

# SHŌGUN

THE EPIC NOVEL OF JAPAN

JAMES CLAVELL



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1945 KING RAT

1963 NOBLE HOUSE

1979 WHIRLWIND

# JAMES CLAVELL

# SHŌGUN

*The Epic Novel of Japan*

DELTA TRADE PAPERBACKS

SHOGUN

A Delta Book

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*I would like to thank all those here, in Asia, and in Europe—the living and the dead—who helped to make this novel possible.*

*Lookout Mountain, California*

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## PROLOGUE

The gale tore at him and he felt its bite deep within and he knew that if they did not make landfall in three days they would all be dead. Too many deaths on this voyage, he thought, I'm Pilot-Major of a dead fleet. One ship left out of five—eight and twenty men from a crew of one hundred and seven and now only ten can walk and the rest near death and our Captain-General one of them. No food, almost no water and what there is, brackish and foul.

His name was John Blackthorne and he was alone on deck but for the bowsprit lookout—Salamon the mute—who huddled in the lee, searching the sea ahead.

The ship heeled in a sudden squall and Blackthorne held on to the arm of the seachair that was lashed near the wheel on the quarterdeck until she righted, timbers squealing. She was the *Erasmus*, two hundred and sixty tons, a three-masted trader-warship out of Rotterdam, armed with twenty cannon and sole survivor of the first expeditionary force sent from the Netherlands to ravage the enemy in the New World. The first Dutch ships ever to breach the secrets of the Strait of Magellan. Four

hundred and ninety-six men, all volunteers. All Dutch except for three Englishmen—two pilots, one officer. Their orders: to plunder Spanish and Portuguese possessions in the New World and put them to the torch; to open up permanent trading concessions; to discover new islands in the Pacific Ocean that could serve as permanent bases and to claim the territory for the Netherlands; and, within three years, to come home again.

Protestant Netherlands had been at war with Catholic Spain for more than four decades, struggling to throw off the yoke of their hated Spanish masters. The Netherlands, sometimes called Holland, Dutchland, or the Low Countries, were still legally part of the Spanish Empire. England, their only allies, the first country in Christendom to break with the Papal Court at Rome and become Protestant some seventy-odd years ago, had also been warring on Spain for the last twenty years, and openly allied with the Dutch for a decade.

The wind freshened even more and the ship lurched. She was riding under bare poles but for storm tops'ls. Even so the tide and the storm bore her strongly toward the darkening horizon.

There's more storm there, Blackthorne told himself, and more reefs and more shoals. And unknown sea. Good. I've set myself against the sea all my life and I've always won. I always will.

First English pilot ever to get through Magellan's Pass. Yes, the first—and first pilot ever to sail these Asian waters, apart from a few bastard Portuguese or motherless Spaniards who still think they own the world. First Englishman in these seas....

So many firsts. Yes. And so many deaths to win them.

Again he tasted the wind and smelled it, but there was no hint of land. He searched the ocean but it was dull gray and angry. Not a fleck of seaweed or splash of color to give a hint of a sanding shelf. He saw the spire of another reef far on the starboard quarter but that told him nothing. For a month now outcrops had threatened them, but never a sight of land. This ocean's endless, he thought. Good. That's what you were trained for—to sail the unknown sea, to chart it and come home again. How many days from home? One year and eleven months and two days. The last landfall Chile, one hundred and thirty-three days aft, across the ocean Magellan had first sailed eighty years ago called Pacific.



Blackthorne was famished and his mouth and body ached from the scurvy. He forced his eyes to check the compass course and his brain to calculate an approximate position. Once the plot was written down in his rutter—his sea manual—he would be safe in this speck of the ocean. And if he was safe, his ship was safe and then together they might find the Japans, or even the Christian King Prester John and his Golden Empire that legend said lay to the north of Cathay, wherever Cathay was.

And with my share of the riches I'll sail on again, westward for home, first English pilot ever to circumnavigate the globe, and I'll never leave home again. Never. By the head of my son!

The cut of the wind stopped his mind from wandering and kept him awake. To sleep now would be foolish. You'll never wake from that sleep, he thought, and stretched his arms to ease the cramped muscles in his back and pulled his cloak tighter around him. He saw that the sails were trimmed and the wheel lashed secure. The bow lookout was awake. So patiently he settled back and prayed for land.

"Go below, Pilot. I take this watch if it pleases you." The third mate, Hendrik Specz, was pulling himself up the gangway, his face gray with fatigue, eyes sunken, skin blotched and sallow. He leaned heavily against the binnacle to steady himself, retching a little. "Blessed Lord Jesus, piss on the day I left Holland."

"Where's the mate, Hendrik?"

"In his bunk. He can't get out of his *scheit voll* bunk. And he won't—not this side of Judgment Day."

"And the Captain-General?"

"Moaning for food and water." Hendrik spat. "I tell him I roast him a capon and bring it on a silver platter with a bottle of brandy to wash it down. *Scheit-huis! Coot!*"

"Hold your tongue!"

"I will, Pilot. But he's a maggot-eaten fool and we'll be dead because of him." The young man retched and brought up mottled phlegm. "Blessed Lord Jesus, help me!"

"Go below. Come back at dawn."

Hendrik lowered himself painfully into the other seachair. "There's the reek of death below. I take the watch if it pleases you. What's the course?"

“Wherever the wind takes us.”

“Where’s the landfall you promised us? Where’s the Japans—where is it, I ask?”

“Ahead.”

“Always ahead! *Gottimhimmel*, it wasn’t in our orders to sail into the unknown. We should be back home by now, safe, with our bellies full, not chasing St. Elmo’s fire.”

“Go below or hold your tongue.”

Sullenly Hendrik looked away from the tall bearded man. Where are we now? he wanted to ask. Why can’t I see the secret rutter? But he knew you don’t ask those questions of a pilot, particularly this one. Even so, he thought, I wish I was as strong and healthy as when I left Holland. Then I wouldn’t wait. I’d smash your gray-blue eyes now and stamp that maddening half-smile off your face and send you to the hell you deserve. Then I’d be Captain-Pilot and we’d have a Netherlander running the ship—not a foreigner—and the secrets would be safe for us. Because soon we’ll be at war with you English. We want the same thing: to command the sea, to control all trade routes, to dominate the New World, and to strangle Spain.

“Perhaps there is no Japans,” Hendrik muttered suddenly. “It’s *Gottbewonden* legend.”

“It exists. Between latitudes thirty and forty north. Now hold your tongue or go below.”

“There’s death below, Pilot,” Hendrik muttered and put his eyes ahead, letting himself drift.

Blackthorne shifted in his seachair, his body hurting worse today. You’re luckier than most, he thought, luckier than Hendrik. No, not luckier. More careful. You conserved your fruit while the others consumed theirs carelessly. Against your warnings. So now your scurvy is still mild whereas the others are constantly hemorrhaging, their bowels diarrhetic, their eyes sore and rheumy, and their teeth lost or loose in their heads. Why is it men never learn?

He knew they were all afraid of him, even the Captain-General, and that most hated him. But that was normal, for it was the pilot who commanded at sea; it was he who set the course and ran the ship, he who brought them from port to port.

Any voyage today was dangerous because the few navigational charts that existed were so vague as to be useless. And there was absolutely no way to fix longitude.

“Find how to fix longitude and you’re the richest man in the world,” his old teacher, Alban Caradoc, had said. “The Queen, God bless her, ‘ll give you ten thousand pound and a dukedom for the answer to the riddle. The dung-eating Portuguese’ll give you more—a golden galleon. And the motherless Spaniards’ll give you twenty! Out of sight of land you’re always lost, lad.” Caradoc had paused and shaken his head sadly at him as always. “You’re lost, lad. Unless ...”

“Unless you have a rutter!” Blackthorne had shouted happily, knowing that he had learned his lessons well. He was thirteen then and had already been apprenticed a year to Alban Caradoc, pilot and shipwright, who had become the father he had lost, who had never beaten him but taught him and the other boys the secrets of shipbuilding and the intimate way of the sea.

A rutter was a small book containing the detailed observation of a pilot *who had been there before*. It recorded magnetic compass courses between ports and capes, headlands and channels. It noted the sounding and depths and color of the water and the nature of the seabed. It set down the *how we got there and how we got back*: how many days on a special tack, the pattern of the wind, when it blew and from where, what currents to expect and from where; the time of storms and the time of fair winds; where to careen the ship and where to water; where there were friends and where foes; shoals, reefs, tides, havens; at best, *everything* necessary for a safe voyage.

The English, Dutch, and French had rutters for their own waters, but the waters of the rest of the world had been sailed only by captains from Portugal and Spain, and these two countries considered all rutters secret. Rutters that revealed the seaways to the New World or unraveled the mysteries of the Pass of Magellan and the Cape of Good Hope—both Portuguese discoveries—and thence the seaways to Asia were guarded as national treasures by the Portuguese and Spanish, and sought after with equal ferocity by their Dutch and English enemies.

But a rutter was only as good as the pilot who wrote it, the scribe who hand-copied it, the very rare printer who printed it, or the scholar who translated it. A rutter could therefore contain errors. Even deliberate ones. A pilot never knew for certain *until he had been there himself*. At least once.

At sea the pilot was leader, sole guide, and final arbiter of the ship and her crew. Alone he commanded from the quarterdeck.

That's heady wine, Blackthorne told himself. And once sipped, never to be forgotten, always to be sought, and always necessary. That's one of the things that keep you alive when others die.

He got up and relieved himself in the scuppers. Later the sand ran out of the hourglass by the binnacle and he turned it and rang the ship's bell.

"Can you stay awake, Hendrik?"

"Yes. Yes, I believe so."

"I'll send someone to replace the bow lookout. See he stands in the wind and not in the lee. That'll keep him sharp and awake." For a moment he wondered if he should turn the ship into the wind and heave to for the night but he decided against it, went down the companionway, and opened the fo'c'sle door. The companionway led into the crew's quarters. The cabin ran the width of the ship and had bunks and hammock space for a hundred and twenty men. The warmth surrounded him and he was grateful for it and ignored the ever present stench from the bilges below. None of the twenty-odd men moved from his bunk.

"Get aloft, Maetsukker," he said in Dutch, the lingua franca of the Low Countries, which he spoke perfectly, along with Portuguese and Spanish and Latin.

"I'm near death," the small, sharp-featured man said, cringing deeper into the bunk. "I'm sick. Look, the scurvy's taken all my teeth. Lord Jesus help us, we'll all perish! If it wasn't for you we'd all be home by now, safe! I'm a merchant. I'm not a seaman. I'm not part of the crew.... Take someone else. Johann there's—" He screamed as Blackthorne jerked him out of the bunk and hurled him against the door. Blood flecked his mouth and he was stunned. A brutal kick in his side brought him out of his stupor.

"You get your face aloft and stay there till you're dead or we make landfall."

The man pulled the door open and fled in agony.

Blackthorne looked at the others. They stared back at him. "How are you feeling, Johann?"

"Good enough, Pilot. Perhaps I'll live."

Johann Vinck was forty-three, the chief gunner and bosun's mate, the oldest man aboard. He was hairless and toothless, the color of aged oak and just as strong. Six years ago he had sailed with Blackthorne on the ill-fated search for the Northeast Passage, and each man knew the measure of the other.

"At your age most men are already dead, so you're ahead of us all." Blackthorne was thirty-six.

Vinck smiled mirthlessly. "It's the brandy, Pilot, that an' fornication an' the saintly life I've led."

No one laughed. Then someone pointed at a bunk. "Pilot, the bosun's dead."

"Then get the body aloft! Wash it and close his eyes! You, you, and you!"

The men were quickly out of their bunks this time and together they half dragged, half carried the corpse from the cabin.

"Take the dawn watch, Vinck. And Ginsel, you're bow lookout."

"Yes sir."

Blackthorne went back on deck.

He saw that Hendrik was still awake, that the ship was in order. The relieved lookout, Salamon, stumbled past him, more dead than alive, his eyes puffed and red from the cut of the wind. Blackthorne crossed to the other door and went below. The passageway led to the great cabin aft, which was the Captain-General's quarters and magazine. His own cabin was starboard and the other, to port, was usually for the three mates. Now Baccus van Nekk, the chief merchant, Hendrik the third mate, and the boy, Croocq, shared it. They were all very sick.

He went into the great cabin. The Captain-General, Paulus Spillbergen, was lying half conscious in his bunk. He was a short, florid man, normally very fat, now very thin, the skin of his paunch hanging slackly in folds. Blackthorne took a water flagon out of a secret drawer and helped him drink a little.

"Thanks," Spillbergen said weakly. "Where's land—where's land?"

"Ahead," he replied, no longer believing it, then put the flagon away, closed his ears to the whines and left, hating him anew.

Almost exactly a year ago they had reached Tierra del Fuego, the winds favorable for the stab into the unknown of Magellan's Pass. But the Captain-General had ordered a landing to search for gold and treasure.

"Christ Jesus, look ashore, Captain-General! There's no treasure in those wastes."

"Legend says it's rich with gold and we can claim the land for the glorious Netherlands."

"The Spaniards have been here in strength for fifty years."

"Perhaps—but perhaps not this far south, Pilot-Major."

"This far south the seasons're reversed. May, June, July, August're dead winter here. The rutter says the timing's critical to get through the Straits—the winds turn in a few weeks, then we'll have to stay here, winter here for months."

"How many weeks, Pilot?"

"The rutter says eight. But seasons don't stay the same—"

"Then we'll explore for a couple of weeks. That gives us plenty of time and then, if necessary, we'll go north again and sack a few more towns, eh, gentlemen?"

"We've got to try now, Captain-General. The Spanish have very few warships in the Pacific. Here the seas are teeming with them and they're looking for us. I say we've got to go on now."

But the Captain-General had overridden him and put it to a vote of the other captains—not to the other pilots, one English and three Dutch—and had led the useless forays ashore.

The winds had changed early that year and they had had to winter there, the Captain-General afraid to go north because of Spanish fleets. It was four months before they could sail. By then one hundred and fifty-six men in the fleet had died of starvation, cold, and the flux and they were eating the calfskin that covered the ropes. The terrible storms within the Strait had scattered the fleet. *Erasmus* was the only ship that made the rendezvous off Chile. They had waited a month for the others and then, the Spaniards closing in, had set sail into the unknown. The secret rutter stopped at Chile.

