponsible, their inner charisma far outshines that of good men such as Smollett and Livesey.***Significance:***

Smollett turns back into the house, as Chapter 21 ("The Attack") begins, to find that all but Gray have left their posts to witness the parlay, and he rebukes them. Then he tells them the attack will come within an hour, but that they are in a better position and can defeat the larger force. They prepare to defend the blockhouse, and as the day begins to heat up they wait. After a little over an hour, Joyce sees one of the pirates approaching and fires. The attackers come in from all sides. As shots are exchanged, one hits Livesey's musket and destroys it. Four of the pirates get over the fence. Two more are killed, and one runs away. Others continue to fire from the woods outside the fence. The four inside the enclosure swarm the house, injuring Hunter, and soon all are fighting in the yard with cutlasses. The battle is short. The surviving pirates retreat. But Hunter and the captain are injured, and Joyce is dead. Still, the group in the stockade has bettered the odds in their favor, for — counting the man Trelawney shot on board the ship — eleven of the original nineteen pirates, as Smollett had estimated, are dead.

***Notes:***

After the captain returns from his conversation with Silver, he is angry to find out that everyone but Gray has abandoned their post. Next, he quickly begins to prepare for the upcoming battle by assigning different men to different sides. The most opening, the north side, is to be manned by Trelawney and Gray. Jim is assigned to load the muskets. Before the men even know it, a small group of pirates swarm the stockade fence, while others open fire from the woods. In the ensuing battle, the fight goes back and forth quickly before the battle is finally won. In the end, Jim and his men kill three pirates, three of the four who are storming the stockade, and the fourth pirate retreats as a coward. In the process, however, Joyce is killed, Hunter is injured, and the captain wounded. The captain figures out that five pirates have been killed, leaving the odds four to nine, not bad considering at one time it had been seven to nineteen. In an aside, the narrator explains that the actual odds were four to eight, because one pirate had died unbeknownst to the group.

In this chapter, the most noticeable thing is about the characteristics of the two groups of fighters. First, it is clear that the captain, Jim and his men have courage and moral strength: they are able to win the battle and keep the stockade safe from the pirates because they do not back down even when their backs are to the wall and the situation looks bleak. In contrasts, the pirates seem slightly cowardly, especially in their retreat as one simply runs away in stead of being killed or trying to fight more. Moreover, they do not try a secondary attack with the men who have been firing from the trees - they simply give up in order to retreat and try again (assumedly) at a later date.

Throughout the entire novel, one continuous marked stylistic theme is the unremorsness of the characters when they encounter death. This is for two reasons. The first has already been discussed, it is because it is an adventure book narrated by a boy who is unconcerned with death, more concerned with the quest at hand then speculating or focusing upon those who die. The second is because in [Treasure Island](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island), the only people who are wounded or die are the minor characters - death does not bring any sadness or remorse. It is merely part of the plot and something that is necessary in order to push the action before.

In the theme that the book is a story of Jim becoming a man, this chapter also has special importance. Not once in this chapter, despite its traumatic events, does Jim ever back down or exhibit any type of behavior that is child-ike. Although he will do child-like things in the future in Treasure Island, that the young boy was able to perform flawlessly under harrowing conditions is worth noting and a big step in his process of maturation.

***Significance:***

Inside the block-house, the muskets are prepared and each man assigned a position. Jim, who is no marksman, is charged with loading spent muskets. Once preparations are complete, the men stand at their posts on high alert and wait for the pirates to come.

When they do, the battle is short and vicious. Each man of the faithful party fights well, but soon they are forced from the block-house to fight out in the open. The boatswain Anderson goes after Jim; Gray, following close, cuts the scoundrel down. So ferocious is their attack, that the pirates retreat, leaving behind five of their comrades; another will die later from his wounds.

Among the faithful party, Joyce has been killed, Hunter is unconscious, and the captain has been badly wounded.

Tension is high among members of the honest party. Jim reports that for the first time, [Captain Smollett](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Captain_Smollett) gets angry: their survival depends on their ability to maintain discipline, and they have neglected their duty. As Captain Smollett explains, he has given Silver "a broadside," a nautical phrase describing all guns on one side of a vessel being fired simultaneously at the enemy. He has done so on purpose: they have a shelter for defense, and to delay the inevitable fight is foolish. However, the men must be ready to follow orders. Here again, devotion to duty is the issue, and the captain makes clear why it is important. He also makes no distinction between Jim and the others. He is expected to perform his duty as a man.

