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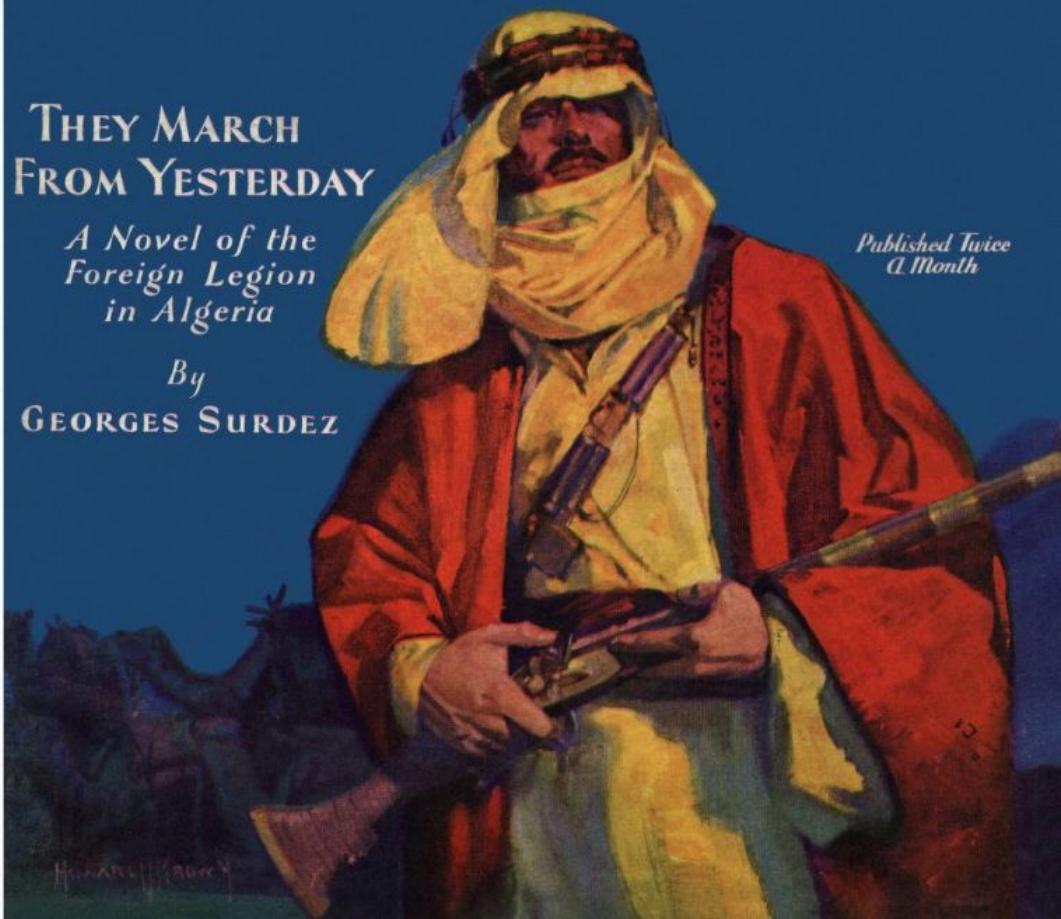
Adventure

THEY MARCH
FROM YESTERDAY

*A Novel of the
Foreign Legion
in Algeria*

By
GEORGES SURDEZ

*Published Twice
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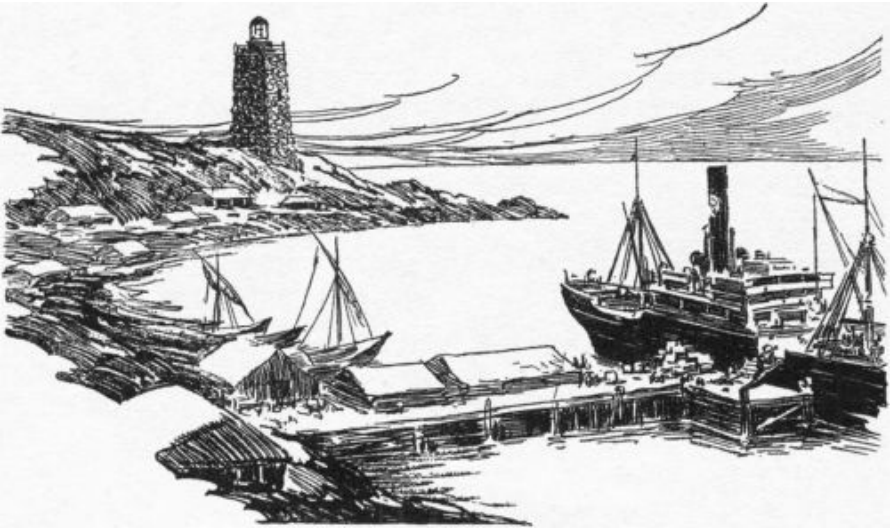
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CAPTAIN ROSE *and* *the* BULLFROG

A Story of the China Sea

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

First published in *Adventure*, March 1st, 1930.

