

Captain Z and the Treasure of Castle Island

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ISBN: 978-1501048449

First edition: December 2015

vallandingham.me
captainZbook.com

To my wife, daughter, and son.
You are my sun, my star, and my world.

1



Our story begins, as most pirate stories do, in the dark.

The low glow of a lamp, running out of oil, was nearly the only light about. The glow of the stars and moon up above helped a bit, but its always darkest, as they say, just before the dawn.

The lamp shined its light on a little dirt path that ran between the rocks. The path wound its way up through the steep cliffs of a forlorn and bare little isle. The cliffs,

the rocks, the path, and some palm trees were the only things to be seen on this island. But it also had something unexpected hiding on it. Treasure!

It was because of this treasure that our pirate friend was on this little island in the dark. Though “friend” might not be the word to use for such a character as this one.

The little lamp she held gave a glimpse of her face. A jagged scar ran across it. Starting at the left ear, it painted a crooked Z across her cheek, ending at her nose. She held up a map for a closer look at the markings on it.

Her mouth was turned down in a deep frown of concentration. Her eyes looked like two pieces of coal, black and smoldering, as they stared down at the scrap of paper. This map, she hoped, would soon lead her to the treasure that lay hidden on this island. A treasure rare as anyone had ever known, and twice as mysterious.

Assured she was still on the right track, the pirate rolled up the map, checked over her shoulder again, and started back up the path.

This is our hero, as it were, Captain Sophia Zephyr, or simply *Captain Z*.

But Captain Z doesn't start this tale as a hero. She starts it, as you might expect from such a story, as a pirate!

An especially crafty no-good villain of a pirate.

But, there is a chance she might not stay that way. Yes, there's a chance, ever so slim, that she might have a bit of good in her, and that good may come out and turn her into a hero.

Will she really turn the corner from villain to hero?
Does she have it in her?

I don't know. All we can do is watch, and listen.

2

Captain Z stopped for a bit to rest on one of the large rocks along the steep path. She checked the map again, making sure she was still on the right path, then continued to trudge up the mountain.

The map in her hand was a treasure map of the very island she was on. Pirates and fisher folk alike called this place *Castle Island*.

The path she was taking ended at an X on the map, and as you may know, an X always marks the spot. And at this particular spot was the treasure that Captain Z was hoping to find, and escape with, before she was discovered.

You see, Captain Z was not the only pirate creeping

about on this island in the dark night.

The Dread Captain Spears and his crew of scoundrel pirates were searching and scouting the island as well. Except, they didn't have a treasure map, as Captain Z had stolen it from them. So they were not searching for the treasure. Instead, they were searching for her!

3

Earlier, that same night, things were a different story altogether.

The Dread Captain Spears was on his ship, the Sea Breaker, with the treasure map all locked up, safe and sound. At least, he thought it was safe.

But he probably would have thought differently if he knew Captain Zephyr was on her way to take it from him.

The Sea Breaker was moored up a stones throw from Castle Island. Captain Spears's plan was for he and his pirate crew to get a good night's sleep, and then have the whole next day to search for the treasure shown on his map. He had even made his crew go to bed early, much to their grumbling and complaining.

But as he and his crew were putting on their pajamas,

a little rowboat slowly and quietly stole its way toward their mighty pirate ship.

Captain Z was in that little rowboat, along with a hook and rope, her lamp, and her feathered hat.

As the sky darkened into night, Captain Z pushed right up to the side of the big pirate ship. Swinging her hook around, she threw it up and snagged the railing of the ship. Quick as a wink, and quiet as a mouse, Captain Z climbed up and was on the top deck.

She tiptoed across the deck, toward the door leading below. Carefully, she skipped over squeaky planks and big heaps of tangled rope.

The door gave a little groan as she opened it, but not one of those scoundrel pirates stirred as Sophia slipped below deck.

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What a commotion those pirates made while they were sleeping!

The snoring was so loud that it sounded like a thunderstorm down there.

Captain Z crept past the loud bedrooms and shuffled into the cluttered map room. Maps were everywhere.

They hung on every inch of the walls. They covered the tables and were scattered on the floor. Rolled up maps stuck out of vases and pots and pans. But none of these maps was the one that Captain Z was looking for.

