

## Chapter 33: What goes Around ...

March 4, 1760,  
Kingston, Jamaica

A thick cloud of gunpowder smoke hangs in the air blocking any hope of seeing what's happened during the confrontation. Cannons from six British warships are firing at *Muskie* from close range, each convinced their shots are hitting the target. How could they not? The huge Novan ship is completely surrounded and less than 300 metres (1000 feet) away.

It's survival is inconceivable. Yet, it's the British ships that are being torn apart from hot metal and splintered wood ripping through the cannon decks. The smell of blood and burnt flesh joins the cries of agony. Cries from those unlucky to have not perished immediately when hell rained back through the open gun ports.

Admiral Anson gave the signal to fire, to destroy the Novan ship before the Spanish could board it and claim a prize. True to their training, his men across all six British ships efficiently execute the command, as upper decks fired their 12-pounders first. Then, as the ships rolled from the recoil, the guns on the middle decks followed with their 24-pounders. The 42-pound guns on the lower decks completed the barrage.

A second round of cannon fire usually following within five minutes or less never happens. This battle is devastatingly over. Within two seconds of firing, each cannon aimed to inflict damage on *Muskie* received an unexpected surprise. Its hot cannonball came flying back through the open gun port ricocheting off metal and timber beams. Crew members not immediately struck down faced splintered wood flying through the smoke and misery. Those not immediately fallen work their way through the smoke and stench, a mix of spent gunpowder and blood, to fires breaking out across the broken decks. The floors previously covered in a layer of soaked sand to prevent fires from spreading to any unused gunpowder cannot combat fires across beams and other wood not normally subjected to such devastation.

The warships are designed to sustain hits to their tough outer shell. Only after sustained broadsides might a breach lead to enemy fire damaging the internal structure and set the gundecks ablaze. Tending to the injured is not a priority. The dead are never given any attention. They are often quickly pushed overboard to clear the decks for continuation of the fight. The priority now is to keep the fires from spreading. Encounters with packets of gunpowder that might be strewn about in the chaos are certainly a danger. Fire reaching the powder magazine will mean the end to a ship and everyone onboard.

Anson's horror of what he unleashed magnifies when he looks up from the quarterdeck of his flagship, HMS Royal George, to see the top half of the masts are gone along with their sails. As the cannon smoke

clears, he can see the other British ships have suffered the same fate. He needs to order a retreat while his ships remain afloat and still retain some sailing power. Before he can issue the order, Captain Ricker flying over the battle on airship *Hawk*, sends an LRAD drone with a message:

*Move your ships into Kingston Harbour. They will find safety there. Medical assistance will arrive soon. If you attempt to flee, your ships will be destroyed.*

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Admiral Archer waits impatiently for control of *Muskie* to be relinquished by the Sapiens. Thankful that the shield held against the massive barrage from the British ships, she remains deeply suspicious. Neil Gargano's override of the portal controls may have opened a Pandora's box of complications. She can see the first sign while looking out from her bridge to each of the British warships.

"How did the top half of their masts along with the sails disappear?" she mutters to herself. "Cannon fire bouncing off the shield would not have caused that."

As the British ships slowly begin a retreat to Kingston Harbour, the shield is lowered and control of the bridge returns. Archer is bound by naval ethics to aid the Spanish ships two of which are sinking after ramming head-on into the shield. Their remaining ships will need assistance in helping survivors to escape their watery grave and transfer to the unaffected vessels.

Captain Ambrosio de Funes Villalpando is frozen in shocked disbelief as his ship sinks lower into the sea. With the bow irreparably damaged, his men scramble to evacuate ignoring commands from their officers. It's every man for himself as the small Novan boats pull along side to help. No one is concerned if the crafts will ferry them to the other undamaged Spanish warships or whisk them off to prisons in a foreign land. No one except Captain Ambrosio.

Extra tidbits to be extracted and possibly inserted into future chapters:

Britain is in the middle of its favourite hobby, war with France and other empires.

HMS *Victory*, currently under construction at Chatham Dockyard is destined to be the future of the Royal Navy. When completed, the 3500-ton ship built from 6000 oak trees with 37 sails and 26 miles of rigging will only have a top speed 11 knots (20kmh) and average 1-8 knots in a topgallant gale. Its intended to make an imperial statement, a graceful beast of the empire striking fear in enemy navies from its sheer size and fire power. Its masts will tower 200ft above the waterline.

Like most warships of this era, the inside view will differ radically from the outside. Ventilation will be more a suggestion than reality as 850 men toil to keep the beast operational. In many ways, it will be

more like a coffin packed with human misery, the smell of sweat, death and human waste permeating the lower decks and hold.

Its sailors, roughly half of which will be tricked into serving or kidnapped ... pressganging as its known in the navy, will effectively be prisoners with no escape until released by the navy after a battle or pushed overboard after dying.

They will serve a strictly enforced hierarchy: at the top, officers, educated, powdered and convinced they are better than everyone else; below them are the petty officers and specialist, carpenters, sailmakers, gunners and the ship's cook. At the bottom are the ratings, men who will do the heavy, dirty unsafe work of running the ship.

They know the route to survival on a floating deathtrap: follow orders; don't question authority. It also helps to avoid being near the poop deck during rough seas.

For food, the meat will be salted so heavily it could outlive some of the crew. The biscuits will be so hard they will be soaked in beer before eating. Rum, hope and quickly inflicted discipline will keep the crew from mutiny.