Blackthorne walked back along the corridor and unlocked his own cabin door, relocking it behind him. The cabin was low-beamed, small, and orderly, and he had

to stoop as he crossed to sit at his desk. He unlocked a drawer and carefully unwrapped the last of the apples he had hoarded so carefully all the way from Santa Maria Island, off Chile. It was bruised and tiny, with mold on the rotting section. He cut off a quarter. There were a few maggots inside. He ate them with the flesh, heeding the old sea legend that the apple maggots were just as effective against scurvy as the fruit and that, rubbed into the gums, they helped prevent your teeth from falling out. He chewed the fruit gently because his teeth were aching and his gums sore and tender, then sipped water from the wine skin. It tasted brackish. Then he wrapped the remainder of the apple and locked it away.

A rat scurried in the shadows cast by the hanging oil lantern over his head. Timbers creaked pleasantly. Cockroaches swarmed on the floor.

I'm tired. I'm so tired.

He glanced at his bunk. Long, narrow, the straw palliasse inviting.

I'm so tired.

Go to sleep for this hour, the devil half of him said. Even for ten minutes—and you'll be fresh for a week. You've had only a few hours for days now, and most of that aloft in the cold. You must sleep. Sleep. They rely on you....

"I won't, I'll sleep tomorrow," he said aloud, and forced his hand to unlock his chest and take out his rutter. He saw that the other one, the Portuguese one, was safe and untouched and that pleased him. He took a clean quill and began to write: "April 21 1600. Fifth hour. Dusk. 133d day from Santa Maria Island, Chile, on the 32 degree North line of latitude. Sea still high and wind strong and the ship rigged as before. The color of the sea dull gray-green and bottomless. We are still running before the wind along a course of 270 degrees, veering to North North West, making way briskly, about two leagues, each of three miles this hour. Large reefs shaped like a triangle were sighted at half the hour bearing North East by North half a league distant.

"Three men died in the night of the scurvy—Joris sailmaker, Reiss gunner, 2d mate de Haan. After commending their souls to God, the Captain-General still being sick, I cast them into the sea without shrouds, for there was no one to make them. Today Bosun Rijckloff died.

"I could not take the declension of the sun at noon today, again due to overcast. But I estimate we are still on course and that landfall in the Japans should be soon....

"But how soon?" he asked the sea lantern that hung above his head, swaying with the pitch of the ship. How to make a chart? There must be a way, he told himself for the millionth time. How to set longitude? There must be a way. How to keep vegetables fresh? What *is* scurvy ...?

"They say it's a flux from the sea, boy," Alban Caradoc had said. He was a huge-bellied, great-hearted man with a tangled gray beard.

"But could you boil the vegetables and keep the broth?"

"It sickens, lad. No one's ever discovered a way to store it."

"They say that Francis Drake sails soon."

"No. You can't go, boy."

"I'm almost fourteen. You let Tim and Watt sign on with him and he needs apprentice pilots."

"They're sixteen. You're just thirteen."

"They say he's going to try for Magellan's Pass, then up the coast to the unexplored region—to the Californias—to find the Straits of Anian that join Pacific with Atlantic. From the Californias all the way to Newfoundland, the Northwest Passage at long last ..."

"The *supposed* Northwest Passage, lad. No one's proved that legend yet."

"He will. He's Admiral now and we'll be the first English ship through Magellan's Pass, the first in the Pacific, the first—I'll never get another chance like this."

"Oh, yes, you will, and he'll never breach Magellan's secret way 'less he can steal a rutter or capture a Portuguese pilot to guide him through. How many times must I tell you—a pilot must have patience. Learn patience, boy. You've plen—"

"Please!"

"No."

"Why?"



“Because he’ll be gone two, three years, perhaps more. The weak and the young will get the worst of the food and the least of the water. And of the five ships that go, only his will come back. You’ll never survive, boy.”

“Then I’ll sign for his ship only. I’m strong. He’ll take me!”

“Listen, boy, I was with Drake in *Judith*, his fifty tonner, at San Juan de Ulua when we and Admiral Hawkins—he was in *Minion*—when we fought our way out of harbor through the dung-eating Spaniards. We’d been trading slaves from Guinea to the Spanish Main, but we had no Spanish license for the trade and they tricked Hawkins and trapped our fleet. They’d thirteen great ships, we six. We sank three of theirs, and they sank our *Swallow*, *Angel*, *Caravelle*, and the *Jesus of Lubeck*. Oh, yes, Drake fought us out of the trap and brought us home. With eleven men aboard to tell the tale. Hawkins had fifteen. Out of four hundred and eight jolly Jack Tars. Drake is merciless, boy. He wants glory and gold, but only for Drake, and too many men are dead proving it.”

“But I won’t die. I’ll be one of—”

“No. You’re apprenticed for twelve years. You’ve ten more to go and then you’re free. But until that time, until 1588, you’ll learn how to build ships and how to command them—you’ll obey Alban Caradoc, Master Shipwright and Pilot and Member of Trinity House, or you’ll never have a license. And if you don’t have a license, you’ll never pilot *any* ship in English waters, you’ll never command the quarterdeck of *any* English ship in *any* waters because that was good King Harry’s law, God rest his soul. It was the great whore Mary Tudor’s law, may her soul burn in hell, it’s the Queen’s law, may she reign forever, it’s England’s law, and the best sea law that’s ever been.”

Blackthorne remembered how he had hated his master then, and hated Trinity House, the monopoly created by Henry VIII in 1514 for the training and licensing of all English pilots and masters, and hated his twelve years of semibondage, without which he knew he could never get the one thing in the world he wanted. And he had hated Alban Caradoc even more when, to everlasting glory, Drake and his hundred-ton sloop, the *Golden Hind*, had miraculously come back to England after disappearing for three years, the first English ship to circumnavigate the globe, bringing with her the richest haul of plunder aboard ever brought back to those shores: an incredible million and a half sterling in gold, silver, spices, and plate.

That four of the five ships were lost and eight out of every ten men were lost and Tim and Watt were lost and a captured Portuguese pilot had led the expedition for Drake through the Magellan into the Pacific did not assuage his hatred; that Drake had hanged one officer, excommunicated the chaplain Fletcher, and failed to find the Northwest Passage did not detract from national admiration. The Queen took fifty percent of the treasure and knighted him. The gentry and merchants who had put up the money for the expedition received three hundred percent profit and pleaded to underwrite his next corsair voyage. And all seamen begged to sail with him, because he did get plunder, he did come home, and, with their share of the booty, the lucky few who survived were rich for life.

I would have survived, Blackthorne told himself. I would. And my share of the treasure then would have been enough to—

*“Rotz vooruiiiiiiit!”* Reef ahead!

He felt the cry at first more than he heard it. Then, mixed with the gale, he heard the wailing scream again.

He was out of the cabin and up the companionway onto the quarterdeck, his heart pounding, his throat parched. It was dark night now and pouring, and he was momentarily exulted for he knew that the canvas raintraps, made so many weeks ago, would soon be full to overflowing. He opened his mouth to the near horizontal rain and tasted its sweetness, then turned his back on the squall.

He saw that Hendrik was paralyzed with terror. The bow lookout, Maetsukker, cowered near the prow, shouting incoherently, pointing ahead. Then he too looked beyond the ship.

The reef was barely two hundred yards ahead, great black claws of rocks pounded by the hungry sea. The foaming line of surf stretched port and starboard, broken intermittently. The gale was lifting huge swathes of spume and hurling them at the night blackness. A forepeak halliard snapped and the highest top gallant spar was carried away. The mast shuddered in its bed but held, and the sea bore the ship inexorably to its death.

*“All hands on deck!”* Blackthorne shouted, and rang the bell violently.

The noise brought Hendrik out of his stupor. *“We’re lost!”* he screamed in Dutch. *“Oh, Lord Jesus, help us!”*

“Get the crew on deck, you bastard! You’ve been asleep! You’ve both been asleep!” Blackthorne shoved him toward the companionway, held on to the wheel, slipped the protecting lashing from the spokes, braced himself, and swung the wheel hard apart.

He exerted all his strength as the rudder bit into the torrent. The whole ship shuddered. Then the prow began to swing with increasing velocity as the wind bore down and soon they were broadside to the sea and the wind. The storm tops’ls bellied and gamely tried to carry the weight of the ship and all the ropes took the strain, howling. The following sea towered above them and they were making way, parallel to the reef, when he saw the great wave. He shouted a warning at the men who were coming from the fo’c’sle, and hung on for his life.

The sea fell on the ship and she heeled and he thought they’d floundered but she shook herself like a wet terrier and swung out of the trough. Water cascaded away through the scuppers and he gasped for air. He saw that the corpse of the bosun that had been put on deck for burial tomorrow was gone and that the following wave was coming in even stronger. It caught Hendrik and lifted him, gasping and struggling, over the side and out to sea. Another wave roared across the deck and Blackthorne locked one arm through the wheel and the water passed him by. Now Hendrik was fifty yards to port. The wash sucked him back alongside, then a giant comber threw him high above the ship, held him there for a moment shrieking, then took him away and pulped him against a rock spine and consumed him.

The ship nosed into the sea trying to make way. Another halliard gave and the block and tackle swung wildly until it tangled with the rigging.

Vinck and another man pulled themselves onto the quarterdeck and leaned on the wheel to help. Blackthorne could see the encroaching reef to starboard, nearer now. Ahead and to port were more outcrops, but he saw gaps here and there.

“Get aloft, Vinck. Fores’ls ho!” Foot by foot Vinck and two seamen hauled themselves into the shrouds of the foremast rigging as others, below, leaned on the ropes to give them a hand.

“Watch out for’ard,” Blackthorne shouted.

The sea foamed along the deck and took another man with it and brought the corpse of the bosun aboard again. The bow soared out of the water and smashed down once more bringing more water aboard. Vinck and the other men cursed the

sail out of its ropes. Abruptly it fell open, cracked like a cannonade as the wind filled it, and the ship lurched.

Vinck and his helpers hung there, swaying over the sea, then began their descent.

“Reef—reef ahead!” Vinck screamed.

Blackthorne and the other man swung the wheel to starboard. The ship hesitated then turned and cried out as the rocks, barely awash, found the side of the ship. But it was an oblique blow and the rock nose crumbled. The timbers held safe and the men aboard began to breathe once more.

Blackthorne saw a break in the reef ahead and committed the ship to it. The wind was harder now, the sea more furious. The ship swerved with a gust and the wheel spun out of their hands. Together they grabbed it and set her course again, but she bobbed and twisted drunkenly. Sea flooded aboard and burst into the fo’c’sle, smashing one man against the bulkhead, the whole deck awash like the one above.

“Man the pumps!” Blackthorne shouted. He saw two men go below.

The rain was slashing his face and he squinted against the pain. The binnacle light and aft riding light had long since been extinguished. Then as another gust shoved the ship farther off course, the seaman slipped and again the wheel spun out of their grasp. The man shrieked as a spoke smashed the side of his head and he lay there at the mercy of the sea. Blackthorne pulled him up and held him until the frothing comber had passed. Then he saw that the man was dead so he let him slump into the seachair and the next sea cleaned the quarterdeck of him.

The gulch through the reef was three points to windward and, try as he could, Blackthorne could not gain way. He searched desperately for another channel but knew there was none, so he let her fall off from the wind momentarily to gain speed, then swung her hard to windward again. She gained way a fraction and held course.

There was a wailing, tormented shudder as the keel scraped the razor spines below and all aboard imagined they saw the oak timbers burst apart and the sea flood in. The ship reeled forward out of control now.

Blackthorne shouted for help but no one heard him so he fought the wheel alone against the sea. Once he was flung aside but he groped back and held on again, wondering in his thickening mind how the rudder had survived so long.

In the neck of the pass the sea became a maelstrom, driven by the tempest and hemmed in by the rocks. Huge waves smashed at the reef, then reeled back to fight the incomer until the waves fought among themselves and attacked on all quarters of the compass. The ship was sucked into the vortex, broadside and helpless.

“Piss on you, storm!” Blackthorne raged. “Get your dung-eating hands off my ship!”

The wheel spun again and threw him away and the deck heeled sickeningly. The bowsprit caught a rock and tore loose, part of the rigging with it, and she righted herself. The foremast was bending like a bow and it snapped. The men on deck fell on the rigging with axes to cut it adrift as the ship floundered down the raging channel. They hacked the mast free and it went over the side and one man went with it, caught in the tangled mess. The man cried out, trapped, but there was nothing they could do and they watched as he and the mast appeared and disappeared alongside, then came back no more.

Vinck and the others who were left looked back at the quarterdeck and saw Blackthorne defying the storm like a madman. They crossed themselves and doubled their prayers, some weeping with fear, and hung on for life.

The strait broadened for an instant and the ship slowed, but ahead it narrowed ominously again and the rocks seemed to grow, to tower over them. The current ricocheted off one side, taking the ship with it, turned her abeam again and flung her to her doom.

Blackthorne stopped cursing the storm and fought the wheel to port and hung there, his muscles knotted against the strain. But the ship knew not her rudder and neither did the sea.

“Turn, you whore from hell,” he gasped, his strength ebbing fast. “Help me!”

The sea race quickened and he felt his heart near bursting but still he strained against the press of the sea. He tried to keep his eyes focused but his vision reeled, the colors wrong and fading. The ship was in the neck and dead but just then the keel scraped a mud shoal. The shock turned her head. The rudder bit into the sea. And then the wind and the sea joined to help and together they spun her before the wind and she sped through the pass to safety. Into the bay beyond.



## CHAPTER ONE

Blackthorne was suddenly awake. For a moment he thought he was dreaming because he was ashore and the room unbelievable. It was small and very clean and covered with soft mats. He was lying on a thick quilt and another was thrown over him. The ceiling was polished cedar and the walls were lathes of cedar, in squares, covered with an opaque paper that muted the light pleasantly. Beside him was a scarlet tray bearing small bowls. One contained cold cooked vegetables and he wolfed them, hardly noticing the piquant taste. Another contained a fish soup and he drained that. Another was filled with a thick porridge of wheat or barley and he finished it quickly, eating with his fingers. The water in an odd-shaped gourd was warm and tasted curious—slightly bitter but savory.

Then he noticed the crucifix in its niche.

This house is Spanish or Portuguese, he thought, aghast. Is this the Japans? or Cathay?