Over in the corner of the room lay a small wooden chest, no bigger than a crab trap. In that chest, Sophia knew, was the map she wanted. The map that showed the way to the treasure of Castle Island.

The chest was locked. Such an important map would be well watched. Captain Z knew that the only key to the chest was strung around Captain Spears's neck. But there's more than one way to steal a map, and luckily for Captain Z, some pirates never think about these other ways.

But she did.

Instead of trying to unlock the chest to get the map, Captain Z simply grabbed the chest in her arms, with the map still inside, and carried it out of the room.

Out of the map room and back down the hall went Captain Z and her new chest. The chest was heavy, but not too heavy to be carried for a few minutes, which is all it would take to get it off the ship. *Yes, Captain Z thought, in a few seconds I'll be off to the island to find the treasure, while this crew is still fast asleep in their pajamas.*

But while Captain Z was smiling to herself and thinking of how smart she was, she forgot to watch where she was going. She reached the steps to the deck but missed the first one. Bam! She tripped and the chest came crashing down, with her behind it.

All of a sudden the snoring stopped. Out of the bedrooms came shouts.

“Avast! Who goes there?”

The frightened captain grabbed her stolen chest and flew out of the door and on to the main deck, slamming the door behind her.

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Captain Z scrambled as fast as she could toward the front of the boat.

The back and forth of the waves and the jumbles of rope nearly made her lose her balance as she looked for a place to hide. She had to get out of sight before the pirates found her with their stolen chest.

Towards the side of the boat she found a loose tarp covering a few crates and barrels. She ducked under the tarp and squeezed herself between two of the barrels. Then she held her breath.

Almost immediately, a slew of pirates burst out of the doorway and onto the main deck. Still sleepy and confused, they stumbled about looking back and forth for whatever could have caused all the ruckus that had woken them.

Peeking out of her hiding spot, Captain Z had to cover her mouth to stop herself from laughing out loud at the way the sleepy pirates were dressed.

They were wearing footie pajamas, like children! The feet on their pj's made them slip and slide around on the deck. The pajamas were blue, or green, or pink. And on each of their heads was a little sleeping cap with a long tail.

They looked more like baby dolls than terrible pirates!

The biggest of them all, the Dread Captain Spears, finally appeared on the deck too, in bright red pajamas. He had ran from his captain's cabin in the back of the ship and was still holding one of his cuddly stuffed animals. It was a little monkey, one of his favorites.

Hissy, his cat, trotted along beside him.

6

Now, there are a pages and pages of stories I could tell of the terrible Captain Spears.

Everyone and their grandmother knows the story of how Spears, in a rage, threw two of his own men overboard just for playing cards. When they were dragged back on board, still spitting and sputtering, Captain Spears just snarled and said, “Ye can play when the workin’s done.”



Then, there was the time he poked a hole in another pirates brand new hat, just because Spears thought the other pirate looked at him funny.

Or, the time he captured ten dolphins and tied their tails together. Then he spent a whole day skiing behind them as they pulled him through the water, shouting “Look at me! King o’ the fishes! King o’ the sea!”

Though, I have to hope he knows dolphins aren’t fish at all. Sometimes pirates aren’t the smartest when it comes to that sort of thing.

Of course this is to say nothing of Captain Spears’s evil red eye.

Some people said it was a magic eye, and could kill a man with only a glance. Others said that Spears was cursed by a witch, and the eye was markings of that spell. Others said that he couldn’t see a wink out of it at all, a blindness caused by a run in with a poisonous jellyfish when he was just a child.

No one knew who was right or wrong about Captain Spears and his eye. But it did seem to glow in the night, like the flame from a candle. And at times it changed color, from red to yellow, or even blue.

The eye only added to the fearfulness other pirates felt when they spoke of Captain Spears.

For every terrible Captain Spears story, there’s a just as

terrible a story about Hissy, the cat that sailed about with Spears, like one of his own pirate crew.

It was said that when Hissy caught mice, it made them walk the plank and then pushed them overboard one by one to watch them fall into the water.