Jim fights as bravely as the others, demonstrating his growing confidence and maturity. The cut across the knuckles he receives while grabbing a cutlass might have stopped him before. But he is so intent on putting up a good fight, that he hardly feels it. Also during the fray, he listens and follows orders like a seasoned soldier and courageously remains in the battle until the end.

***Deep Study(Ch17-21):***

The three chapters narrated by Livesey do not change the voice of the narrative greatly, because both narrators narrate in a similar style — clear, concise, and informal but not colloquial. Yet the doctor relates incidents that Jim could not relate, even if he had been present (for example, Smollett's saying that they have so little food that perhaps they are better off without Redruth, a coldly calculated remark he would surely never have confided to anyone but Livesey). Likewise, Jim remarks upon events (for example, Smollett and Silver smoking together, each trying to unnerve the other — which, he says, was "as good as a play" to watch) that Livesey would probably not point out.

Abraham Gray, as carpenter's mate, would have been useful to the pirates if they could have made him join them. Historically, specialists like Gray were often forced or recruited by pirates who had taken their ships, whereas common sailors were usually allowed to go free unless they joined willingly. However, the mutineers here could not have afforded to free the two sailors (Tom and Alan) whom Silver took ashore, and, because they could not persuade the sailors, the pirates killed them. Gray, potentially more valuable, was left on the ship. Silver, who is thinking all the time, knows his position was severely weakened when Alan's death was heard, and especially when the captain and his party got to the stockade, even at the cost of Redruth's life. He has probably been in contact with the group left on the ship during the first evening and knows that he has lost one man there, leaving him with ten ashore (including himself) and four on the ship. With the loss of the man killed by Ben Gunn — although Silver thinks someone from the stockade killed him — he is no closer to gaining the map, is subject to more random losses of men, and is in dubious control of the undisciplined bunch who have elected him captain but can depose him if they wish. Thus, although he must realize his embassy to the stockade is going to fail, he wants to size up the situation there in preparation for an attack, which will be what he sees is his last chance — and the sooner the better. The mutineers still outnumber Smollett's group (by twelve to seven, including Jim, for Silver has probably got all but one man, Hands, off the ship; thus Jim's count during the attack is wrong even so), and they are now armed with some muskets. (This is never made clear, but probably Silver had a cache of weapons brought on board before they left Bristol.)

A note on weaponry is in order here to explain how primitive the firearms available in the eighteenth century were. Pistols were useful only at close range and had to be primed and reloaded after each shot (or after two shots for double-barreled pistols), a time-consuming process. Muskets had a longer range, although they, too, fired only one shot at a time. But muskets lost accuracy and force at greater distances, because their longer barrels were still smooth-bored, although the balls they fired might be rifled (that is, scored to ensure a relatively straight flight). Squire Trelawney's shot from the boat, from half the distance between ship and shore (a sixth of a mile or nearly 300 yards), is so much a stretch that it must be attributed to poetic license on Stevenson's part. The ship's gun, the "long nine," also had to be primed and loaded before firing, and its nine-pound cannonballs were relatively ineffective at long range except for lucky shots, because they did not explode on impact; such guns were most useful at close range during sea battles between ships.

Glossary

jolly-boat a sailing vessel's small boat, usually carried on the stern.

gig a long, light ship's boat.

"looped for musketry" with small ports for firing weapons.

paling a fence made of pales (narrow, upright pointed stakes; pickets).

musket a smoothbore, long-barreled firearm, used before the invention of the rifle.

keg of pork a barrel of pork cured in salt for preservation.

painter a rope attached to the bow of a boat for tying it to a dock (or to a ship) or for towing it.

two fathoms and a half fifteen feet; a fathom is a unit of length used to measure the depth of water or the length of a nautical rope or cable, equal to six feet (1.8288 meters).

don't hang so long in stays "In stays" or "in irons" is said of a sailing vessel that is headed into the wind with no way on, one that has failed to come about (to change course so that the sails shift); the captain is using the phrase figuratively to urge Gray to change his loyalty from Silver to his rightful captain; he uses "in irons" in much the same way during his later parlay with Silver.

gallipot a small pot or jar of glazed earthenware, especially one used by druggists as a container for medicine; Dr. Livesey uses this figuratively of the jolly-boat because of its small size.