A panel of the wall slid open. A middle-aged, heavy-set, round-faced woman was on her knees beside the door and she bowed and smiled. Her skin was golden and her eyes black and narrow and her long black hair was piled neatly on her head. She wore a gray silk robe and short white socks with a thick sole and a wide purple band around her waist.

*"Goshujinsama, gokibun wa ikaga desu ka?"* she said. She waited as he stared at her blankly, then said it again.

"Is this the Japans?" he asked. "Japans? Or Cathay?"

She stared at him uncomprehendingly and said something else he could not understand. Then he realized that he was naked. His clothes were nowhere in sight. With sign language he showed her that he wanted to get dressed. Then he pointed at the food bowls and she knew that he was still hungry.

She smiled and bowed and slid the door shut.

He lay back exhausted, the untoward, nauseating nonmotion of the floor making his head spin. With an effort he tried to collect himself. I remember getting the anchor out, he thought. With Vinck. I think it was Vinck. We were in a bay and the ship had nosed a shoal and stopped. We could hear waves breaking on the beach but everything was safe. There were lights ashore and then I was in my cabin and blackness. I don't remember anything. Then there were lights through the blackness and strange voices. I was talking English, then Portuguese. One of the natives talked a little Portuguese. Or was he Portuguese? No, I think he was a native. Did I ask him where we were? I don't remember. Then we were back in the reef again and the big wave came once more and I was carried out to sea and drowning—it was freezing—no, the sea was warm and like a silk bed a fathom thick. They must have carried me ashore and put me here.

"It must have been this bed that felt so soft and warm," he said aloud. "I've never slept on silk before." His weakness overcame him and he slept dreamlessly.

When he awoke there was more food in earthenware bowls and his clothes were beside him in a neat pile. They had been washed and pressed and mended with tiny, exquisite stitching.

But his knife was gone, and so were his keys.

I'd better get a knife and quickly, he thought. Or a pistol.

His eyes went to the crucifix. In spite of his dread, his excitement quickened. All his life he had heard legends told among pilots and sailormen about the incredible riches of Portugal's secret empire in the East, how they had by now converted the heathens to Catholicism and so held them in bondage, where gold was as cheap as pig iron, and emeralds, rubies, diamonds, and sapphires as plentiful as pebbles on a beach.

If the Catholic part's true, he told himself, perhaps the rest is too. About the riches. Yes. But the sooner I'm armed and back aboard *Erasmus* and behind her cannon, the better.

He consumed the food, dressed, and stood shakily, feeling out of his element as he always did ashore. His boots were missing. He went to the door, reeling slightly, and put out a hand to steady himself but the light, square lathes could not bear his weight and they shattered, the paper ripping apart. He righted himself. The shocked woman in the corridor was staring up at him.

"I'm sorry," he said, strangely ill at ease with his clumsiness. The purity of the room was somehow defiled.

"Where are my boots?"

The woman stared at him blankly. So, patiently, he asked her again with sign language and she hurried down a passage, knelt and opened another lathe door, and beckoned him. Voices were nearby, and the sound of running water. He went through the doorway and found himself in another room, also almost bare. This opened onto a veranda with steps leading to a small garden surrounded by a high wall. Beside this main entrance were two old women, three children dressed in scarlet robes, and an old man, obviously a gardener, with a rake in his hand. At once they all bowed gravely and kept their heads low.

To his astonishment Blackthorne saw that the old man was naked but for a brief, narrow loincloth, hardly covering his organs.

"Morning," he said to them, not knowing what to say.

They stayed motionless, still bowing.

Nonplussed, he stared at them, then, awkwardly he bowed back to them. They all straightened and smiled at him. The old man bowed once more and went back to work in the garden. The children stared at him, then, laughing, dashed away. The old women disappeared into the depths of the house. But he could feel their eyes on him.

He saw his boots at the bottom of the steps. Before he could pick them up, the middle-aged woman was there on her knees, to his embarrassment, and she helped him to put them on.

"Thank you," he said. He thought a moment and then pointed at himself. "Blackthorne," he said deliberately. "Blackthorne." Then he pointed at her. "What's your name?"

She stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"*Black-thorne*," he repeated carefully, pointing at himself, and again pointed at her. "What's your name?"

She frowned, then with a flood of understanding pointed at herself and said, "*Onna! Onna!*"



*“Onna!”* he repeated, very proud of himself as she was with herself. *“Onna.”*

She nodded happily. *“Onna!”*

The garden was unlike anything he had ever seen: a little waterfall and stream and small bridge and manicured pebbled paths and rocks and flowers and shrubs. It’s so clean, he thought. So neat.

“Incredible,” he said.

“’Nkerriberr?” she repeated helpfully.

“Nothing,” he said. Then not knowing what else to do, he waved her away. Obediently she bowed politely and left.

Blackthorne sat in the warm sun, leaning against a post. Feeling very frail, he watched the old man weeding an already weedless garden. I wonder where the others are. Is the Captain-General still alive? How many days have I been asleep? I can remember waking and eating and sleeping again, the eating unsatisfactory like the dreams.

The children flurried past, chasing one another, and he was embarrassed for them at the gardener’s nakedness, for when the man bent over or stooped you could see everything and he was astounded that the children appeared not to notice. He saw tiled and thatched roofs of other buildings over the wall and, far off, high mountains. A crisp wind broomed the sky and kept the cumulus advancing. Bees were foraging and it was a lovely spring day. His body begged for more sleep but he pushed himself erect and went to the garden door. The gardener smiled and bowed and ran to open the door and bowed and closed it after him.

The village was set around the crescent harbor that faced east, perhaps two hundred houses unlike any he’d ever seen nestling at the beginning of the mountain which spilled down to the shore. Above were terraced fields and dirt roads that led north and south. Below, the waterfront was cobbled and a stone launching ramp went from the shore into the sea. A good safe harbor and a stone jetty, and men and women cleaning fish and making nets, a uniquely designed boat being built at the northern side. There were islands far out to sea, to the east and to the south. The reefs would be there or beyond the horizon.

In the harbor were many other quaintly shaped boats, mostly fishing craft, some with one large sail, several being sculled—the oarsmen standing and pushing against

the sea, not sitting and pulling as he would have done. A few of the boats were heading out to sea, others were nosing at the wooden dock, and *Erasmus* was anchored neatly, fifty yards from shore, in good water, with three bow cables. Who did that? he asked himself. There were boats alongside her and he could see native men aboard. But none of his. Where could they be?

He looked around the village and became conscious of the many people watching him. When they saw that he had noticed them they all bowed and, still uncomfortable, he bowed back. Once more there was happy activity and they passed to and fro, stopping, bargaining, bowing to each other, seemingly oblivious of him, like so many multicolored butterflies. But he felt eyes studying him from every window and doorway as he walked toward the shore.

What is it about them that's so weird? he asked himself. It's not just their clothes and behavior. It's—*they've no weapons*, he thought, astounded. No swords or guns! Why is that?

Open shops filled with odd goods and bales lined the small street. The floors of the shops were raised and the sellers and the buyers knelt or squatted on the clean wooden floors. He saw that most had clogs or rush sandals, some with the same white socks with the thick sole that were split between the big toe and the next to hold the thongs, but they left the clogs and sandals outside in the dirt. Those who were barefoot cleansed their feet and slipped on clean, indoor sandals that were waiting for them. That's very sensible if you think about it, he told himself, awed.

Then he saw the tonsured man approaching and fear swept sickeningly from his testicles into his stomach. The priest was obviously Portuguese or Spanish, and, though his flowing robe was orange, there was no mistaking the rosary and crucifix at his belt, or the cold hostility on his face. His robe was travel stained and his European-style boots besmirched with mud. He was looking out into the harbor at *Erasmus*, and Blackthorne knew that he must recognize her as Dutch or English, new to most seas, leaner, faster, a merchant fighting ship, patterned and improved on the English privateers that had wreaked so much havoc on the Spanish Main. With the priest were ten natives, black-haired and black-eyed, one dressed like him except that he had thong slippers. The others wore varicolored robes or loose trousers, or simply loincloths. But none was armed.

Blackthorne wanted to run while there was time but he knew he did not have the strength and there was nowhere to hide. His height and size and the color of his eyes made him alien in this world. He put his back against the wall.

“Who are you?” the priest said in Portuguese. He was a thick, dark, well-fed man in his middle twenties, with a long beard.

“Who are you?” Blackthorne stared back at him.

“That’s a Netherlander privateer. You’re a heretic Dutchman. You’re pirates. God have mercy on you!”

“We’re not pirates. We’re peaceful merchants, except to our enemies. I’m pilot of that ship. Who are you?”

“Father Sebastio. How did you get here? How?”

“We were blown ashore. What is this place? Is it the Japans?”

“Yes. Japan. Nippon,” the priest said impatiently. He turned to one of the men, older than the rest, small and lean with strong arms and calloused hands, his pate shaved and his hair drawn into a thin queue as gray as his eyebrows. The priest spoke haltingly to him in Japanese, pointing at Blackthorne. All of them were shocked and one made the sign of the cross protectively.

“Dutchmen are heretics, rebels, and pirates. What’s your name?”

“Is this a Portuguese settlement?”

The priest’s eyes were hard and bloodshot. “The village headman says he’s told the authorities about you. Your sins have caught up with you. Where’s the rest of your crew?”

“We were blown off course. We just need food and water and time to repair our ship. Then we’ll be off. We can pay for every—”

“Where’s the rest of your crew?”

“I don’t know. Aboard. I suppose they’re aboard.”

Again the priest questioned the headman, who replied and motioned to the other end of the village, explaining at length. The priest turned back to Blackthorne. “They crucify criminals here, Pilot. You’re going to die. The *daimyo*’s coming with his samurai. God have mercy on you.”

“What’s a *daimyo*?”

“A feudal lord. He owns this whole province. How did you get here?”

“And *samurai*?”

“Warriors—soldiers—members of the warrior caste,” the priest said with growing irritation. “Where did you come from and who are you?”

“I don’t recognize your accent,” Blackthorne said, to throw him off balance. “You’re a Spaniard?”

“I’m Portuguese,” the priest flared, taking the bait. “I told you, I’m Father Sebastio from Portugal. Where did you learn such good Portuguese. Eh?”

“But Portugal and Spain are the same country now,” Blackthorne said, taunting. “You’ve the same king.”

“We’re a separate country. We’re a different people. We have been forever. We fly our own flag. Our overseas possessions are separate, yes, separate. King Philip agreed when he stole my country.” Father Sebastio controlled his temper with an effort, his fingers trembling. “He took my country by force of arms twenty years ago! His soldiers and that devil-spawned Spaniard tyrant, the Duke of Alva, they crushed our real king. *Que va!* Now Philip’s son rules but he’s not our real king either. Soon we’ll have our own king back again.” Then he added with venom, “You know it’s the truth. What devil Alva did to your country he did to mine.”

“That’s a lie. Alva was a plague in the Netherlands, but he never conquered them. They’re still free. Always will be. But in Portugal he smashed one small army and the whole country gave in. No courage. You could throw the Spaniard out if you wanted to, but you’ll never do it. No honor. No *cojones*. Except to burn innocents in the name of God.”

“May God burn you in hellfire for all eternity,” the priest flared. “Satan walks abroad and will be stamped out. Heretics will be stamped out. You’re cursed before God!”

In spite of himself Blackthorne felt the religious terror begin to rise within him. “Priests don’t have the ear of God, or speak with His voice. We’re free of your stinking yoke and we’re going to stay free!”

It was only forty years ago that Bloody Mary Tudor was Queen of England and the Spaniard Philip II, Philip the Cruel, her husband. This deeply religious daughter of Henry VIII had brought back Catholic priests and inquisitors and heresy trials and the dominance of the foreign Pope again to England and had reversed her father's curbs and historic changes to the Church of Rome in England, against the will of the majority. She had ruled for five years and the realm was torn asunder with hatred and fear and bloodshed. But she had died and Elizabeth became queen at twenty-four.

Blackthorne was filled with wonder, and deep filial love, when he thought of Elizabeth. For forty years she's battled with the world. She's outfoxed and outfought Popes, the Holy Roman Empire, France and Spain combined. Excommunicated, spat on, reviled abroad, she's led us into harbor—safe, strong, separate.

"We're free," Blackthorne said to the priest. "You're broken. We've our own schools now, our own books, our own Bible, our own Church. You Spaniards are all the same. Offal! You monks are all the same. Idol worshipers!"

The priest lifted his crucifix and held it between Blackthorne and himself as a shield. "Oh, God, protect us from this evil! I'm not Spanish, I tell you! I'm Portuguese. And I'm not a monk. I'm a brother of the Society of Jesus!"

"Ah, one of them. A Jesuit!"

"Yes. May God have mercy on your soul!" Father Sebastio snapped something in Japanese and the men surged toward Blackthorne. He backed against the wall and hit one man hard but the others swarmed over him and he felt himself choking.

*"Nanigoto da?"*

Abruptly the melee ceased.

The young man was ten paces away. He wore breeches and clogs and a light kimono and two scabbarded swords were stuck into his belt. One was daggerlike. The other, a two-handed killing sword, was long and slightly curved. His right hand was casually on the hilt.

*"Nanigoto da?"* he asked harshly and when no one answered instantly,  
*"NANIGOTO DA?"*

The Japanese fell to their knees, their heads bowed into the dirt. Only the priest stayed on his feet. He bowed and began to explain haltingly, but the man contemptuously cut him short and pointed at the headman. "Mura!"

Mura, the headman, kept his head bowed and began explaining rapidly. Several times he pointed at Blackthorne, once at the ship, and twice at the priest. Now there was no movement on the street. All who were visible were on their knees and bowing low. The headman finished. The armed man arrogantly questioned him for a moment and he was answered deferentially and quickly. Then the soldier said something to the headman and waved with open contempt at the priest, then at Blackthorne, and the gray-haired man put it more simply to the priest, who flushed.

The man, who was a head shorter and much younger than Blackthorne, his handsome face slightly pockmarked, stared at the stranger. "*Onushi ittai doko kara kitanoda? Doko no kuni no monoda?*"

The priest said nervously, "Kasigi Omi-san says, 'Where do you come from and what's your nationality?' "

"Is Mr. Omi-san the *daimyo*?" Blackthorne asked, afraid of the swords in spite of himself.

"No. He's a samurai, the samurai in charge of the village. His surname's Kasigi, Omi's his given name. Here they always put their surnames first. 'San' means 'honorable,' and you add it to all names as a politeness. You'd better learn to be polite—and find some manners quickly. Here they don't tolerate lack of manners." His voice edged. "Hurry up and answer!"

