

Interlude CWK: As I Sailed

The office wedged at the back of the *Adventure Galley* was dark beneath the full moon, shut off as it was from the outside, with the thick, velvet curtains drawn across the windows set into its backside. The door was shut, as much for privacy as to muffle the sound coming in from outside, and it left nothing but candles to light the interior of the cabin.

The walls of the cabin were made of a dark, earthy wood, but they glittered and shone in the candlelight, rich with the gold and valuables plundered at sea. Bolts of silk lay atop the furniture, shimmering, festooned with ropes of silver chain and bejeweled studs, and raw bullion sat piled up inside barrels and chests and crates in the corners, mingled with gleaming, polished coin, and it said nothing of the treasures that must have been stashed in the hold or locked away in other safe places, where there was more room to store them. Even the curtains were adorned with opulence, embroidered with fancy designs and fine stitchwork.

These things alone were the value of a king's ransom, more than enough to buy an estate and a comfortable life afterwards. A man could happily have survived off of the profits he would have found selling these things, if only he had had the chance.

At the center of all of this was a large table that took up most of the room that wasn't already bulging with treasure, and atop this table was a map printed on parchment, half-finished and incomplete. Pouring over this map were two men, one adorned far more fancily than the other, dressed in silks and satins under his hardy outer coat and roughspun breeches. A hat hung from the corner of the chair nearest him, and a compass sat nearby the hand he had planted on the table.

His companion, by contrast, was shabby and shady, and standing side by side with the other, he would have looked like a beggar or a pauper, because his tunic was coarser and the layers he wore fewer. The only sign of wealth on his whole body was the scattered bits of gold adorning his fingers, belt, and neck.

The first man, a famous pirate by the name of William Kidd, dragged his finger across the map, frowning down at the scant lines that had been drawn across it. More than once, his fingertip crossed a large swath of blank parchment where there was nothing, not even a smudge where the cartographer might have accidentally placed his hand in the wet ink.

"To the west," he said to the room around him, "unknown."

Captain Kidd swung his finger back around in the opposite direction, and when he stopped, his fingertip had once more landed on a wide, empty stretch of parchment bereft of labels or the meanest hint of geography.

"To the east, unknown."

His finger came down towards his body — another swath of blank space.

"To the south, unknown."

And when he moved his finger upwards, towards his companion who stood across from him, again, it came to rest on nothing.

“To the north, unknown.”

“Would that we had found someone better acquainted with this cesspit,” his companion, a man by the name of William Burke, said ruefully.

Captain Kidd tapped the surface of the map — could it really even be called that? It was more blank parchment than anything else, and it was truthfully missing far too many details to ever justify calling it a real map. So far, it showed Captain Kidd where he and his crew had already been, the geography of the land that they themselves had already witnessed firsthand, and while that was not useless for returning to any of those places, it was useless for finding islands they might not have yet visited.

The ocean was vast, after all, and traditional methods of navigation were simply ineffectual in this strange, backwards place. Compasses didn’t point north, the constellations were constantly in flux, the islands themselves were not even stationary; just about the only thing that could be counted upon was the sun, for it still rose in the east and set in the west.

Finding anything at all in this twisted ocean was more a matter of luck than anything else. Certainly, it had little at all to do with skill.

“Do you think there will be others?” Captain Kidd asked thoughtfully.

“It’s a matter of certainty,” Burke replied. “We’ve already encountered these...hollow men, these phantoms, however easily they were dispatched. It’s only a matter of time until we find other Servants.”

And they will not go down quite so easily as those simulacra did, Captain Kidd concluded, but did not say aloud. They were both thinking it, so it didn’t really need to be said.

“And when we do,” he murmured, “there is no doubt that they, too, will be seeking the same treasure we are. The Holy Grail.”

The greatest treasure of all, an omnipotent wish-granter that could overturn fate and change even things that had been set in stone. The key to fixing the mistakes of Captain Kidd’s life and erasing all of his missteps. So many things that had gone wrong, and he could undo them all as though they had never happened in the first place. History would remember him with *respect*.

As though taunting him, the words filtered through the closed door, quieter but not silenced entirely.

“My name was Captain Kidd!”

“As I sailed, as I sailed!”

“Oh, my name was Captain Kidd!”

“As I sailed!”

Captain Kidd's finger slipped and nearly ripped a hole through the map, such was the intensity of his sudden ire. Anger burst to life in his breast, like a beast attempting to claw its way out of his body, and it lit a fire in his blood that burned his limbs and boiled his brain.