The good ship *Ayuthia* was old and small, and rolled magnificently, and was filled with ants and rats and cockroaches, all of them champions for size. As the rice paddies and the mud flats of Saigon fell behind and merged with the horizon, a great and mournful melody arose from the two-score bullocks crammed into her forward well deck; they knew, those sad Indo-Chinese bullocks, that they were destined to fill the bellies of convicts. For the *Ayuthia*, bound for Singapore, would stop *en route* at the penal settlement, Pulo Coudore.

Others than the bullocks knew it also.

It was the southwest monsoon, and even the fresh sea wind was very warm. Captain Rose, comfortable enough in his faded pink pajamas, stood on the bridge chewing at his pipestem and plumbing the depths of his single passenger. Captain Rose, pock marked and bulbous nosed, whisky veins in his red cheeks and very strong of breath whenever he came on deck, was no beauty, and no saint either; but he was the proud possessor of a Board of Trade master's ticket, and twenty years of the China coast and parts adjacent, together with their native liquors, had enabled him to handle a ship blindfolded. Also, they had taught him to know a strong fish by the smell; and overnight he had concluded that Monsieur Hermant was a strong fish.

Hermant was a tall, lean, dark man, handsome in a saturnine way with his thin lips and direct, piercing dark eyes; square shouldered, thin in the hips, with the laziness of hidden

agility in every move he made. He smoked whitish Dutch cheroots, which Captain Rose detested. And he stood the rolling deck like a seaman, which the skipper distrusted, having a conviction that no bullfrog could be a proper seaman. This, perhaps, because his mate was a pot bellied and sad eyed Frenchman from Bretagne, Kerguelec by name.

“Pulo Coudore, eh?” said Hermant. He spoke fluent English. “I did a year there as a *fonctionnaire*, when I was in the civil service. A rather attractive place, that. But don’t you feel a slight sympathy with those poor convicts, doomed to spend long years on that coral reef in the middle of the ocean?”

“Not a bit of it,” said Captain Rose, puffing at his briar to down the flavor of the abominated cheroot. “Not a bit of it. Deserve all they get.”

Hermant inspected him half amusedly.

“But do they really?” he said, in his drawling voice. “Most of them, you know, are only deputies.”

“Eh? Deputies?” queried the skipper.

“Yes. All natives. A rich Tonkinese desires to carve out his neighbor’s insides and, say, appropriate his neighbor’s wife. He does it scientifically. The police step in, the inspector investigates. Up bobs a poor coolie who confesses to the crime, with appropriate excuses; and twenty professional witnesses appear who saw him commit the crime. He is sentenced, say, to ten years penal servitude. He departs. At the end of ten years or so, if he is still alive, he returns home and the rich man provides the promised sum of money. The singular white man’s law is satisfied, the rich man is satisfied, and the poor coolie is satisfied. Of course, should he die before the ten years are up, then he loses. The gambling instinct is strong, and adds flavor to the business. It’s really quite sporting.”

“Huh!” said Captain Rose. “It’s damned foolishness, if you ask me. Dishonest.”

“Were you never dishonest?” asked Hermant softly, looking at the horizon.

“No,” said Captain Rose flatly, and removed his pipe to spit over the rail. “No! I’ve pulled a trick now and then, maybe; a bit o’ smuggling or worse, but plain crooked. Nothing dishonest; too much like sneakin’, if you ask me.”

Hermant laughed a little.

“A singular joke, Captain—”

“Joke?” Captain Rose uttered certain foul and emphatic language. “Lookee, now! That there, what you just said, is French law for you. Aye, French!”

“This is not France,” said Hermant. “Not all the convicts are deputies, of course; many of them are honest convicts.”

“I’ve a damned sight more respect for ’em,” said the skipper.

“Nonsense,” and Hermant brushed Captain Rose and his ethics clear aside, as it were, with the one word. “Suppose you had a chance to help one of those deputy convicts escape, get away from the place, and make money doing it; would you assent?”

Captain Rose turned and stared blankly at him.

“Assent? Assent? And what for would I risk my ticket and my ship and my life, maybe, to help a lousy native escape? Wouldn’t be worth it.”

“Hm! It might be worth it,” said Hermant, and paused briefly. “For instance, I know of a man there on Pulo Coudore, a typical case. Let us call him Koh Prap. Serving a life term. He got hired to do the job, took a false name, and was sent up for life instead of for two or three years as he figured. He’s supposed, in his district, to be working somewhere up in Siam. What happens? A little piece of bare hill land he owned proves to have a vein of rich tin; an open

cast mine develops there. The royalties pile up and can't be touched until some years are past and he's legally dead. Only his close relatives know that he's serving a life sentence on Pulo Coudore under the name of Koh Prap. So they come along and offer you, maybe, a hundred pounds, English money, to help Koh Prap get away by using your boat."

"And they'd jolly well get a kick in the pants for their pains," said Captain Rose hotly. "The chap gambled and lost. I'm not the man to help him sneak out of it."

There was an emphatic finality about this argument. Hermant frowned faintly.

"Well, the relatives can't touch any of that money until Koh Prap turns up to claim it," he said. "They've tried all sorts of tricks, even to inventing another Koh Prap; but when it comes to letting loose of money, Frenchmen are pretty cautious. Suppose they offered you five hundred pounds?"