Hissy also liked to grab seagulls out of the air as they circled the ship. It would rip out all the feathers from the heads of these poor birds, and let them go. As such, the only seagulls that still flew around the Sea Breaker were completely bald.

The only person that could pet the mean old cat was Captain Spears himself. Anyone else who tried would get a scratch and a hiss.

There wasn't a more terrible pirate on the seven seas than the Dread Captain Spears. And there wasn't a more frightful cat aboard any ship on earth than Hissy.

And both of these villains, as well as a whole crew of scoundrels, were now looking for Captain Sophia Zephyr.

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Captain Spears's good eye darted back and forth and all around the boat looking for something out of place. He had just woken up out of a wonderful dream, and

his head was still muddled and confused. He hadn't yet thought to check the map room to find out if anything was missing.

When Captain Z saw Spears and his cat, she scooted back under the tarp as far as she could go. It would be an awful thing to be caught on board the Sea Breaker with something belonging to Captain Spears.

She had to escape, but how? She had to try to get to her little row boat before Spears found her.

Suddenly, a great commotion broke out. One of the sleepy pirates had slipped and gotten all tangled up in some of the loose ropes on the deck. While it was just rope wrapped around his legs and arms, in the dark this pirate thought it was the tentacle of a giant octopus that had come up from the depths to drag him into the sea!

"Oh Help! I'm done for! 'Tis a great Kraken come to swallow me whole!" The pirate shouted and flailed his free arm about. His pirate companions were slow to help, fearing such a beast could grab them and pull them under as well.

When they found this screaming pirate was battling nothing more than a piece of rope, they all broke out in laughter (some pirates are mean like that, always laughing at their mates).

"Pray, grab my hand and I'll save you from the mon-

ster!” one of the other pirates called out. The tangled pirate grabbed for a hand, and all the others fell to the floor from laughing so hard.

With all this tomfoolery going on, now was the chance for Captain Z to escape unnoticed.

She crept out from under the tarp with the chest and headed for the side of the ship. Looking over the railing, she saw the little rowboat that carried her here still where she had tied it.

As she turned back around to check that no one was watching her, she met face-to-face with that nastiest of cats, Hissy!

Hissy had jumped up on the railing next to her and stuck its face out to scare her. The cat started up a terrible fit of hissing and meowing. This startled Captain Z such that she stepped backward, tripped over the railing, and went falling head first over the side of the boat.

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Captain Z would be dead and drown, her stolen chest lost for certain, if it weren't for that great tangle of ropes aboard the Sea Breaker.

The same ropes that had allowed her to escape by tangling up the sleepy pirate, had now narrowly saved her life.

As she fell off the side of the ship, some of the rope wrapped around her left foot. Now Captain Z was dangling upside-down by her leg twenty feet below where she started on the deck, but hanging right above her own little rowboat.

What luck!

But time stays still for no man, or woman, as it were. She had to move fast to take advantage of that lucky tangle.

Captain Z dropped her stolen chest into the rowboat, which landed with a bang. She reached up and unloosed the rope coil around her ankle. Then, she dropped down and hit the rowboat with a thud herself.

Sore, but with no bones broken, she put her oars in and started rowing as fast as she could.

A few of the pirate crew poked their heads over the railing to look down at whatever it was that had just fallen off their boat.

They shouted and waved their arms to bring over the rest of the crew.

Captain Z looked up just in time to see the Dread Cap-

tain Spears glaring down at her. His red eye blazing like a bright fire, stoked by his anger.

He stood there and scowled at her for a time, no doubt trying to figure out what to do next. Then he turned and started shouting commands at his crew. “Avast, ya sea dogs! To the aft, double time!” His crew all started running to the back of the ship, and disappeared from Captain Z’s view.

Captain Z focused on her rowing.

The water was too shallow to allow that great giant of a boat, the Sea Breaker, to reach her. Instead, they would have to lower their own rowboats if they wanted to chase.

Captain Z cursed her luck and her clumsy feet for such a disastrous get away. Still, she had the chest, which meant she had the map.

She had the map, once she got the chest open, that is.

Smiling, Captain Z rowed straight for shore. *There’s more than one way to open a chest*, she thought again, *and I have just the key to open this one.*