"Amsterdam. I'm English."

Father Sebastio's shock was open. He said, "English. England," to the samurai and began an explanation but Omi impatiently cut him short and rapped out a flurry of words.

"Omi-san asks if you're the leader. The headman says there are only a few of you heretics alive and most are sick. Is there a Captain-General?"

"I'm the leader," Blackthorne answered even though, truly, now that they were ashore, the Captain-General was in command. "I'm in command," he added, knowing that Captain-General Spillbergen could command nothing, ashore or afloat, even when he was fit and well.

Another spate of words from the samurai. "Omi-san says, because you are the leader you are allowed to walk around the village freely, wherever you want, until his master comes. His master, the *daimyo*, will decide your fate. Until then, you are permitted to live as a guest in the headman's house and come and go as you please. But you are not to leave the village. Your crew are confined to their house and are not allowed to leave it. Do you understand?"

"Yes. Where are my crew?"

Father Sebastio pointed vaguely at a cluster of houses near a wharf, obviously distressed by Omi's decision and impatience. "There! Enjoy your freedom, pirate. Your evil's caught up with—"

"*Wakarimasu ka?*" Omi said directly to Blackthorne.

"He says, 'Do you understand?' "

"What's 'yes' in Japanese?"

Father Sebastio said to the samurai, "*Wakarimasu.*"

Omi disdainfully waved them away. They all bowed low. Except one man who rose deliberately, without bowing.

With blinding speed the killing sword made a hissing silver arc and the man's head toppled off his shoulders and a fountain of blood sprayed the earth. The body rippled a few times and was still. Involuntarily, the priest had backed off a pace. No one else in the street had moved a muscle. Their heads remained low and motionless. Blackthorne was rigid, in shock.

Omi put his foot carelessly on the corpse.

"*Ikinasai!*" he said, motioning them away.

The men in front of him bowed again, to the earth. Then they got up and went away impassively. The street began to empty. And the shops.

Father Sebastio looked down at the body. Gravely he made the sign of the cross over him and said, "*In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.*" He stared back at the samurai without fear now.

"*Ikinasai!*" The tip of the gleaming sword rested on the body.

After a long moment the priest turned and walked away. With dignity. Omi watched him narrowly, then glanced at Blackthorne. Blackthorne backed away and then, when safely distant, he quickly turned a corner and vanished.

Omi began to laugh uproariously. The street was empty now. When his laughter was exhausted, he grasped his sword with both hands and began to hack the body methodically into small pieces.

Blackthorne was in a small boat, the boatman sculling happily toward *Erasmus*. He had had no trouble in getting the boat and he could see men on the main deck. All were samurai. Some had steel breastplates but most wore simple kimonos, as the robes were called, and the two swords. All wore their hair the same way: the top of the head shaved and the hair at the back and sides gathered into a queue, oiled, then doubled over the crown and tied neatly. Only samurai were allowed this style and, for them, it was obligatory. Only samurai could wear the two swords—always the long, two-handed killing sword and the short, daggerlike one—and, for them, the swords were obligatory.

The samurai lined the gunwales of his ship watching him.

Filled with disquiet, he climbed up the gangway and came on deck. One samurai, more elaborately dressed than the others, came over to him and bowed. Blackthorne had learned well and he bowed back equally and everyone on the deck beamed genially. He still felt the horror of the sudden killing in the street, and their smiles did not allay his foreboding. He went toward the companionway and stopped abruptly. Across the doorway was pasted a wide band of red silk and, beside it, a small sign with queer, squiggled writing. He hesitated, checked the other door, but that too was sealed up with a similar band, and a similar sign was nailed to the bulkhead.

He reached out to remove the silk.

*“Hotté oké!”* To make the point quite clear the samurai on guard shook his head. He was no longer smiling.

“But this is my ship and I want ...” Blackthorne bottled his anxiety, eyes on the swords. I’ve got to get below, he thought. I’ve got to get the rutters, mine and the secret one. Christ Jesus, if they’re found and given to the priests or to the Japaners we’re finished. Any court in the world—outside of England and the Netherlands—would convict us as pirates with that evidence. My rutter gives dates, places, and amounts of plunder taken, the number of dead at our three landings in the Americas



and the one in Spanish Africa, the number of churches sacked, and how we burned the towns and the shipping. And the Portuguese rutter? That's our death warrant, for of course it's stolen. At least it was bought from a Portuguese traitor, and by their law any foreigner caught in possession of any rutter of theirs, let alone one that unlocks the Magellan, is to be put to death at once. And if the rutter is found aboard an enemy ship, the ship is to be burned and all aboard executed without mercy.

"Nan *no yoda*?" one of the samurai said.

"Do you speak Portuguese?" Blackthorne asked in that language.

The man shrugged. "*Wakarimasen*."

Another came forward and deferentially spoke to the leader, who nodded in agreement.

"Portugeezu friend," this samurai said in heavily accented Portuguese. He opened the top of his kimono and showed the small wooden crucifix that hung from his neck.

"Christ'an!" He pointed at himself and smiled. "Christ'an." He pointed at Blackthorne. "Christ'an *ka*?"

Blackthorne hesitated, nodded. "Christian."

"Portugeezu?"

"English."

The man chattered with the leader, then both shrugged and looked back at him. "Portugeezu?"

Blackthorne shook his head, not liking to disagree with them on anything. "My friends? Where?"

The samurai pointed to the east end of the village. "Friends."

"This is my ship. I want to go below." Blackthorne said it in several ways and with signs and they understood.

"*Ah, so desu! Kinjiru*," they said emphatically, indicating the notice, and beamed.

It was quite clear that he was not allowed to go below. *Kinjiru* must mean forbidden, Blackthorne thought irritably. Well, to hell with that! He snapped the handle of the door down and opened it a fraction.

*"KINJIRU!"*

He was jerked around to face the samurai. Their swords were half out of the scabbards. Motionlessly the two men waited for him to make up his mind. Others on deck watched impassively.

Blackthorne knew he had no option but to back down, so he shrugged and walked away and checked the hawsers and the ship as best he could. The tattered sails were down and tied in place. But the lashings were different from any he'd ever seen, so he presumed that the Japaners had made the vessel secure. He started down the gangway, and stopped. He felt the cold sweat as he saw them all staring at him malevolently and he thought, Christ Jesus, how could I be so stupid. He bowed politely and at once the hostility vanished and they all bowed and were smiling again. But he could still feel the sweat trickling down his spine and he hated everything about the Japans and wished himself and his crew back aboard, armed, and out to sea.

"By the Lord Jesus, I think you're wrong, Pilot," Vinck said. His toothless grin was wide and obscene. "If you can put up with the swill they call food, it's the best place I've been. Ever. I've had two women in three days and they're like rabbits. They'll do anything if you show 'em how."

"That's right. But you can't do nothing without meat or brandy. Not for long. I'm tired out, and I could only do it once," Maetsukker said, his narrow face twitching. "The yellow bastards won't understand that we need meat and beer and bread. And brandy or wine."

"That's the worst! Lord Jesus, my kingdom for some grog!" Baccus van Nekk was filled with gloom. He walked over and stood close to Blackthorne and peered up at him. He was very nearsighted and had lost his last pair of spectacles in the storm. But even with them he would always stand as close as possible. He was chief merchant, treasurer, and representative of the Dutch East India Company that had put up the money for the voyage. "We're ashore and safe and I haven't had a drink yet. Not a beautiful drop! Terrible. Did you get any, Pilot?"

"No." Blackthorne disliked having anyone near him, but Baccus was a friend and almost blind so he did not move away. "Just hot water with herbs in it."

“They simply won’t understand grog. Nothing to drink but hot water and herbs—the good Lord help us! Suppose there’s no liquor in the whole country!” His eyebrows soared. “Do me a huge favor, Pilot. Ask for some liquor, will you?”

Blackthorne had found the house that they had been assigned on the eastern edge of the village. The samurai guard had let him pass, but his men had confirmed that they themselves could not go out of the garden gate. The house was many-roomed like his, but bigger and staffed with many servants of various ages, both men and women.

There were eleven of his men alive. The dead had been taken away by the Japanese. Lavish portions of fresh vegetables had begun to banish the scurvy and all but two of the men were healing rapidly. These two had blood in their bowels and their insides were fluxed. Vinck had bled them but this had not helped. By nightfall he expected them to die. The Captain-General was in another room, still very sick.

Sonk, the cook, a stocky little man, was saying with a laugh, “It’s good here, like Johann says, Pilot, excepting the food and no grog. And it’s all right with the natives so long as you don’t wear your shoes in the house. It sends the little yellow bastards mad if you don’t take off your shoes.”

“Listen,” Blackstone said. “There’s a priest here. A Jesuit.”

“Christ Jesus!” All banter left them as he told them about the priest and about the beheading.

“Why’d he chop the man’s head off, Pilot?”

“I don’t know.”

“We better get back aboard. If Papists catch us ashore ...”

There was great fear in the room now. Salamon, the mute, watched Blackthorne. His mouth worked, a bubble of phlegm appearing at the corners.

“No, Salamon, there’s no mistake,” Blackthorne said kindly, answering the silent question. “He said he was Jesuit.”

“Christ, Jesuit or Dominican or what-the-hell-ever makes no muck-eating difference,” Vinck said. “We’d better get back aboard. Pilot, you ask that samurai, eh?”

“We’re in God’s hands,” Jan Roper said. He was one of the merchant adventurers, a narrow-eyed young man with a high forehead and thin nose. “He will protect us from the Satan worshipers.”

Vinck looked back at Blackthorne. “What about Portuguese, Pilot? Did you see any around?”

“No. There were no signs of them in the village.”

“They’ll swarm here soon as they know about us.” Maetsukker said it for all of them and the boy Croocq let out a moan.

“Yes, and if there’s one priest, there’s got to be others.” Ginsel licked dry lips. “And then their God-cursed conquistadores are never far away.”

“That’s right,” Vinck added uneasily. “They’re like lice.”

“Christ Jesus! Papists!” someone muttered. “And conquistadores!”

“But we’re in the Japans, Pilot?” van Nekk asked. “He told you that?”

“Yes. Why?”

Van Nekk moved closer and dropped his voice. “If priests are here, and some of the natives are Catholic, perhaps the other part’s true—about the riches, the gold and silver and precious stones.” A hush fell on them. “Did you see any, Pilot? Any gold? Any gems on the natives, or gold?”

“No. None.” Blackthorne thought a moment. “I don’t remember seeing any. No necklaces or beads or bracelets. Listen, there’s something else to tell you. I went aboard *Erasmus* but she’s sealed up.” He related what had happened and their anxiety increased.

“Jesus, if we can’t go back aboard and there are priests ashore and Papists ... We’ve got to get away from here.” Maetsukker’s voice began to tremble. “Pilot, what are we going to do? They’ll burn us! Conquistadores—those bastards’ll shove their swords ...”

“We’re in God’s hands,” Jan Roper called out confidently. “He will protect us from the anti-Christ. That’s His promise. There’s nothing to be afraid of.”

Blackthorne said, "The way the samurai Omi-san snarled at the priest—I'm sure he hated him. That's good, eh? What I'd like to know is why the priest wasn't wearing their usual robes. Why the orange one? I've never seen that before."

"Yes, that's curious," van Nekk said.

Blackthorne looked up at him. "Maybe their hold here isn't strong. That could help us greatly."

"What should we do, Pilot?" Ginsel asked.

"Be patient and wait till their chief, this *daimyo*, comes. He'll let us go. Why shouldn't he? We've done them no harm. We've goods to trade. We're not pirates, we've nothing to fear."

"Very true, and don't forget the Pilot said the savages aren't all Papists," van Nekk said, more to encourage himself than the others. "Yes. It's good the samurai hated the priest. And it's only the samurai who are armed. That's not so bad, eh? Just watch out for the samurai and get our weapons back—that's the idea. We'll be aboard before you know it."

"What happens if this *daimyo*'s Papist?" Jan Roper asked.

No one answered him. Then Ginsel said, "Pilot, the man with the sword? He cut the other wog into pieces, after chopping his head off?"

"Yes."

"Christ! They're barbarians! Lunatics!" Ginsel was tall, a good-looking youth with short arms and very bowed legs. The scurvy had taken all his teeth. "After he chopped his head off, the others just walked away? Without saying anything?"

"Yes."

"Christ Jesus, an unarmed man, murdered, just like that? Why'd he do it? Why'd he kill him?"

"I don't know, Ginsel. But you've never seen such speed. One moment the sword was sheathed, the next the man's head was rolling."

"God protect us!"

"Dear Lord Jesus," van Nekk murmured. "If we can't get back to the ship ... God damn that storm, I feel so helpless without my spectacles!"

"How many samurai were aboard, Pilot?" Ginsel asked.

"Twenty-two were on deck. But there were more ashore."

"The wrath of God will be upon the heathen and on sinners and they'll burn in hell for all eternity."

"I'd like to be sure of that, Jan Roper," Blackthorne said, an edge to his voice, as he felt the fear of God's vengeance sweep through the room. He was very tired and wanted to sleep.

"You can be sure, Pilot, oh yes, I am. I pray that your eyes are opened to God's truth. That you come to realize we're here only because of you—what's left of us."

"What?" Blackthorne said dangerously.

"Why did you really persuade the Captain-General to try for the Japans? It wasn't in our orders. We were to pillage the New World, to carry the war into the enemy's belly, then go home."

"There were Spanish ships south and north of us and nowhere else to run. Has your memory gone along with your wits? We had to sail west—it was our only chance."

"I never saw enemy ships, Pilot. None of us did."

"Come now, Jan," van Nekk said wearily. "The Pilot did what he thought best. Of course the Spaniards were there."

"Aye, that's the truth, and we was a thousand leagues from friends and in enemy waters, by God!" Vinck spat. "That's the God's truth—and the God's truth was we put it to a vote. We all said yes."

"I didn't."

Sonk said, "No one asked me."

"Oh, Christ Jesus!"

