

L. RON HUBBARD



Under the Black Ensign

GALAXY
PRESENTS

Aboard the Terror

THE marlinespike was inoffensive enough. In capable hands it might possibly have laid a man out. But Tom Bristol had shown few signs of wanting to lay anyone out, and if he had, it is certain that he would not have used a short piece of wood for the purpose. And yet that marlinespike was to be Tom Bristol's passport to piracy.

He was working in the crosstrees of the mizzenmast, hanging on with his toes far above a restless deck, using the spike to splice a length of line which had parted in the storm just past.

From his vantage point he could see the swelling reaches of the serene Caribbean, blue and deceptively cool in the morning sunshine. Far to the west he could see a blue smudge—the mountains of St. Kitts. To the south he had seen the soft whiteness of a sail, but as he was not the lookout, he had paid it no further attention.

Besides, in these busy days of 1680, a man would soon grow hoarse crying every ship in sight. And the British man-o'-war was not interested in immediate combat. The HMS *Terror*—five hundred tons, seventy cannon—was concentrating on the task of taking the Lord High Governor of Nevis back to his island, where he would marry the long-expected Lady Jane Campbell.

When Tom Bristol took in the horizons, a close observer might have noticed a certain hunted look flickering in his eyes—the look of a caged leopard angrily pacing behind bars. It was not prominent, that look, but it was there.

Tom Bristol's belt creaked against the spar and his hands were busy at their task. His bare back rippled as he moved his arms. He thrust the marlinespike between hempen strands, and then glanced down at the deck below.

Several men were standing beside the mizzenmast, and the sun played over their gold lace and polished steel in a blinding fanfare of light. In their center was the Lord High Governor. All Bristol could see of this personage was a circle of black hat brim and the extremity of his paunch.

Something about the way the Lord High Governor tried to brace himself expertly against the roll of the ship—an effort which was succeeding ill—excited Bristol's silent laughter.

The marlinespike, none too tightly held, slid out unobserved. Bristol caught sight of it as it flashed down, far out of reach.

Like a bomb it swooped toward the deck, straight for the Lord High Governor. Bristol gripped the spar, suddenly sick with dread. It seemed that the spike fell forever, but still he could find no time to cry out. The clatter as it struck the white planking beside the Lord High Governor might as well have been a cannon shot.

The officers leaped back. With a shrill scream the Lord High Governor threw his hands across his face—a gesture far from necessary, now that the danger had passed.

Wrathful eyes glared up into the rigging. Bristol stared back, forgetting to breathe. He was not a timid man, far from

it, but he knew his immediate fate just as well as if it had been already announced.

Lieutenant Ewell's roar was louder than a lion's. "Come out of that, you lubber! Get down here!"

Bristol gripped a stay and slid to the deck. He stood up and faced the officers. The Lord High Governor shook with rage.

"You blackguard! You insolent whelp!" shouted the governor. "Trying to murder me? 'Od's wounds, what have you to say for yourself?"

"My marline—" Bristol began, his voice quite steady.

"Shut up!" cried the governor. "It's attempted murder, that's what it is! Attempted murder! You're in the pay of France to kill me. I see how it is now. I see how it is!"

Captain Mannville, his arrogant face rimmed by a silvery beard, stared holes into Bristol. "We've had trouble with you before, my man. You realize, of course, that your act will not pass without punishment."

Bristol glanced at the others. Their faces were fat and red with soft living, but for all that, the hardness there, those merciless eyes, had sent many a sailor groveling to the deck before them.

Not that this was a particularly cruel set of officers. Perhaps they were even more kindly than the average of the Royal Navy. But this was 1680, and the tide of lust for empire had swung high in the great nations of the world. Human life was nothing. Compassion was almost forgotten. Britain was setting herself to rule the seas, and Spain was setting the example for bestiality.

The Lord High Governor—late of the London courts, where he had been Sir Charles Stukely, gentleman-in-waiting to the King—planted his feet wide against the persistent annoyance of a swinging deck and breathed hard, as though trying to stifle ungentlemanly wrath.