"Or a thousand," said Captain Rose. "What's a thousand quid? Too much money to be had honestly in a day or two, that's what. Do you suppose a man like me'd risk his ticket and his ship on a sneakin' job like that. Do you, now?"

"But you'd smuggle," said Hermant.

"That's different," said Captain Rose stoutly.

"How is it different? It's breaking the law."

"Huh! A fool parliament or governor or somebody says, 'Don't you dare do this or that, or we'll clap you in jail if we catch you at it!' That's no law. That's a defiance. Like the liquor law in America. Makes a chap go do it, especially if he clears a bit o' money at it."

"But helping a poor devil get away to freedom, from a life sentence—"

"Is a sneakin' proposition," declared Captain Rose. "And if any chap came to me and made it flat out, I'd kick him in the pants. Yes, sir—and take my fist to him, to boot!"

With such unmistakable emphasis was this said that Hermant sighed, threw up his hands and walked away with a shrug of utter mystification. He could not comprehend this English captain's code in the least. He even doubted strongly whether Captain Rose had sensed the bait dangled before his bulbous nose.

He need not have worried. The skipper was nobody's fool. Captain Rose was the type of man, however, who has a certain odd code and can not be swerved from it by logic or gold; a most unreasonable code, if you like, but one to be fought for stoutly and never denied even under torture, mental or physical, simply because it was part of himself.

And whether you subscribe to the man's code or not, whether you think the man a hero or a damned fool, at least you are bound to admire him. For, when you get right down to bed rock, very few of us have any convictions which we think worth fighting for.

Hermant did not waste any more words and time with the skipper. He realized that words were useless, and his time was short, since the sea road from Saigon to Pulo Coudore is not a long one, even for an old misbegotten tub like the *Ayuthia*.



The only other pure white man aboard was Kerguelec, a Breton; and being French, Hermant knew that Bretons can make an excellent living and save money, even in Scotland. Kerguelec was lazy and fat and predatory. He had been with the ship only one voyage, and had already conceived a violent dislike of the skipper, which was more than repaid in kind. So Kerguelec did not require any great persuasion to coincide with Hermant's way of thinking as regarded a

hypothetical Koh Prap, or anything else. And Hermant had a way with him when it came to inspiring confidence in his abilities.

That afternoon Hermant might have been observed—but was not—in converse with certain coolies of the crew, and with the halfcaste second mate, and even with the chief engineer. His conversations had nothing to do with the matter, of course, but instead of making Pulo Coudore that same day, the *Ayuthia* wallowed with helpless engines, and wallowed all night, and wallowed well into the next morning, with the mountain peak of Pulo Coudore breaking the horizon, tantalizingly in sight but unreachable.

When her wallow ended and she got under way again, Captain Rose was nearly apoplectic, for now he could not get into the East Bay much before sunset, and since no unloading would be permitted at night, could not hope to get rid of his bullocks and freight before sometime in the following day.

Monsieur Hermant, however, looked very well pleased with himself. And Captain Rose observed it. The skipper went down to his own cabin, locked the door and sat down. He looked at himself in the cracked mirror, rather disgustedly, and got out a bottle, then put the bottle away again.

“Cat that’s licked the cream, that’s him,” he muttered, and stuffed his pipe with well teased plug cut. “Somethin’s up; no more drinking just now, Skipper. Hm! I wondered why this bullfrog was takin’ passage aboard us.”

Captain Rose smoked out his pipe, then shaved and got into clean pajamas and sent the steward to ask Hermant to his cabin. Presently Hermant sauntered in and nodded genially.

“Shut the door, sir,” said the skipper, and eyed his passenger steadily. “Now, I’ve figured this thing out. You used to be stationed at the Island, you know the ropes, and you’ve been hired to get this what’s-his-name away. Is that the ticket?”

Hermant looked astonished.

“What are you talking about, Captain?”

“About this beggar you were wanting me to take off—this Pap chap. None o’ your tricks, now!”

A laugh broke from Hermant.

“Why, Captain, you misunderstood! I didn’t want you to take any one off. We were just having a talk about the ethics of the thing; the case I laid before you was purely hypothetical.”

“Hypo what?” said Captain Rose. He took a big .45 from his drawer and laid it on his desk shelf. “Whatever it is, I think you’re a liar, and that’s flat. You’re slick, and I’m not; but no bullfrog is comin’ aboard this ship and running her—not while I’m here. If there’s any more talk about gettin’ one of these beggars away from Pulo Coudore, then you’ll run foul of a gun—and the authorities. Is that clear?”

The lean, sardonic features of Hermant remained as impassive as mahogany, but his dark eyes regarded the skipper very steadily.

“Your position is clear, sir,” he rejoined, and bowed slightly. “I regret that you took my light words in earnest.”

“I took ’em as they were meant,” said Captain Rose, “and no mistake about it, neither.”

Hermant bowed again and withdrew in silence.

The dignified air of his passenger, and his reception of what was undeniably provocative language, rather took Captain Rose aback. He went up to the bridge and the second officer, who had the deck, said in his sleek halfcaste way that they would be at anchor by sunset, whereat the skipper snapped an oath at him and went over to the port rail and stood there

staring at Pulo Coudore. His faded blue eyes were very bright and clear and hard, which meant that he was in no mood to be spoken to.