"Calm down, Johann," van Nekk said, trying to ease the tension. "We're the first ones to reach the Japans. Remember all the stories, eh? We're rich if we keep our wits. We have trade goods and there's gold here—there must be. Where else could we sell our cargo? Not there in the New World, hunted and harried! They were hunting us and the Spaniards knew we were off Santa Maria. We had to quit Chile

and there was no escape back through the Strait—of course they'd be lying in wait for us, of course they would! No, here was our only chance and a good idea. Our cargo exchanged for spices and gold and silver, eh? Think of the profit—a thousandfold, that's usual. We're in the Spice Islands. You know the riches of the Japans and Cathay, you've heard about them forever. We all have. Why else did we all sign on? We'll be rich, you'll see!"

"We're dead men, like all the others. We're in the land of Satan."

Vinck said angrily, "Shut your mouth, Roper! The Pilot did right. Not his fault the others died—not his fault. Men always die on these voyages."

Jan Roper's eyes were flecked, the pupils tiny. "Yes, God rest their souls. My brother was one."

Blackthorne looked into the fanatic eyes, hating Jan Roper. Inside he was asking himself if he had really sailed west to elude the enemy ships. Or was it because he was the first English pilot through the Strait, first in position, ready and able to stab west and therefore first with the chance of circumnavigating?

Jan Roper hissed, "Didn't the others die through your ambition, Pilot? God will punish you!"

"Now hold your tongue." Blackthorne's words were soft and final.

Jan Roper stared back with the same frozen hatchet face, but he kept his mouth shut.

"Good." Blackthorne sat tiredly on the floor and rested against one of the uprights.

"What should we do, Pilot?"

"Wait and get fit. Their chief is coming soon—then we'll get everything settled."

Vinck was looking out into the garden at the samurai who sat motionless on his heels beside the gateway. "Look at that bastard. Been there for hours, never moves, never says anything, doesn't even pick his nose."

"He's been no trouble though, Johann. None at all," van Nekk said.

"Yes, but all we've been doing is sleeping and fornicating and eating the swill."

"Pilot, he's only one man. We're ten," Ginsel said quietly.

"I've thought of that. But we're not fit enough yet. It'll take a week for the scurvy to go," Blackthorne replied, disquieted. "There are too many of them aboard ship. I wouldn't like to take on even one without a spear or gun. Are you guarded at night?"

"Yes. They change guard three or four times. Has anyone seen a sentry asleep?" van Nekk asked.

They shook their heads.

"We could be aboard tonight," Jan Roper said. "With the help of God we'll overpower the heathen and take the ship."

"Clear the shit out of your ears! The pilot's just got through telling you! Don't you listen?" Vinck spat disgustedly.

"That's right," Pieterzoon, a gunner, agreed. "Stop hacking at old Vinck!"

Jan Roper's eyes narrowed even more. "Look to your soul, Johann Vinck. And yours, Hans Pieterzoon. The Day of Judgment approaches." He walked away and sat on the veranda.

Van Nekk broke the silence. "Everything is going to be all right. You'll see."

"Roper's right. It's greed that put us here," the boy Croocq said, his voice quavering. "It's God's punishment that—"

"Stop it!"

The boy jerked. "Yes, Pilot. Sorry, but—well ..." Maximilian Croocq was the youngest of them, just sixteen, and he had signed on for the voyage because his father had been captain of one of the ships and they were going to make their fortune. But he had seen his father die badly when they had sacked the Spanish town of Santa Magdellana in the Argentine. The plunder had been good and he had seen what rape was and he had tried it, hating himself, glutted by the blood smell and the killing. Later he had seen more of his friends die and the five ships became one and now he felt he was the oldest among them. "Sorry. I'm sorry."

"How long have we been ashore, Baccus?" Blackthorne asked.

"This is the third day." Van Nekk moved close again, squatting on his haunches. "Don't remember the arrival too clearly, but when I woke up the savages were all over the ship. Very polite and kind though. Gave us food and hot water. They took the dead away and put the anchors out. Don't remember much but I think they



towed us to a safe mooring. You were delirious when they carried you ashore. We wanted to keep you with us but they wouldn't let us. One of them spoke a few words of Portuguese. He seemed to be the headman, he had gray hair. He didn't understand 'Pilot-Major' but knew 'Captain.' It was quite clear he wanted our 'Captain' to have different quarters from us, but he said we shouldn't worry because you'd be well looked after. Us too. Then he guided us here, they carried us mostly, and said we were to stay inside until *his* captain came. We didn't want to let them take you but there was nothing we could do. Will you ask the headman about wine or brandy, Pilot?" Van Nekk licked his lips thirstily, then added, "Now that I think of it, he mentioned '*daimyo*' too. What's going to happen when the *daimyo* arrives?"

"Has anyone got a knife or a pistol?"

"No," van Nekk said, scratching absently at the lice in his hair.

"They took all our clothes away to clean them and kept the weapons. I didn't think anything about it at the time. They took my keys too, as well as my pistol. I had all my keys on a ring. The strong room, the strongbox, and the magazine."

"Everything's locked tight aboard. No need to worry about that."

"I don't like not having my keys. Makes me very nervous. Damn my eyes, I could use a brandy right now. Even a flagon of ale."

"Lord Jesus! The sameree cut him into pieces, did he?" Sonk said to no one in particular.

"For the love of God, shut your mouth. It's 'samurai.' You're enough to make a man shit himself," Ginsel said.

"I hope that bastard priest doesn't come here," Vinck said.

"We're safe in the good Lord's hands." Van Nekk was still trying to sound confident. "When the *daimyo* comes we'll be released. We'll get our ship back and our guns. You'll see. We'll sell all our goods and we'll get back to Holland rich and safe having gone round the world—the first Dutchmen ever. The Catholics'll go to hell and that's the end of it."

"No, it isn't," Vinck said. "Papists make my skin crawl. I can't help it. That and the thought of the conquistadores. You think they'll be here in strength, Pilot?"

"I don't know. I'd think yes! I wish we had all our squadron here."

“Poor bastards,” Vinck said. “At least we’re alive.”

Maetsukker said, “Maybe they’re back home. Maybe they turned back at the Magellan when the storms scattered us.”

“I hope you’re right,” Blackthorne said. “But I think they’re lost with all hands.”

Ginsel shuddered. “At least we’re alive.”

“With Papists here, and these heathens with their stinking tempers, I wouldn’t give an old whore’s crack for our lives.”

“Goddamn the day I left Holland,” Pieterzoon said. “Goddamn all grog! If I hadn’t been drunker than a fiddler’s bitch I’d still be heads down in Amsterdam with my old woman.”

“Damn what you like, Pieterzoon. But don’t damn liquor. It’s the stuff of life!”

“I’d say we’re in the sewer, up to our chins, and the tide’s coming in fast.” Vinck rolled his eyes. “Yes, very fast.”

“I never thought we’d reach land,” Maetsukker said. He looked like a ferret, except he had no teeth. “Never. Least of all the Japans. Lousy stinking Papists! We’ll never leave here alive! I wish we had some guns. What a rotten landfall! I didn’t mean anything, Pilot,” he said quickly as Blackthorne looked at him. “Just bad luck, that’s all.”

Later servants brought them food again. Always the same: vegetables—cooked and raw—with a little vinegar, fish soup, and the wheat or barley porridge. They all spurned the small pieces of raw fish and asked for meat and liquor. But they were not understood and then, near sunset, Blackthorne left. He had wearied of their fears and hates and obscenities. He told them that he would return after dawn.

The shops were busy on the narrow streets. He found his street and the gate of his house. The stains on the earth had been swept away and the body had vanished. It’s almost as though I dreamed the whole thing, he thought. The garden gate opened before he could put a hand on it.

The old gardener, still loinclothed although there was a chill on the wind, beamed and bowed. “*Konbanwa.*”

"Hello," Blackthorne said without thinking. He walked up the steps, stopped, remembering his boots. He took them off and went barefoot onto the veranda and into the room. He crossed it into a corridor but could not find his room.

"Onna!" he called out.

An old woman appeared. "*Hai?*"

"Where's Onna?"

The old woman frowned and pointed to herself. "Onna!"

"Oh, for the love of God," Blackthorne said irritably. "Where's my room? Where's Onna?" He slid open another latticed door. Four Japanese were seated on the floor around a low table, eating. He recognized one of them as the gray-haired man, the village headman, who had been with the priest. They all bowed. "Oh, sorry," he said, and pulled the door to.

"Onna!" he called out.

The old woman thought a moment, then beckoned. He followed her into another corridor. She slid a door aside. He recognized his room from the crucifix. The quilts were already laid out neatly.

"Thank you," he said, relieved. "Now fetch Onna!"

The old woman padded away. He sat down, his head and body aching, and wished there was a chair, wondering where they were kept. How to get aboard? How to get some guns? There must be a way. Feet padded back and there were three women now, the old woman, a young round-faced girl, and the middle-aged lady.

The old woman pointed at the girl, who seemed a little frightened. "Onna."

"No." Blackthorne got up ill-temperedly and jerked a finger at the middle-aged woman. "This is Onna, for God's sake! Don't you know your name? Onna! I'm hungry. Could I have some food?" He rubbed his stomach parodying hunger. They looked at each other. Then the middle-aged woman shrugged, said something that made the others laugh, went over to the bed, and began to undress. The other two squatted, wide-eyed and expectant.

Blackthorne was appalled. "What are you doing?"

*"Ishimasho!"* she said, setting aside her wide waistband and opening her kimono. Her breasts were flat and dried up and her belly huge.

It was quite clear that she was going to get into the bed. He shook his head and told her to get dressed and took her arm and they all began chattering and gesticulating and the woman was becoming quite angry. She stepped out of her long underskirt and, naked, tried to get back into bed.

Their chattering stopped and they all bowed as the headman came quietly down the corridor. *"Nanda? Nanda?"* he asked.

The old woman explained what was the matter. "You want this woman?" he asked incredulously in heavily accented, barely understandable Portuguese, motioning at the naked woman.

"No. No, of course not. I just wanted Onna to get me some food." Blackthorne pointed impatiently at her. "Onna!"

*"Onna* mean 'woman.' " The Japanese motioned at all of them. *"Onna—onna—onna*. You want *onna*?"

Blackthorne wearily shook his head. "No. No, thank you. I made a mistake. Sorry. What's her name?"

"Please?"

"What's her name?"

"Ah! Namu is Haku. Haku," he said.

"Haku?"

*"Hai*. Haku!"

"I'm sorry, Haku-san. Thought *onna* your name."

The man explained to Haku and she was not at all pleased. But he said something and they all looked at Blackthorne and tittered behind their hands and left. Haku walked off naked, her kimono over her arm, with a vast amount of dignity.

"Thank you," Blackthorne said, enraged at his own stupidity.

"This my house. My namu Mura."

"Mura-san. Mine's Blackthorne."

“Please?”

“My namu. Blackthorne.”

“Ah! Berr—rakk—fon.” Mura tried to say it several times but could not. Eventually he gave up and continued to study the colossus in front of him. This was the first barbarian he had ever seen except for Father Sebastio, and the other priest, so many years ago. But anyway, he thought, the priests are dark-haired and dark-eyed and of normal height. But this man: tall and golden-haired and golden-bearded with blue eyes and a weird pallor to his skin where it is covered and redness where it is exposed. Astonishing! I thought *all* men had black hair and dark eyes. *We* all do. The Chinese do, and isn’t China the whole world, except for the land of the southern Portugese barbarians? Astonishing! And why does Father Sebastio hate this man so much? Because he’s a Satan worshiper? I wouldn’t think so, because Father Sebastio could cast out the devil if he wanted. Eeee, I’ve never seen the good Father so angry. Never. Astonishing!

Are blue eyes and golden hair the mark of Satan?

Mura looked up at Blackthorne and remembered how he had tried to question him aboard the ship and then, when this Captain had become unconscious, he had decided to bring him to his own house because he was the leader and should have special consideration. They had laid him on the quilt and undressed him, more than just a little curious.

“His Peerless Parts are certainly impressive, *neh?*” Mura’s mother, Saiko, had said. “I wonder how large he would be when erect?”

“Large,” he had answered and they had all laughed, his mother and wife and friends and servants, and the doctor.

“I expect their women must be—must be as well endowed,” his wife, Niji, said.

“Nonsense, girl,” said his mother. “Any number of our courtesans could happily make the necessary accommodation.” She shook her head in wonder. “I’ve never seen anything like him in my whole life. Very odd indeed, *neh?*”

They had washed him and he had not come out of his coma. The doctor had thought it unwise to immerse him in a proper bath until he was awake. “Perhaps we should remember, Mura-san, we don’t know how the barbarian really is,” he had

said with careful wisdom. "So sorry, but we might kill him by mistake. Obviously he's at the limit of his strength. We should exercise patience."

"But what about the lice in his hair?" Mura had asked.

"They will have to stay for the time being. I understand all barbarians have them. So sorry, I'd advise patience."

"Don't you think we could at least shampoo his head?" his wife had said. "We'd be very careful. I'm sure the Mistress would supervise our poor efforts. That should help the barbarian and keep our house clean."

"I agree. You can shampoo him," his mother had said with finality. "But I'd certainly like to know how large he is when erect."

Now Mura glanced down at Blackthorne involuntarily. Then he remembered what the priest had told them about these Satanists and pirates. God the Father protect us from this evil, he thought. If I'd known that he was so terrible I would never have brought him into my house. No, he told himself. You are obliged to treat him as a special guest until Omi-san says otherwise. But you were wise to send word to the priest and send word to Omi-san instantly. Very wise. You're headman, you've protected the village and you, alone, are responsible.

Yes. And Omi-san will hold you responsible for the death this morning and the dead man's impertinence, and quite rightly.

"Don't be stupid, Tamazaki! You risk the good name of the village, *neh*?" he had warned his friend the fisherman a dozen times. "Stop your intolerance. Omi-san has no option but to sneer at Christians. Doesn't our *daimyo* detest Christians? What else can Omi-san do?"

"Nothing, I agree, Mura-san, please excuse me." Tamazaki had always replied as formally. "But Buddhists should have more tolerance, *neh*? Aren't they both Zen Buddhists?" Zen Buddhism was self-disciplining; it relied heavily on self-help and meditation to find Enlightenment. Most samurai belonged to the Zen Buddhist sect, since it suited, seemed almost to be designed for, a proud, death-seeking warrior.

"Yes, Buddhism teaches tolerance. But how many times must you be reminded they're samurai, and this is Izu and not Kyushu, and even if it were Kyushu, you're still the one that's wrong. Always. *Neh*?"

“Yes. Please excuse me, I know I’m wrong. But sometimes I feel I cannot live with my inner shame when Omi-san is so insulting about the True Faith.”