Captain Kidd took in a deep, slow breath, pushing the anger down and away, and he tried to pretend he didn't see the sympathetic look on Burke's face. His friend at least had the good grace not to give voice to whatever thoughts were now in his head, because Captain Kidd could not be sure he wouldn't have struck the man — the foul temper that had been immortalized in history was more exaggeration than not, but that did not mean it was entirely baseless, only that he was not some hot-blooded malcontent liable to fly off the handle and spout venom whenever faced with the slightest provocation.

But neither did *that* mean that William Kidd was an easygoing man who rolled with the punches and let insults slide with grace. Even a reasonable man had limits of what he might tolerate.

"Regardless," Captain Kidd said, "we can't be sure of what sort of opposition we might face. Other Servants, certainly, but we cannot expect that they will all be Riders, nor even possessed of their own transportation, only that they will all be after the same thing."

"Oh, my name was Captain Kidd, and God's laws did I forbid, and most wickedly I did!"

"As I sailed, as I sailed!"

"And most viciously I did!"

"As I sailed!"

Trying his best to ignore the song drilling through the door, he added, "It might even be that more than one teams up for the sake of achieving a common goal."

"Like us, you mean?" Burke said. "A problem, no doubt about that. We're not exactly the sort what can take on all comers without trouble. Might be prudent to see about picking up some allies of our own."

Where? Captain Kidd wanted to ask. It came back to the same problem: they didn't have any idea where to look for any such allies, because there was nothing for them to rely on to find them. What use was a map for navigating new places when it could only show where you personally had been?

Captain Kidd's hand shifted. Well. Perhaps they didn't have *nothing* on which they might rely, but there were limits to how useful their tools would be.

"And if we take the time to gather allies of our own," Captain Kidd said, thinking of the flaws of that plan, "we may find that we will have given our enemies too much time to consolidate their own powers. It may, in fact, be more prudent to strike swiftly and soon, instead of searching for safety in numbers."

"Except we haven't the slightest clue how long those other Servants have been around," Burke pointed out. "Could very well be that we're the latecomers to this little party and most of the rest have already formed their teams. We'd be on the backfoot."

A damnably good point. They had already met one such team, after all, even if the encounter had gone less than smoothly and the two of them had walked away thoroughly chastened. Captain Kidd couldn't say that he much enjoyed feeling like a child being scolded by his mother, but in lieu of more concrete options...

"My parents taught me well!"

"As I sailed, as I sailed!"

"My parents taught me well!"

"As I sailed!"

Captain Kidd's brow twitched, but once more, he mastered himself well enough to keep the anger bottled up inside of him instead of letting it explode. Instead, he dragged his finger back over to one of the few islands that was inked out on the map, although calling that collection of blots separated by shallows an island was perhaps a bit of a misnomer.

"If we're seeking allies," he said, "then it might behoove us to revisit that little hideout and negotiate."

"With *that* lot?" Burke asked incredulously. "Pardon the insinuation, but are you mad, Will? You want to go back to *those* people?"

No, but they weren't precisely faced with a glut of options, were they? It may be the better course to seek out allies that they knew existed instead of hoping they might miraculously stumble upon some who happened to align with their views and goals more cleanly. Better to have allies at all than to go about and lose looking for ones they *liked*.

Seizing the Grail was what mattered. What difference did it make whether or not the ones who helped him do it were the sort of folk he would happily go and drink with afterwards?

Burke, perhaps seeing Captain Kidd's thoughts written on his face, went on, "Will, forget about that crazy bitch who almost killed us, or the other crazy bitch who wanted to make you a pin cushion, that asshole nearly swindled us out of all of our treasure!"

"My parents taught me well, to shun the gates of Hell, and against them I rebelled!"

"As I sailed, as I sailed!"

"Against them I rebelled!"

"As I sailed!"

"And what use is ordinary gold and silk to us, Burke?" Captain Kidd snapped. "Did you, by chance, happen to see an English port for us to anchor in? Mayhaps you found a governor willing to lend us a sympathetic ear? Did you receive letters of pardon from the King that you've yet to tell me about?"

"You know very well that I haven't," Burke replied sourly.