As a matter of fact, Captain Rose was trying to reason with himself as he looked at the nine-mile main island, with its heavily timbered peaks mounting into the sky, and its attendant smaller islets. No convict had ever escaped from Pulo Coudore, and none ever would, he told himself; it was just impossible. The French had no boats except a rowboat and lighters. There were few natives on the island. The waters around were famous for huge sharks. No one was allowed ashore from visiting ships. And there you were. Even the *Ayuthia* would be boarded and guarded by black Colonial troops while she discharged cargo. And what could that slick bullfrog hope to do under such circumstances?

Captain Rose scowled at the island, where, in 1705, the sepoy of the East India Company's garrison had murdered all the whites except two, and decamped. He had heard of this massacre, and it occurred to him that Britishers had no luck in these islands anyhow.

"Well, if there's any scheme in that bullfrog's head, I've settled it for him now," thought the skipper, as the cool breeze calmed his choler. "He couldn't do anything without my help, and knows he won't have that; any blasted nigger that hired out as a convict and then comes into money and goes back on his bargain gets none o' my sympathy!"

He did not see the mate, Kerguelec, come up to the bridge, look at him standing there, then turn around and vanish again. He did not see the scowling look directed at him by the second officer; and he would not have cared a tinker's dam if he had seen either one. To him, the *Ayuthia* was his ship alone, and he alone was accountable for everything she did, and for what was done aboard her; and behind his bulbous nose, his veined cheeks, his hard and clear blue eyes, was a bulldog's stubborn spirit. Captain Rose could be, and was, pretty much of a scoundrel when he so liked, and Holy Joes had called him some stiff names; but he had never been called weak or irresolute or crafty.

The afternoon was waning when the old *Ayuthia*, chugging in among the islets, headed about for the red roofed rectangular Hon Bai Kan light on its high elevation, seven hundred feet above the sea, and drew in between the light and East Point, taking the northeast channel, since she was bound for the inner anchorage.

The bay opened up. There was the little pier with its rowboat and lighters, and behind it the white, red roofed buildings; back of this, again the native village and the sharply rising mountain, thick grown with small trees and brush. Kerguelec, who was new to this landfall, took the wheel himself while Captain Rose stood beside him as pilot.

"Now, Mister, look out for a three-fathom patch in the fairway," said the skipper, and pointed. "See that rocky elevation on the hill to the south? Keep it bearing 263° until that white marker on the shore yonder is bearing 230°; aye, now you have it rightly, Mister! Bring it ahead, now, bring it ahead; haul around to the nor'west, slow, now—there's a rock awash on the north side! Haul around, you blasted fool—can't you understand English? That's the way. See that radio station on the hill? Anybody'd look fine hauling off some o' them convicts, eh? Her call is FPR, and I'd hate to have her sending out for a gunboat to chase me, I would! Steady, now—need to have that landing pier bearin' 193! Here, give me that wheel and get to your station, blast you!"

So Captain Rose took the wheel, attended to the engine room signals himself, and the *Ayuthia* came to rest in the sunset glow, with a rattle of chain through the hawse. The sad bullocks, looking off at the shore, bellowed mournfully.

The rowboat was already putting out from the pier with a white uniformed official aboard, and Captain Rose was presently receiving his visitor—who shook hands warmly with Hermant before greeting the skipper. There was a drink down below, a talk about nothing, and the official, with many regrets that the unloading could not be accomplished that day, went ashore, thinking Captain Rose something of a boor.

The skipper went below and had a drink. After all, he reflected, there would be no escape from this place; it was quite impossible. Provided one of the beggars took a chance on the sharks and was hauled aboard, there was the cable to Cap St. Jacques and the radio station besides, so even a fool bullfrog would know it was a hopeless job. Besides, any one who escaped that night would be missed in the morning, and soon collared. With which comfortable, and entirely correct, reflection, Captain Rose retired for the night to a deck chair on the after bridge deck; his own cabin got entirely too much aroma from the bullocks in the forward well deck. And the fixed white light seven hundred feet above the sea shone all night like a blazing star to keep him company.

With morning the outer reefs were lines and eddies of white foaming blue; a cable was borne out by the rowboat and made fast aboard, and along this the two lighters were dragged by laughing, chattering convicts, very cheerful in their simple uniforms, as they pulled themselves out, hand over hand.

A dozen white clad negroes, colonials, with pistols at their belts, came aboard the *Ayuthia* and stationed themselves at rails and gangways; the winches rattled, the booms were swung out, the hatches taken off. The officer in charge of the detachment mounted to the bridge deck and stretched out comfortably in a chair beside Monsieur Hermant, who was watching proceedings lazily, and the two men chatted.

Aboard swarmed the convicts; to them, poor simple souls, this was a lark, and with gay chatterings in all the tongues of Indo-China they went to work getting the bullocks slung down into the lighters. Some of them scattered through the ship, begging food, offering for sale their coral and balloon fish and shells; there was a good deal of hilarity, and very little supervision. Escape was impossible, and all hands knew it.