And now, Tamazaki, you are dead of your own choosing because you insulted Omi-san by not bowing simply because he said, “... this smelly priest of the foreign religion.” Even though the priest does smell and the True Faith is foreign. My poor friend. That truth will not feed your family now or remove the stain from my village.

Oh, Madonna, bless my old friend and give him the joy of thy Heaven.

Expect a lot of trouble from Omi-san, Mura told himself. And if that isn’t bad enough, now our *daimyo* is coming.

A pervading anxiety always filled him whenever he thought of his feudal lord, Kasigi Yabu, *daimyo* of Izu, Omi’s uncle—the man’s cruelty and lack of honor, the way he cheated all the villages of their rightful share of their catch and their crops, and the grinding weight of his rule. When war comes, Mura asked himself, which side will Yabu declare for, Lord Ishido or Lord Toranaga? We’re trapped between the giants and in pawn to both.

Northwards, Toranaga, the greatest general alive, Lord of the Kwanto, the Eight Provinces, the most important *daimyo* in the land, Chief General of the Armies of the East; to the west the domains of Ishido, Lord of Osaka Castle, conqueror of Korea, Protector of the Heir, Chief General of the Armies of the West. And to the north, the Tokaido, the Great Coastal Road that links Yedo, Toranaga’s capital city, to Osaka, Ishido’s capital city—three hundred miles westward over which their legions must march.

Who will win the war?

Neither.

Because their war will envelop the empire again, alliances will fall apart, provinces will fight provinces until it is village against village as it ever was. Except for the last ten years. For the last ten years, incredibly, there had been a warlessness called peace throughout the empire, for the first time in history.

I was beginning to like peace, Mura thought.

But the man who made the peace is dead. The peasant soldier who became a samurai and then a general and then the greatest general and finally the Taiko, the absolute Lord Protector of Japan, is dead a year and his seven-year-old son is far too

young to inherit supreme power. So the boy, like us, is in pawn. Between the giants. And war inevitable. Now not even the Taiko himself can protect his beloved son, his dynasty, his inheritance, or his empire.

Perhaps this is as it should be. The Taiko subdued the land, made the peace, forced all the *daimyos* in the land to grovel like peasants before him, rearranged fiefs to suit his whim—promoting some, deposing others—and then he died. He was a giant among pygmies. But perhaps it's right that all his work and greatness should die with him. Isn't man but a blossom taken by the wind, and only the mountains and the sea and the stars and this Land of the Gods real and everlasting?

We're all trapped and that is a fact; war will come soon and that is a fact; Yabu alone will decide which side we are on and that is a fact; the village will always be a village because the paddy fields are rich and the sea abundant and that is a last fact.

Mura brought his mind back firmly to the barbarian pirate in front of him. You're a devil sent to plague us, he thought, and you've caused us nothing but trouble since you arrived. Why couldn't you have picked another village?

"Captain-san want *onna*?" he asked helpfully. At his suggestion the village council made physical arrangements for the other barbarians, both as a politeness and as a simple means of keeping them occupied until the authorities came. That the village was entertained by the subsequent stories of the liaisons more than compensated for the money which had had to be invested.

"*Onna*?" he repeated, naturally presuming that as the pirate was on his feet, he would be equally content to be on his belly, his Heavenly Spear warmly encased before sleeping, and anyway, all the preparations had been made.

"No!" Blackthorne wanted only to sleep. But because he knew that he needed this man on his side he forced a smile, indicated the crucifix. "You're a Christian?"

Mura nodded. "Christian."

"I'm Christian."

"Father say not. Not Christian."

"I'm a Christian. Not a Catholic. But I'm still Christian."

But Mura could not understand. Neither was there any way Blackthorne could explain, however much he tried.



“Want *onna*?”

“The—the dimyo—when come?”

“Dimyo? No understand.”

“Dimyo—ah, I mean *daimyo*.”

“Ah, *daimyo*. Hai. *Daimyo!*” Mura shrugged. “*Daimyo* come when come. Sleep. First clean. Please.”

“What?”

“Clean. Bath, please.”

“I don’t understand.”

Mura came closer and crinkled his nose distastefully.

“Stinku. Bad. Like all Portugeezu. Bath. This clean house.”

“I’ll bathe when I want and I don’t stink!” Blackthorne fumed. “Everyone knows baths are dangerous. You want me to catch the flux? You think I’m God-cursed stupid? You get the hell out of here and let me sleep!”

“Bath!” Mura ordered, shocked at the barbarian’s open anger—the height of bad manners. And it was not just that the barbarian stank, as indeed he did, but he had not bathed correctly for three days to his knowledge, and the courtesan quite rightly would refuse to pillow with him, however much the fee. These awful foreigners, he thought. Astonishing! How astoundingly filthy their habits are! Never mind. I’m responsible for you. You will be taught manners. You will bathe like a human being, and Mother will know that which she wants to know. “Bath!”

“Now get out before I snap you into pieces!” Blackthorne glowered at him, motioning him away.

There was a moment’s pause and the other three Japanese appeared along with three of the women. Mura explained curtly what was the matter, then said with finality to Blackthorne, “Bath. Please.”

“Out!”

Mura came forward alone into the room. Blackthorne shoved out his arm, not wanting to hurt the man, just to push him away. Suddenly Blackthorne let out a

bellow of pain. Somehow Mura had chopped his elbow with the side of his hand and now Blackthorne's arm hung down, momentarily paralyzed. Enraged, he charged. But the room spun and he was flat on his face and there was another stabbing, paralyzing pain in his back and he could not move. "By God ..."

He tried to get up but his legs buckled under him. Then Mura calmly put out his small but iron-hard finger and touched a nerve center in Blackthorne's neck. There was a blinding pain.

"Good sweet Jesus ..."

"Bath? Please?"

"Yes—yes," Blackthorne gasped through his agony, astounded that he had been overcome so easily by such a tiny man and now lay helpless as any child, ready to have his throat cut.

Years ago Mura had learned the arts of judo and karate as well as how to fight with sword and spear. This was when he was a warrior and fought for Nakamura, the peasant general, the Taiko long before the Taiko had become the Taiko—when peasants could be samurai and samurai could be peasants, or craftsmen or even lowly merchants, and warriors again. Strange, Mura thought absently, looking down at the fallen giant, that almost the first thing the Taiko did when he became all powerful was to order all peasants to cease being soldiers and at once give up all weapons. The Taiko had forbidden them weapons forever and set up the immutable caste system that now controlled all the lives in all the empire: samurai above all, below them the peasants, next craftsmen, then the merchants followed by actors, outcasts, and bandits, and finally at the bottom of the scale, the eta, the nonhumans, those who dealt with dead bodies, the curing of leather and handling of dead animals, who were also the public executioners, branders, and mutilators. Of course, any barbarian was beneath consideration in this scale.

"Please excuse me, Captain-san," Mura said, bowing low, ashamed for the barbarian's loss of face as he lay groaning like a baby still at suck. Yes, I'm very sorry, he thought, but it had to be done. You provoked me beyond all reasonableness, even for a barbarian. You shout like a lunatic, upset my mother, interrupt my house's tranquillity, disturb the servants, and my wife's already had to replace one shoji door. I could not possibly permit your obvious lack of manners to go unopposed. Or allow you to go against my wishes in my own house. It's really for your own good.

Then, too, it's not so bad because you barbarians really have no face to lose. Except the priests—they're different. They still smell horrible, but they're the anointed of God the Father so they have great face. But you—you're a liar as well as a pirate. No honor. How astonishing! Claiming to be a Christian! Unfortunately that won't help you at all. Our *daimyo* hates the True Faith and barbarians and tolerates them only because he has to. But you're not a Portuguese or a Christian, therefore not protected by law, *neh*? So even though you are a dead man—or at least a mutilated one—it is my duty to see that you go to your fate clean. "Bath very good!"

He helped the other men carry the still dazed Blackthorne through the house, out into the garden, along a roofed-in walk of which he was very proud, and into the bath house. The women followed.

It became one of the great experiences of his life. He knew at the time that he would tell and retell the tale to his incredulous friends over barrels of hot saké, as the national wine of Japan was called; to his fellow elders, fishermen, villagers, to his children who also would not at first believe him. But they, in their turn, would regale their children and the name of Mura the fisherman would live forever in the village of Anjiro, which was in the province of Izu on the southeastern coast of the main island of Honshu. All because he, Mura the fisherman, had the good fortune to be headman in the first year after the death of the Taiko and therefore temporarily responsible for the leader of the strange barbarians who came out of the eastern sea.

## CHAPTER TWO

"The *daimyo*, Kasigi Yabu, Lord of Izu, wants to know who you are, where you come from, how you got here, and what acts of piracy you have committed," Father Sebastio said.

"I keep telling you we're not pirates." The morning was clear and warm and Blackthorne was kneeling in front of the platform in the village square, his head still aching from the blow. Keep calm and get your brain working, he told himself. You're on trial for your lives. You're the spokesman and that's all there is to it. The Jesuit's hostile and the only interpreter available and you'll have no way of knowing what he's saying except you can be sure he'll not help you.... 'Get your wits about you boy,' he could almost hear old Alban Caradoc saying. 'When the storm's the worst

and the sea the most dreadful, that's when you need your special wits. That's what keeps you alive and your ship alive—if you're the pilot. Get your wits about you and take the juice out of every day, however bad....'

The juice of today is bile, Blackthorne thought grimly. Why do I hear Alban's voice so clearly?

"First tell the *daimyo* that we're at war, that we're enemies," he said. "Tell him England and the Netherlands are at war with Spain and Portugal."

"I caution you again to speak simply and not to twist the facts. The Netherlands—or Holland, Zeeland, the United Provinces, whatever you filthy Dutch rebels call it—is a small, rebellious province of the Spanish Empire. You're leader of traitors who are in a state of insurrection against their lawful king."

"England's at war and the Netherlands have been sepa—" Blackthorne did not continue because the priest was no longer listening but interpreting.

The *daimyo* was on the platform, short, squat, and dominating. He knelt comfortably, his heels tucked neatly under him, flanked by four lieutenants, one of whom was Kasigi Omi, his nephew and vassal. They all wore silk kimonos and, over them, ornate surcoats with wide belts nipping them in at the waist and huge, starched shoulders. And the inevitable swords.

Mura knelt in the dirt of the square. He was the only villager present and the only other onlookers were the fifty samurai who came with the *daimyo*. They sat in disciplined, silent rows. The rabble of the ship's crew were behind Blackthorne and, like him, were on their knees, guards nearby. They had had to carry the Captain-General with them when they were sent for, even though he was ailing badly. He had been allowed to lie down in the dirt, still in semicoma. Blackthorne had bowed with all of them when they had come in front of the *daimyo*, but this was not enough. Samurai had slammed all of them on their knees and pushed their heads into the dust in the manner of peasants. He had tried to resist and shouted to the priest to explain that it was not their custom, that he was the leader and an emissary of their country and should be treated as such. But the haft of a spear had sent him reeling. His men gathered themselves for an impulsive charge, but he shouted at them to stop and to kneel. Fortunately they obeyed. The *daimyo* had uttered something guttural and the priest interpreted this as a caution to him to tell the truth and tell it

quickly. Blackthorne had asked for a chair but the priest said the Japanese did not use chairs and there were none in Japan.

Blackthorne was concentrating on the priest as he spoke to the *daimyo*, seeking a clue, a way through this reef.

There's arrogance and cruelty in the *daimyo's* face, he thought. I'll bet he's a real bastard. The priest's Japanese isn't fluent. Ah, see that? Irritation and impatience. Did the *daimyo* ask for another word, a clearer word? I think so. Why's the Jesuit wearing orange robes? Is the *daimyo* a Catholic? Look, the Jesuit's very deferential and sweating a lot. I'll bet the *daimyo's* not a Catholic. Be accurate! *Perhaps* he's not a Catholic. Either way you'll get no quarter from him. How can you use the evil bastard? How do you talk direct to him? How're you going to work the priest? How discredit him? What's the bait? Come on, think! You know enough about Jesuits—

"The *daimyo* says hurry up and answer his questions."

"Yes. Of course, I'm sorry. My name's John Blackthorne. I'm English, Pilot-Major of a Netherlands fleet. Our home port's Amsterdam."

"Fleet? What fleet? You're lying. There's no fleet. Why is an Englishman pilot of a Dutch ship?"

"All in good time. First please translate what I said."

"Why are you the pilot of a Dutch privateer? Hurry up!"

Blackthorne decided to gamble. His voice abruptly hardened and it cut through the morning warmth. "Que va! First translate what I said, *Spaniard!* Now!"

The priest flushed. "I'm Portuguese. I've told you before. Answer the question."

"I'm here to talk to the *daimyo*, not to you. Translate what I said, you motherless offal!" Blackthorne saw the priest redden even more and felt that this had not gone unnoticed by the *daimyo*. Be cautious, he warned himself. That yellow bastard will carve you into pieces quicker than a school of sharks if you overreach yourself. "Tell the lord *daimyo!*" Blackthorne deliberately bowed low to the platform and felt the chill sweat beginning to pearl as he committed himself irrevocably to his course of action.

Father Sebastio knew that his training should make him impervious to the pirate's insults and the obvious plan to discredit him in front of the *daimyo*. But, for the first

time, it did not and he felt lost. When Mura's messenger had brought news of the ship to his mission in the neighboring province, he had been rocked by the implications. It can't be Dutch or English! he had thought. There had never been a heretic ship in the Pacific except those of the archdevil corsair Drake, and never one here in Asia. The routes were secret and guarded. At once he had prepared to leave and had sent an urgent carrier pigeon message to his superior in Osaka, wishing that he could first have consulted with him, knowing that he was young, almost untried and new to Japan, barely two years here, not yet ordained, and not competent to deal with this emergency. He had rushed to Anjiro, hoping and praying that the news was untrue. But the ship was Dutch and the pilot English, and all of his loathing for the satanic heresies of Luther, Calvin, Henry VIII, and the archfiend Elizabeth, his bastard daughter, had overwhelmed him. And still swamped his judgment.

"Priest, translate what the pirate said," he heard the *daimyo* say.

O Blessed Mother of God, help me to do thy will. Help me to be strong in front of the *daimyo* and give me the gift of tongues, and let me convert him to the True Faith.

Father Sebastio gathered his wits and began to speak more confidently.