“Then what might we spend our treasures on?” Captain Kidd asked peevishly. “You’ve been here with me the entirety of our stint in this slice of Hell, and not once have we glimpsed the slightest sign of civilization on these islands. Gold is little more than pretty rocks if we’ve nothing to spend it on, and silk nothing but a comfort on the cold nights in our beds — if we even had need of sleep!”

“Your point is made,” said Burke. “Fine. The treasure doesn’t matter. I’m still not so sure we want to be shacking up with those lunatics.”

Captain Kidd sagged, and a breezy sigh left his mouth. “In that, at least, you might be right.”

How ironic it was. The *Quedagh Merchant* was, in many ways, the crowning achievement of Captain Kidd’s life. It had been largely forgotten in the wake of the other parts of it that had become more famous after his death, but taking the *Merchant* and its valuables was the capstone to William Kidd’s career as a privateer. If he had but the chance to make any use of it at all, Captain William Kidd may have gone down in history as the most successful pirate to ever sail. Petty politics and a miscarriage of justice were the only things that had prevented it.

And now? Even with that vast treasure at his fingertips and no political tomfoolery to doom him, he might as well have a collection of mud. Without a place to spend any of it, their value was the same, which was to say, worthless.

“The trouble is that we’ve a dearth of options to choose from,” Captain Kidd went on. “Can we afford to be particular about who it is we ally with when that group is the only other Servants we know of that we can be sure care little enough for the Holy Grail?”

Therein lay one of the biggest dangers of seeking out other allies in the unknown: the uncertainty of whether or not they would be rivals seeking the same goal. It was not that Captain Kidd much minded the idea of sharing — indeed, if the Grail had the power to grant more than one wish, Captain Kidd would happily hand it over after his was made. The problem was that he much preferred knowing where he stood and whether or not he should expect a knife in the back.

The very last thing he wanted was to face another mutiny.

“Oh, I murdered William Moore!”

“As I sailed, as I sailed!”

“Oh, I murdered William Moore!”

“As I sailed!”

Captain Kidd’s cheek twitched, and the fingers of one hand curled into a fist as his other pressed his fingertips deep into the parchment of the map. He sucked in a deep, trembling breath, trying to calm himself.

It wasn’t working.

“It might be better to know that we couldn’t trust our allies over knowing that their goals are different from ours,” Burke was saying, but Captain Kidd could barely hear the words over the

thundering of his pulse in his ears. “At least in that way we could be sure that they wouldn’t stab us in the back until we had the Grail in our hands.”

Captain Kidd gritted his teeth and drew in a sharp breath through his nose. An intrusive thought lingered, that this would be far more effective at soothing his temper if he were flesh and blood instead of a clump of manifested magical energy. If his lungs were real and his heart was real and his brain was real.

If he was a living, breathing person. If he hadn’t been *executed* in the name of political expediency.

“I murdered William Moore, and I left him in his gore, many leagues up from the shore!”

“As I sailed, as I sailed!”

“Many leagues up from the shore!”

“As I sailed!”

“Damn it!”

Captain Kidd whipped around and took hold of the first thing he could get his hands on — his chair, it turned out — and with all of his might, he threw it across the tiny room. When it hit the back wall, it did not, as it likely would have on a ship made of ordinary glass and wood or the cheap lumber the original *Adventure Galley* had been constructed from, go through the window, but instead, it shattered into splinters and shards, some the size of a small sword and some no larger than a sliver. His hat bounced and rolled and came to a stop near Captain Kidd’s boot.

“I wish they would stop singing that...that infernal song!” he spat, frustrated. He gesticulated wildly at the open air.

Because it kept reminding him, over and over and over and over again, the exact circumstances of his life and death, the entire reason why it was he sought out the Grail. The lyrics of that blasted ditty hounded him every waking hour of the day, a constant thorn in his side, and he did not need the song itself bellowed on repeat to add to his misery.

“It helps to keep them coherent,” Burke reminded him. “They’d be half the sailors they are if they didn’t sing that song to focus on their purpose and identities.”

“It’s slanderous!”

“It could also be much worse,” said Burke.

Captain Kidd spun back around and glowered at him. “How so? What could possibly be worse than that farcical nonsense that ruined my good name?”

Burke arched an eyebrow pointedly. “You could be so well remembered for the one kindness you did another man that your legend became a part of his instead of remaining your own.”

Captain Kidd grimaced and looked away uncomfortably. “Your point is well-made,” he admitted grudgingly.