So the bullocks were got rid of at last, and it came the turn of the cargo. All this while Captain Rose stood at the break of the bridge, vigilant and alert, clad now in his uniform whites, the jacket pocket bulging ominously. Nothing occurred to reward his keen glances, however, and he soon relaxed, handing out coppers to the convicts who begged from him, and buying a few odds and ends of coral or dried balloon fish.

The work was drawing to a close when a laughable incident took place. A group were scuffling on the forward deck, convicts and crew intermingled, and three or four of them pitched down headlong into the hold. There were screams of mirth in shrill voices, and one by one all emerged, unhurt. The work went on, Captain Rose watching while the second mate and a shore official tallied off the cargo.

It never occurred to any one, naturally, that in the trifling fall of a few men into the hold might lie something much greater; something, in fact, pregnant with life and death to more than one man, and with far reaching consequences.

So the work came to an end, and the convicts were tallied off; counted like cargo or bullocks as they crowded into the lighters; and dragged their way ashore once more, to their lonely island life. The papers were signed and taken care of. The officer shook hands all around and went ashore with his detachment; and the moment the rowboat was clear of the ship, Captain Rose sighed in relief. Then he lifted his voice in a bellow, and the *Ayuthia's*

cable began to come in, and there was all kinds of confusion and noise, with winches rattling and booms being stowed and lashed and hatch quoins being hammered in place.

In five minutes she was standing about for the harbor mouth. Captain Rose, from the port side of the bridge, looked at the idly reclining figure beneath the awning and sniffed in triumphant disdain. Monsieur Hermant, smoking his inevitable cheroot, regarded the skipper with a lazy look and smiled to himself.



The crew of the *Ayuthia* was made up of all sorts of brown men, but they had not been picked at random. Captain Rose had done the work himself, and he had put the best ones into the black gang with intention.

He did not love his chief engineer; indeed, he browbeat and overawed him. And, being an Eurasian, the chief did not have enough backbone to stand up for his rights and make Captain Rose respect and like him. Instead, he hated secretly, after the manner of his breed, and let the skipper boss the engine room as no white chief engineer would have allowed for a minute.

These things had an important bearing upon events.

The *Ayuthia* had not come out of her way, as the Coudore group lies almost in the true Saigon and Singapore route. The rocky group was dropping out of sight over the horizon by noon, for a couple of hours saw her unloading finished; and Captain Rose, blessing the cool sea wind, turned in for a drink and a bit of sleep. Nor did he take the drink alone, for he met his mate, Kerguelec, in the passage; and being a man who sincerely wanted to be friends with all hands, he asked the Breton in with him, and they drank together heartily.

Oddly, perhaps, Captain Rose never forgave the man that drink, for he himself believed firmly that there was no viler sin than hypocrisy in the glass. And he was soon enough in discovering the extent of Kerguelec's friendship for him.

Eight bells, four in the afternoon, saw the skipper climbing on deck after another good drink. He looked things over pretty carefully, to be sure everything was stowed; for as he was wont to say, you never can depend on a bullfrog seaman for very long. He found nothing at which to cavil forward, and went back along the bridge deck for a look aft. He passed Hermant, sprawled lazily beneath the awning, and nodded genially, for he was never a man to cherish a grudge unless he thought he had reason to do so.

When he looked down at the after well deck he saw something that first drew his curious glance, then his scowling attention—and finally his presence.

Engine room watches had changed and the black gang were sluicing themselves off with cool water and capering around with shrill voiced mirth. Now, Captain Rose had not been twenty years in these seas for nothing, and he knew each of his dish faced brown men by sight. His eyes grew hard and bright as he looked. Then he deliberately descended the ladder, and noted grimly how, at sight of him, the men there dived for their clothes, though they were doing nothing forbidden. When he reached the well deck they were struggling with their scanty raiment.

Captain Rose walked up to one of them, who was screwing himself into an unaccustomed coat, and swung him around by the shoulder. He was a meek little chap, meeker even than a Malay—or rather, than a Malay appears to be.

“What's your name, you?” said the skipper, in what he called French.

“Nam Trang, m'soo,” came the response.

“You’re a liar!” retorted Captain Rose. “Nam Trang had a scar clear across his chin. Come on, now—what’s your name?”

The Annamese looked at him fearfully and shrank away. The gaze of Captain Rose widened.

“What’s all this!” he exclaimed. “Why, you ain’t even one o’ my hands! I thought you looked queer to me. Cochin China, or I’m a Dutchman! You’re not from Annam, eh?”

“From Kamaut, m’soo,” faltered the brown man, after a glance around. All his companions had fled.

“Huh!” exclaimed the skipper. Color came into his face suddenly, until he seemed in the throes of some inner convulsion. “Blast me—what’s your name, huh? Is it Pap?”

The mild little man smiled at this.

“Koh Prap, m’soo—”

“Oh, Captain Rose! I say, Captain, would you step up here a minute?”

The skipper turned. Above, at the bridge ladder, he saw Hermant standing. It all came over him then in a flash—all of it. Impossible it was, rankly incredible; yet none the less a fact. The job had been pulled off under his nose, somehow. And there was Hermant intervening, cool, impassive, insolent; the chap must have scented trouble.

