Four long hours of waiting as the Pendragon carefully chose her approach. Rather than go into a heads-on fight, it was decided that since the ship probably belonged to Sir Duncan, they would be on alert in case the old Sugar Cane came to take the treasure. There might even be a second ship lurking about, so they decided on trickery to take the enemy ship.

The sails were purposely put in disarray. The running rigging was slack and not secured and tied off. They wanted to give the impression of great confusion. Captain Turnbuckle guided the ship close enough to the unknown ship so they would be sure and see it in the morning light. Then they made no progress at all towards their target. It was hoped the ship would turn and come to the Pendragon curious as to why it did not come any closer.

John was laying down on the mainmast crosstree and covered himself in a piece of canvas, watching through a scope as the other ship made preparations of getting underway. It turned and started towards the Pendragon. “She’s taken the bait!” he yelled down.

Cumberbatch herded the children below except Ava and eight of the youngest. They were to stay on deck and pretend they were stranded. It was assumed the other ship’s captain would be watching through his glass and would see just children onboard and would be over confident on his approach.

On they came, as the Pendragon continued to drift, sails flapping in disarray, lines swaying in the breeze. Ava and the others were assembled by the railing and looked toward the ship. “Start waving! John shouted down to them.

Ava and the others began jumping up and down trying to get the other ship’s attention. The other ship could clearly see the Pendragon and that it was not functioning properly. However, they reduced sail and slowed down until they could be certain.

John’s voice came floating down from topside, “They’re slowing down. I’m not sure they believe us.”

Ava stood watching the ship’s approach and made up her mind. She quickly untied her hair and jumped up on the rail and held on to a backstay. She waved and shouted to get noticed all the time her long, dark hair blowing in the wind. John turned back to watch the other ship and to his disbelief, more sail appeared on its yards and on it came. “Nice work.” He yelled down to Ava.

She did not look up, afraid they would see, and replied, “Glad you approve! I just hope I don’t regret this.”

Captain Elias of the Tobago held the telescope as steady as he could. He scanned the Pendragon from stem to stern and all he could see were those children standing on the deck and that one girl or woman standing on the railing, with dress and hair flying in the wind.

Elias’s orders were to fire a cannon so the History could come and close the trap. From his deck the other ship did not appear to be worth the effort. The ship looked like the Sugar Cane, but he could not be certain, and with just children on board perhaps the others had been lost at sea or there had been a mutiny and the only ones left were ones he could see on the deck.

“Standby by luff.” He shouted. “Let fly!” With that, the Tobago turned in to the wind and the sailor furled the sails as the ship glided to a stop a few yards from the Pendragon. “Ready the grapnels.” Elias shouted. “We’ll board her, but be ready for any tricks.”

He took a hailing trumpet and shouted, “What ship are you?”

Ava jumped down off the railing and she shouted, “Help us please! The crew is all dead and we have been adrift for days… please help us!”

“Let go the hooks!” Elias commanded. Instantly six, three-pronged grapnel hooks sailed the gap of water between the two ships and landed on the deck of the Pendragon barely missing the children. The sailors pulled on the ropes and the two ships slowly came together. Elias shouted to his first mate, “Boarders away!”

Twenty sailors of various descriptions and armed with cutlass and pistol, jumped from their ship to the Pendragon and stood looking around as if they expected to be attacked. One of the sailors grabbed Ava by the elbow. “Where is the crew?”

Ava acted startled and weak, “Please Sir. Please don’t hurt us. The crew is all dead. We’re the only ones alive. Please help us!” She began to sob. John watched everyting from on high. We smiled as Ava pleaded with the sailor.

Through his speaking trumpet, Elias commanded his men to search the ship. Fifteen or so of the men made their way to the hatches while the others walked about the ship searching for anything of value. It took a few minutes then three of the men appeared on deck. One reported back to Elias, “Nothing Capt’n!”

John knew the three who came back up on deck was Cumberbatch, Buster Jack and because of his size and strength, Hugh. The plan was to get most of the boarders below where they would be overpowered. The three of them would then put on the boarder’s coats and shirts and emerge as three boarders. John could only imagine what happened down there, but he could not linger on that thought. He slowly stood up, grabbed a rope and holding on with all his strength, he jumped free from his hiding place and swung over to the other ship. He landed right behind the captain, drew his cutlass and one pistol, “Never you fear, Captain. Surrender your ship, or die. It’s your choice.” Some of the sailors still on the deck of the Tobago rushed toward their captain.

John stepped closer and pointed the blade at the captain’s throat, “One more step and he’ll not live to see another day!”