“Flogging takes it out of them,” said Sir Charles. “If we let this insult pass, God knows the results upon the rest of this mangy scum.”

Captain Mannville nodded. “Ah, yes. Flogging. Bristol, stand to the mast and prepare yourself for a hundred lashes.”

Bristol’s steadiness deserted him. He stepped back, found the rail, and supported himself with it. His face was a little gray through his dark tan. The brisk trade wind was in his light brown hair, ruffling it.

“A . . . a hundred lashes, sir? My God, it’s death!” Through his mind ran the scenes of other floggings. Thus far he had escaped that ever handy cat-o’-nine, used in all navies to maintain discipline. No man had lived through a hundred lashes.

“A hundred lashes!” cried Sir Charles. “Perhaps that will teach the fool to respect the persons of his betters. That murderously thrown belaying pin might have snuffed out my life!”

A marlinespike is hardly a belaying pin. Something in the remark gave Bristol strength. After all, he, Tom Bristol, was a sailor, and this Sir Charles was a landlubber. The contempt possessed by all sailors came to Bristol’s aid.

Pushing himself away from the rail and standing up straight,

he looked the Lord High Governor in the eye. "It happens, sirrah, that the marlinespike fell quite by accident. But had I known that it would fall, I am certain that I would have pitched it more accurately."

Sir Charles' face became dangerously purple again. He grew in size, his fat width puffed out, his voice broke through the bonds of his rage.

"You . . . you address me as 'sirrah'? You intimate that . . ." He was speechless. His eyes threatened to pop out on his cheeks.

"Silence, Bristol!" said Captain Mannville. "For that insolence you shall receive an additional hundred lashes."

Bristol turned on him. His eyes were reckless now. There was something wild and vibrant about him as he stood there, like a fine steel blade quivering.

"A hundred lashes more?" cried Bristol, almost laughing. "I'll be dead in the first seventy-five! And while I'm still able to talk, Mannville, there's something I have to say which might interest you."

"Silence!" cried Mannville, his hand on the butt of his pistol.

"Go ahead and shoot! The quicker the better!"

Bristol was aware of faces outside the circle. Men of the crew were staring at him, unable to believe that anyone would have the courage to speak thus to *gentlemen*.

"Five months ago," said Bristol, "I went ashore in Liverpool. Before I even entered a tavern, I was set upon by your press gang and dragged out to this ship. When I tried to protest, you had me thrown in irons.

“Mannville, it has never made any difference to the Royal Navy who manned its men-o’-war. In my home port, I am listed as dead. My ship sailed without me.

“Press ganging may have some justification when applied to men on the beach, but it happened, Mannville, that I was first mate of the bark *Randolph* out of Maryland.”

“Silence!” cried Mannville again. He was having some difficulty looking this man in the eye, and that fact did little to improve his temper.

“I demand that this insolent wretch be punished instantly!” bellowed the Lord High Governor. “First he tries to murder me, and then he dares to speak this way to officers of the King!”

Mannville stepped back and made a sign to two British marines. They fell upon Bristol and carried him swiftly to the mast. Two lines were ready there for any man who might be unlucky enough to be flogged. These were immediately made fast to Bristol’s wrists.

Facing the mast, his arms drawn above him painfully tight, he felt the hot sun on his bare back. He saw the quartermaster step forward. In the quartermaster’s hand was the cat-o’-nine.

Originally the cat-o’-nine-tails was merely a collection of thongs held together in a short handle. But the Royal Navy had changed all that. This cat-o’-nine had brass wire wound about the ends of the thongs, and the brass was tipped by pellets of lead.

Wielded by brawny quartermasters, the cat-o’-nine was responsible for more deaths than scurvy or gunshot.

The captain stepped back. Sir Charles moved a little closer.

The Lord High Governor's eyes were brittle hard, like polished agate.

The lash went back with a swift, singing sound. Bristol clenched his teeth and shut his eyes, expecting the white-hot flash of pain.



*Bristol clenched his teeth and shut his eyes,
expecting the white-hot flash of pain.*