Captain Rose walked to the ladder and ascended silently. Hermant smiled in his sardonic way; he saw only a bulbous nosed, somewhat wheezy, rather apoplectic seaman. There was a good deal he did not know about seamen.

“Well?” said the skipper, when he came to the upper deck. There was nothing menacing about him, except that he was breathing a bit hard.

“You have uncovered the ruse,” said Hermant, smiling a little.

“I’ve uncovered the skunk, you mean,” said Captain Rose. “Koh Prap—is that the chap you were set on bringing off?”

Hermant nodded.

“Yes. And now that it’s all over, Captain, you might as well accept the situation gracefully. You can still profit well by it. Not so well as you might have done, of course, since I had to take your officers and some of the crew in on this. But you’ll find everything satisfactory.”

The skipper’s features slowly purpled, yet he managed to restrain himself.

“And just how,” he asked, “did you turn the trick? Those convicts were counted off.”

Hermant chuckled.

“How else? The same old way, Captain. A chap hired out to take Koh Prap’s place ashore. He’s one of the men you hired at Saigon. His family get the money, he stays on the island for a time, then confesses; he won’t get a long sentence. They won’t discover the error for quite a bit, if they ever do before he confesses. Clever, eh?”

“I said you were a slick ’un,” returned Captain Rose. “Come on for’ard.”

Amused, curious at this reception of the news, Hermant sauntered along. The *Ayuthia* did not boast of a bridge proper—merely a pilot house at the forward end of the bridge deck. Captain Rose stepped to the starboard ladder, then turned.

“I warned you what you’d get if you put this job over,” he said, almost calmly. “There’s the ladder, and you stay off this bridge in future.”

Hermant got his promised reward.

It was no mere kick, no polite Gallic kick; it was not even a vicious kick; it was just such a strong, sturdy, unexpected lift of the boot as Captain Rose would have applied to any insolent foremast hand—and calculated for effect, not for looks. Hermant staggered under the impact,

caught at the ladder rail, then whirled. Captain Rose kicked him again—and abruptly had a fight on his hands.

As a fight, it was neither long nor spectacular; though this was not the fault of Hermant. He drove in with sudden savagery—his features were contorted into a vicious and frightful mask of fury—and in this flashing instant of attack the skipper sensed swift and deadly peril, for the Frenchman had fallen into a fighting crouch and meant business. Captain Rose meant business too, and was more direct in his methods. Hermant ran into an upthrust knee and something smashed under his long jaw, and as he staggered, a heavy fist took him squarely amidships and knocked him down the ladder to the deck below like a sack of meal. For all his age and looks, Captain Rose was entirely ready and able to take on any bullfrog going.

With a satisfied grunt the skipper turned about and strode into the pilot house, where Kerguelec and a brown man gaped at him. He gave one curt order.

“Eh?” Kerguelec, a slow man to get into action, had not comprehended yet what it was all about. “But the course—”

“The course be damned!” said Captain Rose. “Back for Pulo Coudore and land that blasted convict and get Nam Trang aboard. Look alive, now!”

Kerguelec started to speak, then dissembled his scowl, nodded and gave the order. The sun was just touching the western horizon.



Captain Rose ate a very hearty dinner, quite oblivious to the atmosphere around.

The last thing he expected was trouble. Hermant, not particularly damaged by his fall, was keeping to his own cabin; and the skipper did not know that the man had already taken care of every one in sight. In fact, all hands from chief officer to coolie were getting their large or small split of Hermant's money, and the officers did not like Captain Rose anyway, so that it was quickly known to all aboard that they were putting back to the island. The skipper did not order the luckless Koh

Prap confined, for the chap could not escape from the ship, and was only a little brown beggar anyhow.

Captain Rose went to his cabin after supper and entered up matters in the rough log, so as to have everything shipshape. His eyes were open now—when those men fell into the hold, Koh Prap had exchanged clothes with Nam Trang, and that was all. Incredibly simple, and it had worked like a charm.

A knock on the door, and Kerguelec entered, leaving the door open. He came around to one side of the desk so that the skipper, in facing him, had his back to the door.

“Well, Mister,” said Captain Rose, sitting back in his chair and reaching for his pipe, “and what's on your mind, eh?”

“I want to ask you about that man, Koh Prap,” said the Breton stolidly. “Are you going to take him back?”

“Surest thing you know,” answered the skipper.

“Why, Cap'n?” asked Kerguelec, wrinkling up his brow. “Because it is not right to take him away?”

“Huh! No,” said the skipper. “He's just a poor sport, and I ain't risking my ticket and my ship to help him out, that's why. See here, Mister,” he added suddenly, looking up with his keen glance, “why are you so blasted—”

A cloth fell over his head. His arms went up to it and were seized, drawn together, and lashed fast, all in an instant. His feet were caught and made fast to his chair. It was all done swiftly and without a false move, and next moment the skipper was blaspheming in choking darkness, until he had to stop for lack of air.

Then, presently, he heard the soft laugh of Hermant, and squirmed at the sound.