That, at least, was the one advantage Captain Kidd’s notoriety had bought him — unlike Burke, he was his own man, with his own ship, born of his own legend. Burke had the indignity of possessing none of those things, and so his one power, his one Noble Phantasm, allowed him to be called upon by Captain William Kidd in Captain Kidd’s time of need.

It was, in many ways, a pitiful state of affairs, and Captain Kidd could well understand what Burke would wish for on the Holy Grail, but Captain Kidd could not say that it wasn’t to his advantage at the same time. Burke was an infinitely better conversationalist than those brainless lumps manning the ship, for one, and far more capable of defending himself besides, to say nothing of how useful a man so resourceful would have been in a more ordinary Grail War.

“Then if you’re done with your tantrum...?” Burke said leadingly.

Captain Kidd glowered at him, hating how childish that description made him sound, but didn’t take the bait and start a fight over it. He could save his anger for the enemies that would no doubt stand in their way of the Grail, for it would serve him much better there.

“I spied three ships from Spain!”

“As I sailed, as I sailed!”

“I spied three ships from Spain!”

“As I sailed!”

“Fine,” Captain Kidd said through gritted teeth. “Have you some sort of suggestion, then? Because as it is, I see little in the way of how we might find allies better suited to our sensibilities, not lacking, as we are, a suitable map which we might use to seek them out.”

Burke lifted one hand to his chin and rubbed thoughtfully at his whiskered jawline. He peered down at the map as though he would actually find anything of use upon it, riddled as it was with enormous blank spots, his brow furrowed.

A little vindictively, Captain Kidd doubted he would actually come up with anything. Their situation truly was that unenviable, and no amount of staring at the map would magically fill in the parts that were missing, no matter how much either of them might have wished it were so.

“I spied three ships from Spain, and I looted them for gain, ‘til most of them were slain!”

“As I sailed, as I sailed!”

“‘Til most of them were slain!”

“As I sailed!”

At length, Burke breathed out a long breath and leaned back. “Short of choosing a random direction to go and explore, I don’t see how we’re going to find anything at all out here,” he admitted.

I told you so, Captain Kidd thought viciously. It wasn’t so simple, was it?

“What about that skill of yours, though?” Burke asked. “What was it... Seeker of Fortune?”

Captain Kidd’s gut squirmed. His lip began to curl. Another reminder of his failure, of the injustices visited upon him in life. He could not have something more respectable, a skill of the sorts belonging to those who found riches in life or who achieved great deeds, oh no, the skill he had acquired was one that was built upon failing to do either of those things.

It was a skill perfect for someone who had once had glory within his grasp, someone who had touched wealth with his fingertips, someone who had come so close to success and victory, only to lose it all before any of it was truly his.

The perfect skill, in other words, for William Kidd, who had gone out seeking to make his mark on the world, only to face failure after failure time after time, and at the very end, right as success was within his grasp and the future he had dreamed off within reach, had all of it ripped away from him. William Kidd — immortalized in history for his failures.

Before he realized what he was doing, Captain Kidd’s hand moved towards his compass, but the instant his brain caught up with his fingers, he stopped.

It was true, Seeker of Fortune would let him find the things he wanted. That was what it did, it led him to opportunity, because it was an instinct for where he could find it. Even if it couldn’t help him seize it, it gave him the chance to *try*.

All he had to do was admit that he was enough of a failure to need it.

“Come all you young and old!”

“See me die, see me die!”

“Come all you young and old!”

“See me die!”

The squirming in his belly ignited, and Captain Kidd seized his compass savagely, flipping the lid open with such violence that he would ordinarily have feared breaking it. Inside, the mounted needle spun wildly, whirling about over the wind rose beneath it such that it might have seemed to point in every direction at once.

Too much opportunity. The opportunity to turn around and sail back to the archipelago so that he might make allies of the Servants there, even though they might sooner see him returned to the Throne. The opportunity to chase down the owner of the Grail so that he might take it for himself and make his wish. The myriad opportunities to seek out others who desired the Grail, so that he might either make them his allies or remove them from the competition.

Opportunity existed everywhere. That was the truth. Perhaps that was the mistake William Kidd had made in life, chasing the opportunities he saw with the greatest prizes instead of the ones that were more certain and less risky. Perhaps, had he sought out his fortune on land as a governor or as part of the British navy, he might not have found his end where and when he did.

Or perhaps a bunch of feckless partisans had hung him out to dry the instant he was no longer useful to them, and his mistake was trusting them to stand beside him instead of taking his fate for himself.