the gunwale was lipping astern The gunwale (pronounced GUN-ulh) is the upper edge of the side of a boat; water was touching the edge of the jolly-boat's gunwale at the rear (stern).

trim the boat to balance the boat by ballasting, shifting cargo, and so on.

the long nine a large artillery piece mounted on the ship; this is primed with powder and wadding; loaded with nine-pound, round lead shot; aimed; and fired by a gunner by touching the powder with a lit match. Thus, in Chapter 17, the captain asks Trelawney, who is watching the gunner, to tell the others in the jolly-boat when he sees the match so that they can hold or back the boat, because the gunner will have aimed ahead of it.

carpet bowls a game played by rolling a weighted ball at a target ball or jack, as in lawn bowling but played indoors on a carpet.

good divinity sound religious doctrine.

Jolly Roger a black flag of pirates, with a white skull and crossbones.

Ben Gunn is fly Fly is thieves' slang, originally, meaning "alert and knowing; sharp, quick."

Davy Jones in folklore, the spirit of the sea, or the sea personified; used by sailors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

You're on a lee shore A lee shore is a sheltered shore, out of the wind; thus Smollett means that Silver and his pirates are in a bad position with no good way out.

a rum puncheon a wooden cask or barrel for holding rum.

doldrums equatorial ocean regions noted for dead calms; a sailing ship in the doldrums may be becalmed indefinitely for lack of wind.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

When [Smollett](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-smollett) turns back inside, only [Gray](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) is still at his post, and while he’s pleased with Gray, he’s furious with the others. The captain is silent for a while, and then says that within an hour they’ll be bombarded: they’re outnumbered, but are better located defensively.

***Analysis Part 1:***

All the others, including Jim, have snuck over to listen to the captain and Silver, failing to remain at watch. That task will become increasingly important, as their main advantage is a defensive one.

***Summary part 2:***

[Captain Smollett](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-smollett) tells [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) to eat his breakfast, and everyone to have some brandy. He directs each person to a specific task for the battle. As the sun rises, it becomes almost unbearably hot. An hour passes. Suddenly they hear a whistle, suggesting the attack is about to begin. Then several bullets strike the log-house, though none of them enter—[Joyce](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) returns a few shots, and then silence returns.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The captain takes on the role of directing others on land just as he did aboard the ship. Jim is still growing accustomed to what battles are like—they involve a good amount of boredom and sitting still, but can be interrupted suddenly by terrifying action.

***Summary Part 3:***

Suddenly, with a roar, a group of pirates races out of the woods and towards the stockade. They hurl themselves over the fence, and as the [squire](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/squire-trelawney) and [Gray](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) fire, three of them fall (though one soon rises and flees). Then they see [Job Anderson](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters), the boatswain, who has snuck up to the entrance. He and two others race into the log-house, and cries of confusion ring out. [Smollett](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-smollett) cries that they should go out and fight in the open. [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) grabs a knife, receives a cut across the knuckles, and races outside, seeing the [doctor](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/doctor-livesey) pursuing a pirate down the hill and managing to stab him.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Here the first head-to-head battle between the captain’s men and the pirates begins. The first onslaught of pirates seems to fail at overcoming the log-house, but given the pirates’ advantage in numbers, they’re able to mount various assaults at once. Even while Jim participates in the fight, he also remains acutely aware of the need to watch others, like the doctor, and learn from their tactics.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) is suddenly face to face with [Anderson](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters), who roars and raises his knife: Jim leaps to the side, but slips and rolls down the hill. By the time he stands up, it’s only been a moment, but his side has won victory: [Gray](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) had stabbed Anderson, and two others had been struck down too. Only one remains alive, and he clambers up and flees, managing to escape. The [doctor](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/doctor-livesey), Gray, and Jim race back inside.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Jim’s first face-to-face fight allows him to use his advantages of being young, small, and nimble, such that he can quickly slip out of the way of danger—here, he’s able to avoid Anderson long enough for Gray to make use of the boatswain’s momentary weakness and kill him.

***Summary Part 5:***[Hunter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) is motionless, stunned; [Joyce](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) is dead, shot through the head; and [Smollett](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-smollett) is wounded. But the captain rejoices to hear that five of the enemy have been cut down; the new odds are four to nine, having so recently been seven to nineteen.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Jim takes stock of the losses on his side. The captain, again, can seem coldly calculating, with little regard for suffering, but it’s all in pursuit of survival for all of them.