“Now enjoy yourself, Captain,” said the Frenchman, with insolent triumph. “You’re not hurt, and you’ll not interfere. Later on you can set the police after me and be damned to you. Good-by!”

The door slammed.

Captain Rose relaxed and became quiet; he could breathe, and not much more. To sit there with a stifling, dirty cloth flung loosely over his head, wrists lashed together, feet lashed to his chair, was chastening medicine to any apoplectic soul. Fortunately, the cloth was not tied about his neck, or he might well have stifled. He could even tell that the cabin lights were still left burning; and from the squeaking rattle of the chains, knew the *Ayuthia* was changing course. Then she began to wallow and roll, and Captain Rose whistled softly. This wallow meant that she was heading westward. With this realization, he understood everything—even Hermant’s plans.

His chair tipped a little with the wallow and instinctively he tried to brace himself, but of course could not. If it went over, no help for it—he would go as well!

Mutiny? He was not so sure. Hermant was a sly bullfrog and no mistake. Kerguelec was in on it, of course, and every one else aboard, probably. Thought of the mate brought a swirl of fury into the skipper’s brain. Another bullfrog, damn him! Kerguelec had been talking to him, had left the door open, had got his back to it. Then some of them had sneaked in and bagged him, quite literally. Who had done it? He had not the least idea.

Not that it would matter particularly. As Hermant’s story had more than hinted, there was big money involved, and the bullfrog could afford to grease every palm liberally. Beyond any doubt, Kerguelec was heading the *Ayuthia* west for Point Obi; Hermant and Koh Prap and anybody else who might run foul of Admiralty law would skip ashore, and then Captain Rose might have his ship again. Nobody would be hurt, and the story would be a laughing matter rather than an outrage.

“That’s his scheme, and it’s good,” muttered the irate skipper. “Devilish, blasted good! That is to say, from his point o’ view. It ain’t so good from—”

The *Ayuthia* executed a truly beautiful wallow as though imitating a movement from a dance. Captain Rose felt his chair tip up on one side, hesitate—then he and the chair went down together in a crash that hurt his shoulder and head and drew a muffled blast of profanity from him.

With the fall, the cloth over his head fell away. His profanity ceased.

Yes, his cabin was lighted, and the telltale on the ceiling showed the ship was heading west by a half north, as he had figured. He lay there blinking, on his side; the old chair had collapsed in the fall, but enough of it remained together to keep the skipper quite helpless for the moment; also, he was badly jarred. With another roll, he slid in the opposite direction; then came a nice, smooth, apparently unending wallow, and Captain Rose went cursing down the floor to fetch up with another crash against the bulkhead.

“Blast an’ damn it!” he said, with emphasis. Then, “Hullo, now! What’s this?”

This second jarring crash had pretty well finished the chair, which was no William Morris product at best. The top of it came clear out of the seat, which naturally loosened the bit of

line fastening the skipper's right arm, and the left arm came free a moment afterward.

With both his arms free, thirty seconds sufficed to free his ankles, and Captain Rose stood up. He was so overcome that he could not find words; he stood blinking, rubbing his wrists, looking around. With the next roll he gravitated toward his locker, took a good stiff drink straight from the bottle, and looked for his old revolver. It was missing.

"Ah!" said he, and smacked his lips.

He never felt quite right without his after dinner pipe, which he had not yet lighted. He went over to the table, picked it up, struck a match, and braced himself against the ship's roll as he puffed.

"Now, let's see. That blighted bullfrog didn't lock the door—or did he?"

The door was unlocked.

Kerguelec would have his gun, of course; but no matter. The skipper went grimly into his trunk and presently found what he sought—a slungshot he had taken away from a thug on the Rangoon waterfront one night. It was no ordinary slungshot, but a bit of devil's artistry, the weight being slung at either end of a length of stiff, springy rhinoceros hide sewn about a strip of whalebone. Captain Rose had often wondered just what a man could accomplish with this weapon, and now he grunted with satisfaction as he hefted it.

He paused, reflecting. Everything was probably topsy-turvy now; no telling who would have the bridge, or what. So, as minutes counted, he delayed only long enough to get into his uniform whites and pull down his cap; then he pulled open the cabin door and stepped out into the passage, the implement of destruction peeping from his jacket pocket.

The first person he saw was the second officer, just emerging from his own cabin. Captain Rose wasted no talk. The unfortunate halfcaste gaped at him with fallen jaw and stood there paralyzed with astonishment until the skipper's fist knocked him backward, and the skipper followed him into the cabin and stood over him as he lay, not daring to move.

"You this-and-that," said Captain Rose, without mincing words in the least, "so you've taken Hermant's money, huh? Where's your gun?"

"In—in the locker there, sir," stammered the second officer.

The skipper took it, found it to be a loaded automatic, and pocketed it with a grunt of satisfaction.

"You stay here and keep your jaw closed until I send for you," he said, and stalked out of the cabin, turning the key on the outside of the door before departing.

Then he stamped off, making for the bridge, knowing Kerguelec would be there. He felt an exasperated desire to use his fists on that man, but regretfully concluded the slungshot would be safer, at least at the first.