“Come all you young and old, you’re welcome to my gold, for by it I’ve lost my soul!”

“And must die, and must die!”

“By it, I’ve lost my soul!”

“I must die!”

Captain Kidd focused on what he wanted, what he desired most, the opportunity he sought — the chance to find like-minded allies who sought the Grail, who wanted the same thing he did. Even if he couldn’t trust them not to stab him in the back at the end, if he could at least trust that their goals aligned with his up until the very last moment, then that would be enough.

The needle of his compass quivered to a halt, and then it swung back around, and this time, when it stopped, it stayed there, pointing unerringly in the direction he needed to go to seek out that opportunity he wanted.

“Don’t think I’ll ever get used to you doing that sort of thing,” Burke commented.

“It’s far easier than doing it on the map,” Captain Kidd replied. “Channeling it through my compass at least gives me a direction. The map might tell me where I need to go, but that doesn’t mean anything if I don’t have a heading to take me there.”

“True enough.”

Keeping his mind focused on that specific opportunity, Captain Kidd looked down at his map, and his eyes roved over it, waiting until he found the place that *clicked*. It was harder to do with a map so incomplete, because without geography to act as a landmark, it wasn’t easy to tell where his intuition was even telling him where to go. On a map with so many blank spots, it could very well be that his target was in the ocean and on the move, and so he could wind up constantly chasing where they’d been instead of where they were.

“There.”

Captain Kidd tapped the spot his instinct was leading him towards, and with a minute application of magical energy, planted a large cross to mark it. He was not sure how many of his Servant peers — pirates and sailors and privateers who had etched their names into history — realized it, but navigational gear, too, was a part of a ship, and therefore an extension of the *Adventure Galley* and its functions. It could be used and used well, if only one knew how.

Letting out a breath, Captain Kidd changed his focus, and the needle on his compass spun and swung around. Keeping the same goal in mind, the same opportunity, he felt out again across the map, and as his finger moved, a line drew from that cross he had made all the way back to the archipelago where they had encountered that belligerent team.

“And there.”

One more time, Captain Kidd changed his focus, and once more, the needle swiveled and whirled until it found what he was looking for. For a third time, he dragged his finger across the parchment and stopped where his gut told him he should.

Harder was not *impossible*.

“And —”

Captain Kidd stopped and stared down at the map, not quite sure he should believe his eyes.

“Oh.”

“Well, fuck me,” said Burke, eyebrows rising towards his hairline. “Is that...?”

“Where we might find the opportunity to take the Grail,” Captain Kidd answered, just as stunned.

And it was only a scant few miles away, so close that it might be called arm’s length. They could be on it in an hour or less, depending on whether the wind stayed on their side and the oceans changed.

Captain Kidd looked down at his compass again, but the needle remained pointed in the same direction as before, and his instinct did not compel his finger to move. Whoever or whatever possessed the Grail was stationary, or at least moving slowly enough that the *Adventure Galley* could catch up quite easily.

“That’s spitting distance,” Burke commented. “We could have the Grail before *sunrise*.”

“We could.”

Excitement welled up inside of Captain Kidd. They really could. Truly. His wish was within his grasp, and he could finally correct the mistakes of his life and undo the ignominious record of proper history. William Kidd could be a hero, a celebrated name revered for his accomplishments. No longer a stain, but someone people looked up to, venerated, idolized. A privateer who brought glory to the British Empire by seizing the treasures of France, a pirate hunter who stopped the Golden Age of Piracy in its tracks — whatever future he dreamed up, he could make it a reality, a reality where he would be the foremost name in naval history.

Perhaps he would even have a ship named after him. The *HMS William Kidd* — it had a nice ring to it.

Captain Kidd looked at the other two blots on his map. The first, a place where he might find allies in his hunt for the Grail, and the second, a place where he would find allies of desperation. Both,

however, were much farther away than the Grail. The journey to either would take days, valuable time where the Grail might be seized by another party or move further out of reach. A wish might even be made upon it, and then it could become useless and lose its power.

Once more, opportunity might slip through his fingers.

When he looked back up, Burke seemed to have come to the same conclusion. “Dare we risk it, Will?”

And so, Captain Kidd had to make a choice again. Did he take the chance and hunt down the Grail, or did he seek safety in allies first and risk losing it for good? The greater prize for the higher risk, or the safer path with less certainty of ultimate success?