Without turning, Elias shouted. “Belay that! Don’t come no closer!”

“Now tell your men to drop their weapons… now!” John shouted.

Elias commanded them to drop their weapons. After a moment’s hesitation from the crew, John inched the point of the cutlass closer to Elias’ throat. Elias screeched, “Drop them now – curse your eyes!”

The crew dropped whatever they had to the deck with a clatter. The sailors on the Pendragon did likewise and the children below deck came rushing up on deck and scooped up the discarded weapons. The captured sailors slowly came up on deck followed by more children fully armed. The crew of the Pendragon gathered the sailors in the middle and held their pistols and swords at the ready.

One of the sailors called out, “They be noth’n but children!” Scrounger quickly took the flat of this cutlass and struck the man on top of the head sending him to deck in a heap. “Anyone else have anything to say?” Scrounger said with a grin.

Edward Turnbuckle appeared on deck. “That be you Elias?” he shouted to the captain of the Tobago.

Elias couldn’t believe his eyes, “Turnbuckle?”

Captain Turnbuckle paraded himself along the deck and with cutlass and a brace of pistols in his belt, he jumped over the rails and onto the Tabago. Walked up to Elias and bowed, “At your service you traitorous dog!”

Elias was stunned, “You in command of this ship… with all these children?”

“Aye, Matey. This be my crew –a might better than y’orn.”

“But these are the children that commandeered the Sugar Cane in Port Royal and you were aboard?”

“Aye. Call it fate. Sir Duncan tried to hang old Turnbuckle, but now I have two of his ships.”

“I don’t understand how you could sail a ship all this way with a crew of children!” Elias was puzzled. He kept looking around as if he did not believe his eyes. “They’re just children!”

“H’rr now, not just children mind yah. These be the Crossbone Children.” Turnbuckle smiled and said, “Hoist the colors!” Ava’s black flag with the skull and crossed bones with the two C’s sailed lively up the signal line.

“You mean to tell me that you and these children are pirates?” Elias almost broke out in laughter and some of his silent crew chuckled.

“You be laugh’n out the side of yer face when you see what these babies can do. This ship now be known as the Pendragon, if you please.” He stepped away from Elias and yelled back to the Pendragon to bring the sailors back across to their own ship and to fetch the cargo net and put them all in it. While some of the children ran to do his bidding, he commanded the others to spike the cannon, disable the rudder lines and cut all the main running rigging.

Elias watched with fascination how the efficient the young crew was in doing what Captain Turnbuckle commanded. The cannons were cut from their lashings and pushed into the ocean. All the cutlasses, knives, pistols and other assorted weapons were thrown overboard except the weapons any of the children wanted. Most of the powder and shot were removed and put aboard the Pendragon. In less than thirty minutes, the Tobago was rendered completely useless.

Seemingly out of nowhere, a very large bird or what appeared to a bird momentarily blocked the sun and a fearsome shadow fell across the deck of both ships. Everyone was shouting and pointing at the creature. John ran to the side to see the creature better. To his amazement he saw the same Griffin that he had confronted on the Weymouth months ago.

The Griffin did not stop or circle the ships, but flew in a straight line towards the nearby island.

Every eye on the two ships followed the flight of the creature. It was then that Cumberbatch yelled out, “Look… on the horizon where that creature be fly’n… tis another ship. It be rounding the island head’n straight for us!”

Buster Jack came running up to John as he said, “It be a creature from ‘ell!”

John smiled, “No… it was warning us of this newcomer. We might not have seen it until it was too late.”

Buster Jack could not tear his eyes from the bird, “But did you see its head and claws?”

“Yes… I’ve seen it before. But never mind about that now. We have to deal with this other ship!”

Captain Turnbuckle grabbed a glass and spotted the new comer. “T’is a Sloop of War by thunder! She be the History, if I be not mistaken.” He yelled for the crew to cross back over to the Pendragon and cut away the grapnel hooks but not before he ordered Captain Elias to come over to the Pendragon. “Take old Elias here and tie him up nice and proper like. Stow him in the cargo hold, we be need’n him later.” he commanded.

Cumberbatch and John stood at the taffrail watching the History’s approach through their scopes. Turnbuckle approached them and snapped open his own glass. “Arrr, it be the History alright. Commanded by that little squint, Sedly… more’s the pity! She be faster than us but less guns. We’ll have to bring her to grips fast or she’ll stand off and pound us into boxwood.”