Kerguelec was indeed on the bridge; so was the Eurasian chief, and a Tonkin seaman was at the helm, since the *Ayuthia* far antedated steam controls. The mate and the chief were conferring as to the best place to leave the ship and reach Siamese territory, when a frightened squawk broke from the Tonkinese. He had seen the figure of the skipper rise in the darkness from the starboard ladder. Kerguelec caught the warning and rose, jerking out his gun.

Both doors of the pilot house were open. Captain Rose came in the port door, and came in fast, just as the gun jerked up in Kerguelec's hand. The slungshot struck the mate's wrist, and his bullet went up through the ceiling, and the gun fell from his hand. The chief was whipping out a knife, but he did not use it, for the skipper whirled on him and clipped him twice over the head. The wretched chief engineer collapsed like a limp sack on the cushions of the locker.

"Well, Mister," said the skipper to Kerguelec, "I'm going to learn you a few things."

And, dropping his weapon, he waded into the Breton.

Kerguelec knew his business. He got in two smashing drives over the heart that staggered the skipper, then cracked in a beauty for the jaw, with full weight behind it. Captain Rose ducked, stopped it with his skull, and the mate's wrist snapped. The skipper cracked in a one-two, and Kerguelec, whirling, ducked and dropped to the floor. Captain Rose forgot about the *savate* until the mate's heel took him under the chin and dropped him like a shot.

As he lay, the skipper reached desperately for the slungshot, came up with it, and met the mate's rush squarely. He had been a fool to let go his weapon, and knew it. Now he drove in mercilessly, spat after spat, the deadly springing thing in his hand landing repeatedly until Kerguelec was weaving on his feet and spitting blood and groggy oaths.

"Take your lesson, you blasted bullfrog!" said the skipper grimly, and went ahead with his work. Nor did he cease until Kerguelec slipped to his knees, a bleeding, incoherent mass, and then the skipper disdainfully booted him behind the ear and let him sprawl out on the deck.

"And a good job," said Captain Rose, as he went to the wheel.

He spun it, glanced into the binnacle, and watched the *Ayuthia* swing around on the compass. The Tonkinese had long since fled, and various noises were ringing through the ship, which Captain Rose disregarded. He had to guess at a course for Pulo Coudore, but he was good at such work; presently he grunted with satisfaction, spun over the wheel, and slipped the loops over the spokes.

"Put up your hands, you fool!"

The crackling voice sounded from the starboard door. Captain Rose looked over his shoulder and saw Hermant standing there, gun in hand. Excited chatterings, dim shapes, showed that with Hermant were some or most of the crew, and there was a flash of steel in the starlight.

"Huh?"

Deliberately the skipper thrust his hands into his jacket pockets. Hermant's gun jerked at him.

"Up, I said!" snapped the man, his face tense, dangerous. He took a step forward.

"What'll you do—shoot me?" queried the skipper, getting the automatic in his fist.

Hermant saw the movement, saw the skipper duck sidewise, and fired. The two shots came almost as one. Captain Rose spun about, then fired again as he straightened. The tall figure of Hermant seemed to fall back from the doorway, a splotch of red spreading over its breast.

Then the skipper found them all around him—brown men, naked, knives glinting.

He groaned as steel ripped into his flank; groaned even as he fired, sending bullets pointblank into the crowding figures. He did not even take the automatic from his pocket; his white drill coat flamed until it burned his hand. *Click-click*—and his weapon was empty, brown men still around him.

Another knife reached him—some one in the gang banged out with a revolver, the bullet going high. Then Captain Rose got the slungshot in his fist, and with a grunt hurled himself at the lot of them, and his roaring bellow filled the pilot house as the weapon lashed.

The *Ayuthia* presented a remarkable spectacle as she crawled into the bight of Pulo Coudore toward sunset of the following day.

Captain Rose stood on the bridge. He was not handsome, for he was quite naked except for numerous iodine stained bandages that encompassed shoulder and ribs and thighs. His mate—the former second officer—had a bandaged jaw, and Kerguelec lay on a mattress under

the awning, much more completely bandaged than was the skipper, and with more need. His chief engineer had a head swathed in cloths, and a number of the crew were obviously patched. Up in the bow, out of the way, lay the white figure of Hermant, and the brown figure of Koh Prap, equally dead; and several hurt men were groaning in the forward well deck.

The chain rattled out. Captain Rose saw the rowboat setting off from shore, and with a grunt went into the pilot house and sat down. He had better log this thing in the rough log before he went any farther. He got out the book and pencil, and chewed the latter for an instant, then set down his entry:

This day and date weather fair. Crew mutinied last night, led by passenger and mate and escaped convict. Am landing passenger and convict for burial. Mate going to Singapore for trial. Two ton coal wasted.

He read over his entry, approved it, and thrust away the log.

“That ought to satisfy ’em,” said Captain Rose. “And now I reckon that bullfrog coming off can stand a drink with me, huh? All goes to show that Hermant should ha’ picked another ship to try his tricks on. But I never did see a bullfrog that had good sense. Huh!”

[The end of *Captain Rose and the Bullfrog* by Henry Bedford-Jones]