It was, in the end, an easy choice, and really, there hadn’t been any other —

“Wait.”

“What?” asked Burke.

Captain Kidd’s brow furrowed. “Do you hear that?”

A moment of silence passed. The ship creaked and groaned, the waves beat against it, but otherwise, there was nothing.

“Don’t hear nothing,” Burke said.

That was exactly the problem.

“Why did they stop singing?”

This time, it was Burke’s brow that furrowed, and the two of them shared a suspicious glance before turning away from the table and making for the door. They both reached for their flintlocks, and Burke took point, opening the door to the cabin.

Cold mist billowed in through the door, slinking about the floor and coating the entire room in short order. It moved with slow, meticulous purpose, like a snake slithering in the underbrush as it scented its prey, and in the dark outside, it clung to the ship, drifting through the railings’ posts and over the wooden boards until everything below it was obscured in a thick, gray fog. Beneath the dim moonlight, it glittered like silver dust, and the only thing that rose out of it was the ship’s mast, looming like a towering oak.

Of the crew who should have been manning the ship, there was no sign. Not a single one of them was at their post, nor were any of them slacking off, as though phantoms who had no sense of self would ever be tempted. It was as though they had all been plucked from the ship and taken away.

“What the devil?”

Burke and Captain Kidd stepped out onto the deck, ignoring the mist as it crept along and caressed their legs like icy fingers. For once, Captain Kidd was glad that Servants didn't quite experience the world as living humans did, because it would have been quite distracting.

"Where have they all gone?" Captain Kidd asked the air.

"There's no trace of them, Will," Burke said. He scuffed his boot against the deck, but hit nothing aside from the wood.

Of course not. Even if they were all killed, they were phantoms, specters of his old crew. Mere memories shaped into shells that looked like people. They would leave no bodies behind to rot.

Burke and Captain Kidd ventured further out, walking down the length of the ship, but the only thing that greeted them was the thud of their boots as they went. Along the way, they found only work half done — rigging that had been in the midst of being adjusted, knots that had been tied only halfway, and other such things that implied the crew had been removed suddenly and without warning.

At the end, they met up at the bow, having discovered nothing which might explain what had happened.

"You didn't notice them vanishing?"

"No," said Captain Kidd. "In fact, I still have not. As far as the *Adventure Galley* is concerned, they're all still here."

A voice like the ocean rumbled across the ship.

"They belong to the sea."

Burke and Captain Kidd whirled about, pistols raised, and quite suddenly, there was a man standing aboard the ship with them, only he looked nothing like any man ought to look, not living, in any case. His skin was pale and drawn, sunken, with eyes the milky white of a long dead corpse and a beard hanging from his face like strips of seaweed. His clothing was tattered and ragged, and his hat scuffed and worn.

"By God!" Burke gasped.

"Name yourself?" Captain Kidd barked. He cocked back the hammer of his flintlock. "I have not patience for charlatans and tricksters!"

"Name?" said the stranger in his burbling voice. "I have...many. Old Scratch. The Man Below. The Evil of the Deep."

A shiver swept down Captain Kidd's spine. Those were all nicknames for —

"Davy Jones."

The stranger didn't deny it, nor did he confirm it. His cracked lips pulled back from jagged teeth, and he ambled forward, only he didn't seem to walk so much as glide. His footsteps made no sound on the deck, as though he wasn't even truly there.

“Your men have been consigned to their proper place. All who die at sea are mine.”

CRACK was the sound of Captain Kidd's pistol firing, and the stranger stumbled, but to Captain Kidd's horror, what spouted from his wound wasn't blood of any kind, but water, as though the ocean itself ran through his veins.

“I may welcome you as well,” he said as though he hadn't just been shot, “and so I must ask you, Captain William Kidd. You and your companion...do you seek the Holy Grail?”

Something cold gripped Captain Kidd's insides, and then it sparked and lit into fire, and he snarled, cocking his pistol a second time. This time, he would not miss. This stranger, whether he was who he claimed or not, would lose his head. Even a Servant couldn't survive *that*.

“*Fuck* you!”

And with another *CRACK*, the stranger's head vanished into a fine mist. His body fell backwards against the deck and exploded when it hit the wood, disappearing just as suddenly as he had appeared.

Captain Kidd's pistol lowered. “What the fuck was *his* problem?” Burke asked from beside him.