Blackthorne listened carefully, trying to pick out the words and meanings. The Father used "England" and "Blackthorne" and pointed at the ship, which lay nicely at anchor in the harbor.

"How did you get here?" Father Sebastio said.

"By Magellan's Pass. This is the one hundred and thirty-sixth day from there. Tell the *daimyo*—"

"You're lying. Magellan's Pass is secret. You came via Africa and India. You'll have to tell the truth eventually. They use torture here."

"The Pass *was* secret. A Portuguese sold us a rutter. One of your own people sold you out for a little Judas gold. You're all manure! Now all English warships—and Dutch warships—know the way through to the Pacific. There's a fleet—twenty English ships-of-the-line, sixty-cannon warships—attacking Manila right now. Your empire's finished."

"You're lying!"

Yes, Blackthorne thought, knowing there was no way to prove the lie except to go to Manila. "That fleet will harry your sea lanes and stamp out your colonies. There's

another Dutch fleet due here any week now. The Spanish-Portuguese pig is back in his pigsty and your Jesuit General's penis is in his anus—where it belongs!" He turned away and bowed low to the *daimyo*.

"God curse you and your filthy mouth!"

"*Ano mono wa nani o moshité oru?*" the *daimyo* snapped impatiently.

The priest spoke more quickly, harder, and said "Magellan" and "Manila" but Blackthorne thought that the *daimyo* and his lieutenants did not seem to understand too clearly.

Yabu was wearying of this trial. He looked out into the harbor, to the ship that had obsessed him ever since he had received Omi's secret message, and he wondered again if it was the gift from the gods that he hoped.

"Have you inspected the cargo yet, Omi-san?" he had asked this morning as soon as he had arrived, mud-spattered and very weary.

"No, Lord. I thought it best to seal up the ship until you came personally, but the holds are filled with crates and bales. I hope I did it correctly. Here are all their keys. I confiscated them."

"Good." Yabu had come from Yedo, Toranaga's capital city, more than a hundred miles away, post haste, furtively and at great personal risk, and it was vital that he return as quickly. The journey had taken almost two days over foul roads and spring-filled streams, partly on horseback and partly by palanquin. "I'll go to the ship at once."

"You should see the strangers, Lord," Omi had said with a laugh. "They're incredible. Most of them have blue eyes—like Siamese cats—and golden hair. But the best news of all is that they're pirates...."

Omi had told him about the priest and what the priest had related about these corsairs and what the pirate had said and what had happened, and his excitement had tripled. Yabu had conquered his impatience to go aboard the ship and break the seals. Instead he had bathed and changed and ordered the barbarians brought in front of him.

"You, priest," he said, his voice sharp, hardly able to understand the priest's bad Japanese. "Why is he so angry with you?"

“He’s evil. Pirate. He worship devil.”

Yabu leaned over to Omi, the man on his left. “Can you understand what he’s saying, nephew? Is he lying? What do you think?”

“I don’t know, Lord. Who knows what barbarians really believe? I imagine the priest *thinks* the pirate is a devil worshiper. Of course, that’s all nonsense.”

Yabu turned back to the priest, detesting him. He wished that he could crucify him today and obliterate Christianity from his domain once and for all. But he could not. Though he and all other *daimyos* had total power in their own domains, they were still subject to the overriding authority of the Council of Regents, the military ruling junta to whom the Taiko had legally willed his power during his son’s minority, and subject, too, to edicts the Taiko had issued in his lifetime, which were all still legally in force. One of these, promulgated years ago, dealt with the Portuguese barbarians and ordered that they were all protected persons and, within reason, their religion was to be tolerated and their priests allowed, within reason, to proselytize and convert. “You, priest! What else did the pirate say? What was he saying to you? Hurry up! Have you lost your tongue?”

“Pirate says bad things. Bad. About more pirate war boatings—many.”

“What do you mean, ‘war boatings’?”

“Sorry, Lord, I don’t understand.”

“ ‘War boatings’ doesn’t make sense, *neh*?”

“Ah! Pirate says other ships war are in Manila, in Philippines.”

“Omi-san, do you understand what he’s talking about?”

“No, Lord. His accent’s appalling, it’s almost gibberish. Is he saying that more pirate ships are east of Japan?”

“You, priest! Are these pirate ships off our coast? East? Eh?”

“Yes, Lord. But I think he’s lying. He says at Manila.”

“I don’t understand you. Where’s Manila?”

“East. Many days’ journey.”



“If any pirate ships come here, we’ll give them a pleasant welcome, wherever Manila is.”

“Please excuse me, I don’t understand.”

“Never mind,” Yabu said, his patience at an end. He had already decided the strangers were to die and he relished the prospect. Obviously these men did not come within the Taiko’s edict that specified “Portuguese barbarians,” and anyway they were pirates. As long as he could remember he had hated barbarians, their stench and filthiness and disgusting meat-eating habits, their stupid religion and arrogance and detestable manners. More than that, he was shamed, as was every *daimyo*, by their stranglehold over this Land of the Gods. A state of war had existed between China and Japan for centuries. China would allow no trade. Chinese silk cloth was vital to make the long, hot, humid Japanese summer bearable. For generations only a minuscule amount of contraband cloth had slipped through the net and was available, at huge cost, in Japan. Then, sixty-odd years ago, the barbarians had first arrived. The Chinese Emperor in Peking gave them a tiny permanent base at Macao in southern China and agreed to trade silks for silver. Japan had silver in abundance. Soon trade was flourishing. Both countries prospered. The middlemen, the Portuguese, grew rich, and their priests—Jesuits mostly—soon became vital to the trade. Only the priests managed to learn to speak Chinese and Japanese and therefore could act as negotiators and interpreters. As trade blossomed, the priests became more essential. Now the yearly trade was huge and touched the life of every samurai. So the priests had to be tolerated and the spread of their religion tolerated or the barbarians would sail away and trade would cease.

By now there were a number of very important Christian *daimyos* and many hundreds of thousands of converts, most of whom were in Kyushu, the southern island that was nearest to China and contained the Portuguese port of Nagasaki. Yes, Yabu thought, we must tolerate the priests and the Portuguese, but not these barbarians, the new ones, the unbelievable golden-haired, blue-eyed ones. His excitement filled him. Now at last he could satisfy his curiosity as to how well a barbarian would die when put to torment. And he had eleven men, eleven different tests, to experiment with. He never questioned why the agony of others pleased him. He only knew that it did and therefore it was something to be sought and enjoyed.

Yabu said, "This ship, alien, non-Portuguese, and pirate, is confiscated with all it contains. All pirates are sentenced to immediate—" His mouth dropped open as he saw the pirate leader suddenly leap at the priest and rip the wooden crucifix from his belt, snap it into pieces and hurl the pieces on the ground, then shout something very loudly. The pirate immediately knelt and bowed low to him as the guards jumped forward, swords raised.

"Stop! Don't kill him!" Yabu was astounded that anyone could have the impertinence to act with such lack of manners in front of him. "These barbarians are beyond belief!"

"Yes," Omi said, his mind flooding with the questions that such an action implied.

The priest was still kneeling, staring fixedly at the pieces of the cross. They watched as his hand reached out shakily and picked up the violated wood. He said something to the pirate, his voice low, almost gentle. His eyes closed, he steepled his fingers, and his lips began to move slowly. The pirate leader was looking up at them motionlessly, pale blue eyes unblinking, catlike, in front of his rabble crew.

Yabu said, "Omi-san. First I want to go on the ship. Then we'll begin." His voice thickened as he contemplated the pleasure he had promised himself. "I want to begin with that red-haired one on the end of the line, the small man."

Omi leaned closer and lowered his excited voice. "Please excuse me, but this has never happened before, Sire. Not since the Portuguese barbarians came here. Isn't the crucifix their sacred symbol? Aren't they *always* deferential to their priests? Don't they always kneel to them openly? Just like our Christians? Haven't the priests absolute control over them?"

"Come to your point."

"We all detest the Portuguese, Sire. Except the Christians among us, *neh*? Perhaps these barbarians are worth more to you alive than dead."

"How?"

"Because they're unique. They're anti-Christian! Perhaps a wise man could find a way to use their hatred—or irreligiousness—to our advantage. They're your property, to do with as you wish. *Neh*?"

Yes. And I want them in torment, Yabu thought. Yes, but you can enjoy that at any time. Listen to Omi. He's a good counselor. But is he to be trusted now? Does he have a secret reason for saying this? Think.

"Ikawa Jikkyu is Christian," he heard his nephew say, naming his hated enemy—one of Ishido's kinsmen and allies—who sat on his western borders. "Doesn't this filthy priest have his home there? Perhaps these barbarians could give you the key to unlock Ikawa's whole province. Perhaps Ishido's. Perhaps even Lord Toranaga's," Omi added delicately.

Yabu studied Omi's face, trying to reach what was behind it. Then his eyes went to the ship. He had no doubt now that it had been sent by the gods. Yes. But was it as a gift or a plague?

He put away his own pleasure for the security of his clan. "I agree. But first break these pirates. Teach them manners. Particularly *him*."

"Good sweet Jesus' death!" Vinck muttered.

"We should say a prayer," van Nekk said.

"We've just said one."

"Perhaps we'd better say another. Lord God in Heaven, I could use a pint of brandy."

They were crammed into a deep cellar, one of the many that the fishermen used to store sun-dried fish. Samurai had herded them across the square, down a ladder, and now they were locked underground. The cellar was five paces long and five wide and four deep, with an earthen floor and walls. The ceiling was made of planks with a foot of earth above and a single trapdoor set into it.

"Get off my foot, you God-cursed ape!"

"Shut your face, shit picker!" Pieterzoon said genially. "Hey! Vinck, move up a little, you toothless old fart, you've got more room than anyone! By God, I could use a cold beer! Move up."

"I can't, Pieterzoon. We're tighter than a virgin's arse here."

"It's the Captain-General. He's got all the space. Give him a shove. Wake him up!" Maetsukker said.

“Eh? What’s the matter? Leave me alone. What’s going on? I’m sick. I’ve got to lie down. Where are we?”

“Leave him alone. He’s sick. Come on, Maetsukker, get up, for the love of God.” Vinck angrily pulled Maetsukker up and shoved him against the wall. There was not room enough for them all to lie down, or even to sit comfortably, at the same time. The Captain-General, Paulus Spillbergen, was lying full length under the trapdoor where there was the best air, his head propped on his bundled cloak. Blackthorne was leaning against a corner, staring up at the trapdoor. The crew had left him alone and stayed clear of him uneasily, as best they could, recognizing from long experience his mood, and the brooding, explosive violence that always lurked just below his quiet exterior.

Maetsukker lost his temper and smashed his fist into Vinck’s groin. “Leave me alone or I’ll kill you, you bastard.”

Vinck flew at him, but Blackthorne grabbed both of them and rammed their heads against the wall.

“Shut up, all of you,” he said softly. They did as they were ordered. “We’ll split into watches. One watch sleeps, one sits, and one stands. Spillbergen lies down until he’s fit. That corner’s the latrine.” He divided them up. When they had rearranged themselves it was more bearable.

We’ll have to break out of here within a day or we’ll be too weak, Blackthorne thought. When they bring the ladder back to give us food or water. It will have to be tonight or tomorrow night. Why did they put us here? We’re no threat. We could help the *daimyo*. Will he understand? It was my only way to show him that the priest’s our real enemy. Will he understand? The priest had.

“Perhaps God may forgive your sacrilege but I won’t,” Father Sebastio had said, very quietly. “I will never rest until you and your evil are obliterated.”

The sweat was dribbling down his cheeks and chin. He wiped it away absently, ears tuned to the cellar as they would be when he was aboard and sleeping, or off watch and drifting; just enough to try to hear the danger before it happened.

We’ll have to break out and take the ship. I wonder what Felicity’s doing. And the children. Let’s see, Tudor’s seven years old now and Lisbeth is.... We’re one year and eleven months and six days from Amsterdam, add thirty-seven days provisioning and

coming from Chatham to there, add lastly, the eleven days that she was alive before the embarkation at Chatham. That's her age exactly—if all's well. All should be well. Felicity will be cooking and guarding and cleaning and chattering as the kids grow up, as strong and fearless as their mother. It will be fine to be home again, to walk together along the shore and in the forests and glades and beauty that is England.

Over the years he had trained himself to think about them as characters in a play, people that you loved and bled for, the play never ending. Otherwise the hurt of being away would be too much. He could almost count his days at home in the eleven years of marriage. They're few, he thought, too few. "It's a hard life for a woman, Felicity," he had said before. And she had said, "Any life is hard for a woman." She was seventeen then and tall and her hair was long and sensu—

His ears told him to beware.

The men were sitting or leaning or trying to sleep. Vinck and Pieterzoon, good friends, were talking quietly. Van Nekk was staring into space with the others. Spillbergen was half awake, and Blackthorne thought the man was stronger than he let everyone believe.

There was a sudden silence as they heard the footsteps overhead. The footsteps stopped. Muted voices in the harsh, strange-sounding language. Blackthorne thought he recognized the samurai's voice—Omi-san? Yes, that was his name—but he could not be certain. In a moment the voices stopped and the footsteps went away.

"You think they'll feed us, Pilot?" Sonk said.

"Yes."

"I could use a drink. Cold beer, by God," Pieterzoon said.

"Shut up," Vinck said. "You're enough to make a man sweat."

Blackthorne was conscious of his soaking shirt. And the stench. By the Lord God I could use a bath, he thought and abruptly he smiled, remembering.

Mura and the others had carried him into the warm room that day and laid him on a stone bench, his limbs still numb and slow moving. The three women, led by the old crone, had begun to undress him and he had tried to stop them but every time he moved, one of the men would stab a nerve and hold him powerless, and however much he raved and cursed they continued to undress him until he was naked. It was not that he was ashamed of being naked in front of a woman, it was just that

undressing was always done in private and that was the custom. And he did not like being undressed by anyone, let alone these uncivilized natives. But to be undressed publicly like a helpless baby and to be washed everywhere like a baby with warm, soapy, scented water while they chattered and smiled as he lay on his back was too much. Then he had become erect and as much as he tried to stop it from happening, the worse it became—at least he thought so, but the women did not. Their eyes became bigger and he began to blush. Jesus Lord God the One and Only, I can't be blushing, but he was and this seemed to increase his size and the old woman clapped her hands in wonder and said something to which they all nodded and she shook her head awed and said something else to which they nodded even more.