The Pendragon had drifted clear of the Tobago and was ready to make sail. The crew was standing amidships waiting for Captain Turnbuckle’s orders. He turned and looked at young crew for a moment. “Over yonder comes a ship what is faster than us and can stand away and shoot holes in us… that is, unless we can get all the sails on the Pendragon as fast as you can be. With a good wind at our backs, we be able to close the gap faster than the enemy wants us to. We have no choice but to fire on the enemy with our cannon. So remember your training and pay no attention to what be go’n on around you. Load and fire when I gives the command… are ya ready for a fight?” He held up his sword and the children cheered.

“Then up yah go… full canvas!”

Like mice, the crew scattered to their stations. Within minutes, all the sails were set and the Pendragon was gathering speed. Cumberbatch took the helm and pointed the ship straight toward the History.

The crew of the History was surprised by the Pendragon’s sudden show of speed. Sloops were made to dash in and fire their few cannon and run away to charge again when the moment presents itself, like a wolf attacking a slow prey, but the Pendragon, with all sail set, was gathering speed at an alarming rate.

The captain of the History, Martin Sedly, ordered the ship to turn to larboard in order to fire at the Pendragon’s bow and hoped for a crippling shot to one of the masts. As soon as the History made its turn, the Pendragon turned to larboard as well. It would be broadside to broadside now and Sedly knew his smaller ship would not fair well against the larger brig but both ships were going too fast to change now or they would collide.

Captain Turnbuckle yelled, “Load the starboard battery… double-shotted with grape!” The cannon on the right side of the ship were quickly loaded with two cannonballs instead of the one and a heaping portion of musket shot. It was a risky to fire such a load, but if loaded and aimed correctly, it would be a devastating blow to any ship, especially a smaller one like a sloop.

When John was satisfied the sails were set properly, he watched in fascination as the youngest of the girls ran back and forth to the guns carry the powder charges from the powder magazine. He recognized Samantha, Morgan, Sydney and Tristy performing their duties as if they had been doing it for years.

As the ship’s gunner, Ava supervised the loading of the cannon and when each was ready, she turned to the quarter deck and raised her hand to indicate the cannon were ready. At each gun was a gun captain, they commanded the gun crew. Each gun had a rack of cannonballs, a sponge and a bucket of water to sponge out the hot barrel after each shot and slow match; a slow burning rope used to ignite the cannon. When the cannon was loaded and ready to fire, the gun captains turned and faced the gunner watching for the signal to fire.

Captain Turnbuckle saw her and gave her a slight nod. “Larboard battery… load but don’t run out!” He motioned for John to join him and Cumberbatch by the helm. “As soon as we fire the first broadside, I intend to cut around her stern and fire another full broadside into her stern, so be ready.” To John he said, “Pass the word to the gunner so she’ll know what we be about, eh.”

John ran to Ava, “The captain says after the first broadside, he is going to cut across the stern. He needs the cannon loaded for a second broadside. Understand?”

“Yes.” she said, “We’ll have to be fast… faster than we’ve ever done it before!

John smiled, “I know, just do the best you can.”

He continued to his station but not before she said, “Good luck John!”

He turned as he said, “You too.” He stumbled over a ringbolt and almost fell.

The two ships would pass within seventy-five yards of each other. The children could hear the crew of the History shouting and cursing at them. Turnbuckle raised his sword and shouted, “Standby to fire! Ava raised her sword as well and each gun captain looked to her for the signal.

Turnbuckle watched and gauged the moment. As he dropped his sword, Ava did the same.

The Pendragon’s cannon roared out and filled the air with acrid smoke. Both ships must have fired at the same time. Here and there, splinters flew through the air as the enemy cannonballs found their targets. Several of the children were flung through the air and landed hard on the deck, but true to Scurvy Jones’ word, they instantly sprang back to their feet and resumed their place at the guns. Those that had splinters sticking out of them, pulled them from the bodies and went back into action. One cannon was upended but the crew fought to get it back into action. Ava screamed the command to reload and counted out the steps to stop the vent, sponge out and to reload. Each gun crew behaved as if they had been through this a hundred times.

John heard Turnbuckle command, “Hard a starboard!” John yelled for the crew to re-trim the sails and to bring the braces around to catch the wind on the new course. As the wind pushed the smoke away from the two ships, they saw the effect of their double-shot barrage.

The History’s main mast was slowly falling over the side. There were large gaping holes in the side of the ship and they could see several crew members lying on the deck of their ship. Of the captain and helmsman, there was no sign. As the Pendragon completed its turn to fire at the History’s stern, they could tell there was no fight left in the enemy crew.

Captain Turnbuckle shook himself not believing what he was seeing or hearing, “Secure the guns! Mr. Henry, damage report if you please!”