“A rival, perhaps —”

Burke gasped, and Captain Kidd whipped around just in time to see the sword as it was pulled back out of his body. Burke stumbled to his knees, clutching at the wound as red blood fountained from his chest, spurting between his fingers, and he had only enough time to turn to Captain Kidd with a fearful despair on his face.

“Will...”

And then he burst apart into glittering dust, flickering as it faded away.

Captain Kidd spun about, throwing himself backwards as he turned to face the perpetrator, the stranger, whose bloody sword was now clean again. It, like the rest of him, looked decrepit and decayed, and yet it had been sharp and strong enough to deal a killing blow to a Servant, whatever it may have appeared on the outside.

“You bastard!”

CRACK was the sound of the pistol firing again, but the stranger deflected it with contemptuous ease. A second shot was equally as unsuccessful. The stranger would not be hit, not unless he decided he wanted to be.

Had he been playing around with Captain Kidd the entire time? Merely pretending that he could be killed?

“Captain William Kidd,” the stranger said in that eerie voice, “do you seek the Holy Grail?”

Captain Kidd stumbled backwards. A third shot, a fourth — even as he retreated towards his cabin, he kept firing, but each produced the same result, and the stranger kept coming, stalking slowly and ever closer.

At last, Captain Kidd’s heel came down, skidding along a wooden wall, for he had backed himself not into the cabin itself, but into the outside of the wall that separated it from the outer sections of the ship. When his foot slid down and found the deck again, something rattled, jostled by the abrupt movement. Captain Kidd’s heart leapt in his chest.

No. Absolutely not. And under ordinary circumstances, he would never. He hated that with a passion, almost as much as he hated what had become of his legend, how his life had ended, how his legacy had endured.

But he was too close to undoing all of that to be picky about his Noble Phantasms.

“Do I seek the Holy Grail, you ask?” he said. “What an absurd question! I am a privateer! A pirate! I sought my fortune at sea, throwing my all into the adventure and the glory that came with it! Do I seek the Holy Grail? Of course I do!”

He reached down and took hold of the bucket that sat near his boot, left behind by whoever had been swabbing the deck. It was heavy with water, but that was of no consequence for a Servant like him.

“And I won’t let a trumped up ghost story stand in my way!”

And as magical energy surged into that bucket, he lifted it and threw it with all of his strength.

Fatal Blow that Sealed Kidd’s Fate

“The Murder of William Moore!”

The bucket flew, reenacting the legend of William Kidd murdering his gunner, the crime for which he had been convicted, the *only* crime for which he had ever truly been guilty. With the weight of that sin, carrying the history of that loathsome act, bearing the grudge of a man who had lost everything because of it, if it struck head on, it would no doubt be a fatal blow.

BOOM

And from out of the mist, a cannonball barreled through the air. With an unerring precision, it collided with the bucket, and they were both smashed to pieces. Captain Kid’s final gambit, his most hated and humiliating Noble Phantasm, had failed. His last resort had simply come up short, was inadequate to the task of defeating his foe.

Captain Kidd, defeated, slumped back against the wall and slid down. That was it, he thought. His last, best effort, because he was a sailor and a navigator, not a great warrior. With his ship, with his

crew, with the *Adventure Galley's* cannons and armaments, he could mount a scrappy fight and go down swinging. Even if he was sunk and his ship went down, he could at least bloody the enemy's nose.

But in personal combat, his pistols and his last ditch Noble Phantasm were all he had. A sword? He was passable at best, for his true talents lay in the roles his ship asked of him, not frontline combat. A true professional, a duelist or a soldier, would swiftly and effortlessly outclass him.

The stranger stalked forward with all the gravity of an executioner. He lifted his sword, a saber with a blade that was pitted and rusted and a hilt encrusted with barnacles. The milky white eyes stared down at Captain Kidd, piercing through his soul.

“All those who die at sea belong to it,” the stranger said. “All those on this sea who covet the Grail will die. Captain William Kidd, do you seek the Holy Grail?”

Once more, his fortune had changed. Once more, William Kidd would be denied his chance, denied the opportunity to make his mark the way he wanted. As he had in life, he would die an ignoble death, having failed to accomplish anything worth speaking of, let alone remembering, done in by a specter from out of old sailors' superstitions.

A ghost done in by a ghost story. How utterly pathetic.

“Go to hell,” Captain Kidd spat.

“Yes,” the stranger said gravely, “we shall.”

And the sword came down.