Mura had said with enormous gravity, "Captain-san, Mother-san thank you, the best her life, now die happy!" and he and they had all bowed as one and then he, Blackthorne, had seen how funny it was and he had begun to laugh. They were startled, then they were laughing too, and his laughter took his strength away and the crone was a little sad and said so and this made him laugh more and them also. Then they had laid him gently into the vast heat of the deep water and soon he could bear it no longer, and they laid him gasping on the bench once more. The women had dried him and then an old blind man had come. Blackthorne had never known massage. At first he had tried to resist the probing fingers but then their magic seduced him and soon he was almost purring like a cat as the fingers found the knots and unlocked the blood or elixir that lurked beneath skin and muscle and sinew.

Then he had been helped to bed, strangely weak, half in dream, and the girl was there. She was patient with him, and after sleeping, when he had strength, he took her with care even though it had been so long.

He had not asked her name, and in the morning when Mura, tense and very frightened, had pulled him out of sleep, she was gone.

Blackthorne sighed. Life is marvelous, he thought.

In the cellar, Spillbergen was querulous again, Maetsukker was nursing his head and moaning, not from pain but from fear, the boy Croocq near breaking, and Jan Roper said, "What's there to smile about, Pilot?"

"Go to hell."

“With respect, Pilot,” van Nekk said carefully, bringing into the open what was foremost in their minds, “you were most unwise to attack the priest in front of the rotten yellow bastard.”

There was general though carefully expressed agreement.

“If you hadn’t, I don’t think we’d be in this filthy mess.”

Van Nekk did not go near Blackthorne. “All you’ve got to do is put your head in the dust when the Lord Bastard’s around and they’re as meek as lambs.”

He waited for a reply but Blackthorne made none, just turned back to the trapdoor. It was as though nothing had been said. Their unease increased.

Paulus Spillbergen lifted himself on one elbow with difficulty. “What are you talking about, Baccus?”

Van Nekk went over to him and explained about the priest and the cross and what had happened and why they were here, his eyes hurting today worse than ever.

“Yes, that was dangerous, Pilot-Major,” Spillbergen said. “Yes, I’d say quite wrong—pass me some water. Now the Jesuits’ll give us no peace at all.”

“You should have broken his neck, Pilot. Jesuits’ll give us no peace anyway,” Jan Roper said. “They’re filthy lice and we’re here in this stink hole as God’s punishment.”

“That’s nonsense, Roper,” Spillbergen said. “We’re here becau—”

“It is God’s punishment! We should have burned all the churches in Santa Magdellana—not just two. We should have. Cesspits of Satan!”

Spillbergen slapped weakly at a fly. “The Spanish troops were regrouping and we were outnumbered fifteen to one. Give me some water! We’d sacked the town and got the plunder and rubbed their noses in the dust. If we’d stayed we would have been killed. For God’s sake, give me some water; someone. We’d’ve all been killed if we hadn’t retrea—”

“What does it matter if you’re doing the work of God? We failed Him.”

“Perhaps we’re here to do God’s work,” van Nekk said, placatingly, for Roper was a good though zealous man, a clever merchant and his partner’s son. “Perhaps we can

show the natives here the error of their Papist ways. Perhaps we could convert them to the True Faith.”

“Quite right,” Spillbergen said. He still felt weak, but his strength was returning. “I think you should have consulted Baccus, Pilot-Major. After all, he’s chief merchant. He’s very good at parleying with savages. Pass the water, I said!”

“There isn’t any, Paulus.” Van Nekk’s gloom increased. “They’ve given us no food or water. We haven’t even got a pot to piss in.”

“Well, ask for one! And some water! God in heaven, I’m thirsty. Ask for water! You!”

“Me?” Vinck asked.

“Yes. You!”

Vinck looked at Blackthorne but Blackthorne just watched the trapdoor obliviously, so Vinck stood under the opening and shouted, “Hey! You up there! Give us God-cursed water! We want food and water!”

There was no answer. He shouted again. No answer. The others gradually took up the shouts. All except Blackthorne. Soon their panic and the nausea of their close confinement crept into their voices and they were howling like wolves.

The trapdoor opened. Omi looked down at them. Beside him was Mura. And the priest.

“Water! And food, by God! Let us out of here!” Soon they were all screaming again.

Omi motioned to Mura, who nodded and left. A moment later Mura returned with another fisherman, carrying a large barrel between them. They emptied the contents, rotting fish offal and seawater, onto the heads of the prisoners.

The men in the cellar scattered and tried to escape, but all of them could not. Spillbergen was choking, almost drowned. Some of the men slipped and were trampled on. Blackthorne had not moved from the corner. He just stared up at Omi, hating him.

Then Omi began talking. There was a cowed silence now, broken only by coughing and Spillbergen’s retching. When Omi had finished, the priest nervously came to the opening.



“These are Kasigi Omi’s orders: You will begin to act like decent human beings. You will make no more noise. If you do, next time five barrels will be poured into the cellar. Then ten, then twenty. You will be given food and water twice a day. When you have learned to behave, you will be allowed up into the world of men. Lord Yabu has graciously spared all your lives, providing you serve him loyally. All except one. One of you is to die. At dusk. You are to choose who it will be. But you”—he pointed at Blackthorne—“you are not to be the one chosen.” Ill at ease, the priest took a deep breath, half bowed to the samurai, and stepped back.

Omi peered down into the pit. He could see Blackthorne’s eyes and he felt the hatred. It will take much to break that man’s spirit, he thought. No matter. There’s time enough.

The trapdoor slammed into place.

## CHAPTER THREE

Yabu lay in the hot bath, more content, more confident than he had ever been in his life. The ship had revealed its wealth and this wealth gave him a power that he had never dreamed possible.

“I want everything taken ashore tomorrow,” he had said. “Repack the muskets in their crates. Camouflage everything with nets or sacking.”

Five hundred muskets, he thought exultantly. With more gunpowder and shot than Toranaga has in all the Eight Provinces. And twenty cannon, five thousand cannon balls with an abundance of ammunition. Fire arrows by the crate. All of the best European quality. “Mura, you will provide porters. Igurashi-san, I want all this armament, including the cannon, in my castle at Mishima forthwith, in secret. You will be responsible.”

“Yes, Lord.” They had been in the main hold of the ship and everyone had gaped at him: Igurashi, a tall, lithe, one-eyed man, his chief retainer, Zukimoto his quartermaster, together with ten sweat-stained villagers who had opened the crates under Mura’s supervision, and his personal bodyguard of four samurai. He knew they did not understand his exhilaration or the need to be clandestine. Good, he thought.

When the Portuguese had first discovered Japan in 1542, they had introduced muskets and gunpowder. Within eighteen months the Japanese were manufacturing

them. The quality was not nearly as good as the European equivalent but that did not matter because guns were considered merely a novelty and, for a long time, used only for hunting—and even for that bows were far more accurate. Also, more important, Japanese warfare was almost ritual; hand-to-hand individual combat, the sword being the most honorable weapon. The use of guns was considered cowardly and dishonorable and completely against the samurai code, *bushido*, the Way of the Warrior, which bound samurai to fight with honor, to live with honor, and to die with honor; to have undying, unquestioning loyalty to one's feudal lord; to be fearless of death—even to seek it in his service; and to be proud of one's own name and keep it unsullied.

For years Yabu had had a secret theory. At long last, he thought exultantly, you can expand it and put it into effect: Five hundred chosen samurai, armed with muskets *but trained as a unit*, spearheading your twelve thousand conventional troops, supported by twenty cannon used in a special way by special men, also trained *as a unit*. A new strategy for a new era! In the coming war, guns could be decisive!

What about *bushido*? the ghosts of his ancestors had always asked him.

What about *bushido*? he had always asked them back.

They had never answered.

Never in his wildest dreams had he thought he'd ever be able to afford five hundred guns. But now he had them for nothing and he alone knew how to use them. But whose side to use them for? Toranaga's or Ishido's? Or should he wait—and perhaps be the eventual victor?

"Igurashi-san. You'll travel by night and maintain strict security."

"Yes, Lord."

"This is to remain secret, Mura, or the village will be obliterated."

"Nothing will be said, Lord. I can speak for my village. I cannot speak for the journey, or for other villages. Who knows where there are spies? But nothing will be said by us."

Next Yabu had gone to the strong room. It contained what he presumed to be pirate plunder: silver and gold plate, cups, candelabra and ornaments, some religious

paintings in ornate frames. A chest contained women's clothes, elaborately embroidered with gold thread and colored stones.

"I'll have the silver and gold melted into ingots and put in the treasury," Zukimoto had said. He was a neat, pedantic man in his forties who was not a samurai. Years ago he had been a Buddhist warrior-priest, but the Taiko, the Lord Protector, had stamped out his monastery in a campaign to purge the land of certain Buddhist militant warrior monasteries and sects that would not acknowledge his absolute suzerainty. Zukimoto had bribed his way out of that early death and become a peddler, at length a minor merchant in rice. Ten years ago he had joined Yabu's commissariat and now he was indispensable. "As to the clothes, perhaps the gold thread and gems have value. With your permission, I'll have them packed and sent to Nagasaki with anything else I can salvage." The port of Nagasaki, on the southernmost coast of the south island of Kyushu, was the legal entrepôt and trading market of the Portuguese. "The barbarians might pay well for these odds and ends."

"Good. What about the bales in the other hold?"

"They all contain a heavy cloth. Quite useless to us, Sire, with no market value at all. But this should please you." Zukimoto had opened the strongbox.

The box contained twenty thousand minted silver pieces. Spanish doubloons. The best quality.

Yabu stirred in his bath. He wiped the sweat from his face and neck with the small white towel and sank deeper into the hot scented water. If, three days ago, he told himself, a soothsayer had forecast that all this would happen, you would have fed him his tongue for telling impossible lies.

Three days ago he had been in Yedo, Toranaga's capital. Omi's message had arrived at dusk. Obviously the ship had to be investigated at once but Toranaga was still away in Osaka for the final confrontation with General Lord Ishido and, in his absence, had invited Yabu and all friendly neighboring *daimyos* to wait until his return. Such an invitation could not be refused without dire results. Yabu knew that he and the other independent *daimyos* and their families were merely added protection for Toranaga's safety and, though of course the word would never be used, they were hostages against Toranaga's safe return from the impregnable enemy fortress at Osaka where the meeting was being held. Toranaga was President of the Council of Regents which the Taiko had appointed on his deathbed to rule the

empire during the minority of his son Yaemon, now seven years old. There were five Regents, all eminent *daimyos*, but only Toranaga and Ishido had real power.

Yabu had carefully considered all the reasons for going to Anjiro, the risks involved, and the reasons for staying. Then he had sent for his wife and his favorite consort. A consort was a formal, legal mistress. A man could have as many consorts as he wished, but only one wife at one time.

“My nephew Omi has just sent secret word that a barbarian ship came ashore at Anjiro.”

“One of the Black Ships?” his wife had asked excitedly. These were the huge, incredibly rich trading ships that plied annually with the monsoon winds between Nagasaki and the Portuguese colony of Macao that lay almost a thousand miles south on the China mainland.

“No. But it might be rich. I’m leaving immediately. You’re to say that I’ve been taken sick and cannot be disturbed for any reason. I’ll be back in five days.”

“That’s incredibly dangerous,” his wife warned. “Lord Toranaga gave specific orders for us to stay. I’m sure he’ll make another compromise with Ishido and he’s too powerful to offend. Sire, we could never guarantee that someone won’t suspect the truth—there are spies everywhere. If Toranaga returned and found you’d gone, your absence would be misinterpreted. Your enemies would poison his mind against you.”

“Yes,” his consort added. “Please excuse me, but you must listen to the Lady, your wife. She’s right. Lord Toranaga would never believe that you’d disobeyed just to look at a barbarian ship. Please send someone else.”

“But this isn’t an ordinary barbarian ship. It’s *not* Portuguese. Listen to me. Omi says it’s from a different country. These men talk a different-sounding language among themselves and they have *blue eyes* and *golden hair*.”

“Omi-san’s gone mad. Or he’s drunk too much saké,” his wife said.

“This is much too important to joke about, for him and for you.”

His wife had bowed and apologized and said that he was quite right to correct her, but that the remark was not meant in jest. She was a small, thin woman, ten years older than he, who had given him a child a year for eight years until her womb had dried up, and of these, five had been sons. Three had become warriors and died

bravely in the war against China. Another had become a Buddhist priest and the last, now nineteen, he despised.

His wife, the Lady Yuriko, was the only woman he had ever been afraid of, the only woman he had ever valued—except his mother, now dead—and she ruled his house with a silken lash.

“Again, please excuse me,” she said. “Does Omi-san detail the cargo?”

“No. He didn’t examine it, Yuriko-san. He says he sealed the ship at once because it was so unusual. There’s never been a non-Portuguese ship before, *neh*? He says also it’s a fighting ship. With twenty cannon on its decks.”

“Ah! Then someone must go immediately.”

“I’m going myself.”

“Please reconsider. Send Mizuno. Your brother’s clever and wise. I implore you not to go.”

“Mizuno’s weak and not to be trusted.”

“Then order him to commit seppuku and have done with him,” she said harshly. Seppuku, sometimes called hara-kiri, the ritual suicide by disembowelment, was the only way a samurai could expiate a shame, a sin, or a fault with honor, and was the sole prerogative of the samurai caste. All samurai—women as well as men—were prepared from infancy, either for the act itself or to take part in the ceremony as a second. Women committed seppuku only with a knife in the throat.

“Later, not now,” Yabu told his wife.

“Then send Zukimoto. He’s certainly to be trusted.”

“If Toranaga hadn’t ordered all wives and consorts to stay here too, I’d send you. But that would be too risky. I have to go. I have no option. Yuriko-san, you tell me my treasury’s empty. You say I’ve no more credit with the filthy moneylenders. Zukimoto says we’re getting the maximum tax out of my peasants. I have to have more horses, armaments, weapons, and more samurai. Perhaps the ship will supply the means.”

“Lord Toranaga’s orders were quite clear, Sire. If he comes back and finds—”

“Yes. *If* he comes back, Lady. I still think he’s put himself into a trap. The Lord Ishido has eighty thousand samurai in and around Osaka Castle alone. For Toranaga to go there with a few hundred men was the act of a madman.”

“He’s much too shrewd to risk himself unnecessarily,” she said confidently.

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