

⊗ THE SCEPTERS OF TIME ○



THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN
STORMBOLD



By

Hugh Mannfield

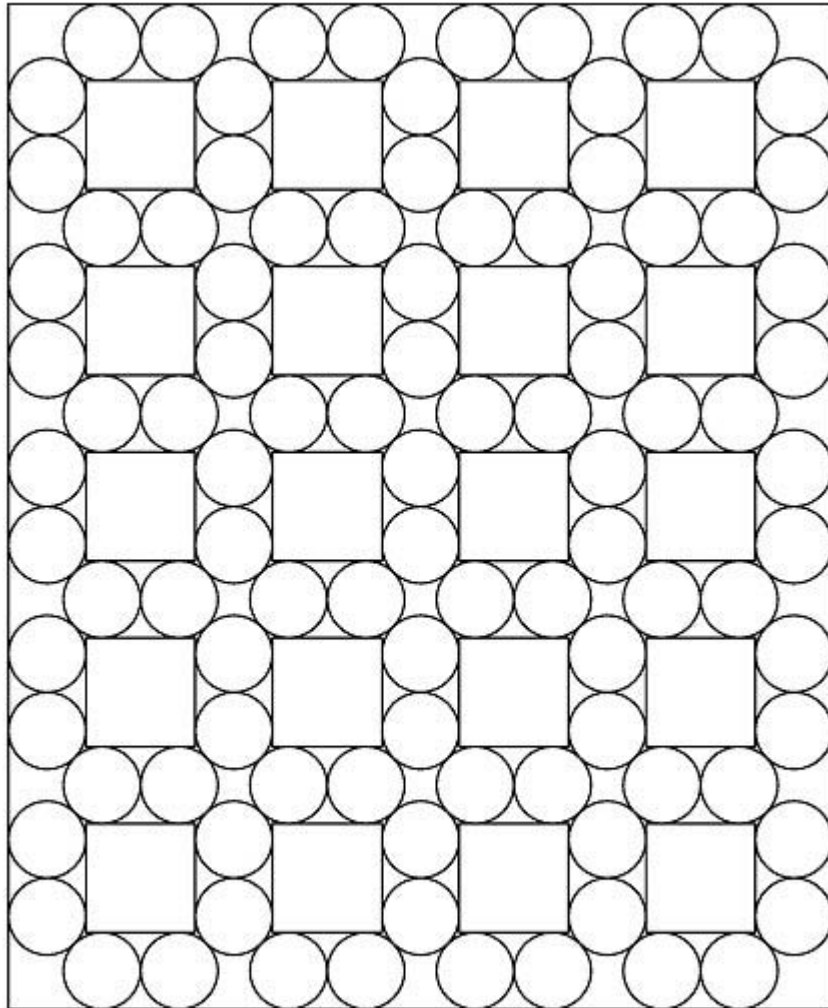
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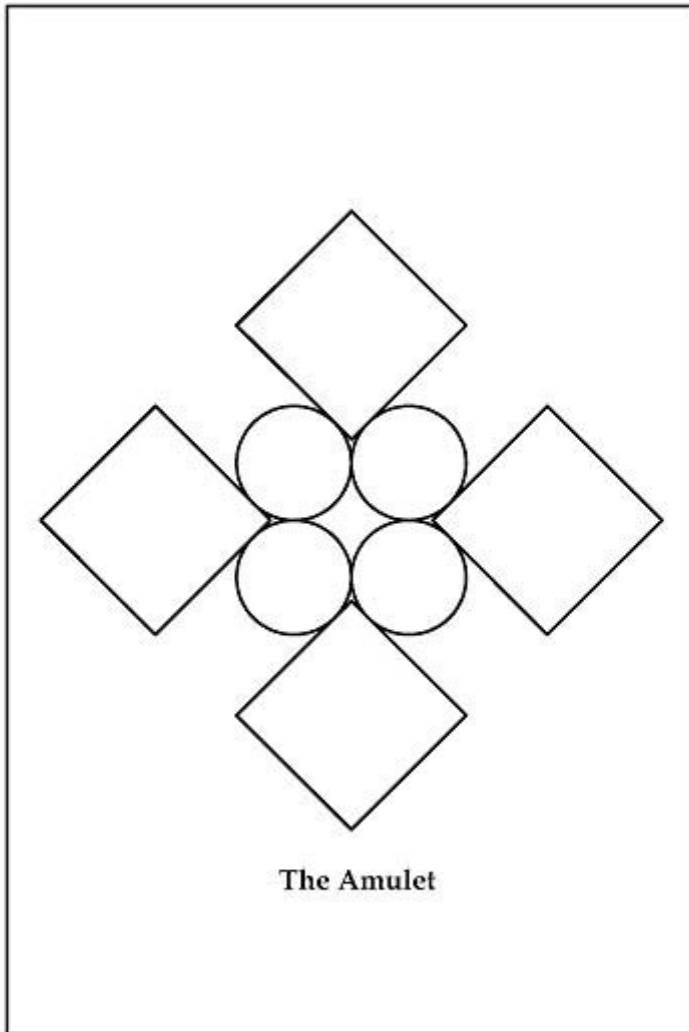
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The Pattern



The Amulet

Contents

Chapter 1:	The Vortex	1
Chapter 2:	A History Lesson	20
Chapter 3:	The Dragon at Sea.....	47
Chapter 4:	Flight to the Mountains	84
Chapter 5:	The Temple of the Sun	123
Chapter 6:	The Spirit Traveler.....	164
Chapter 7:	The Temple of Knowledge	198
Chapter 8:	Rise of The Black Dragon	235
Chapter 9:	Fall of the First Kingdom.....	272
Chapter 10:	A Voyage Into Darkness.....	309
Chapter 11:	The Dark Fortress	345
Chapter 12:	The Journey Home	382

Chapter 1 The Vortex

The bow of the ship *Cassiopeia* rose and fell slowly as the young first mate gazed in disbelief across the glassy blue green swells toward a foggy horizon. The world seemed to come to an end two hundred yards from the ship. He squinted into the gray mist that blended into a hazy sky, scanning to no avail for any sign of cloud or sail. The long dark finger of the bowsprit described lazy circles in the moist and heavy air. There was no trace of motion in this fog; it was brooding like an August afternoon before a night of thunderstorms. Time stood still, measured only by the gentle rolling of the ship and the slapping of her empty sails in the rigging. These ocean swells were like none other Jonathan had ever seen. They were smooth and geometrically perfect, and came from only one direction without the slightest ripple from another source.

Some of the crew were off watch and idle, enjoying the faint warmth of the mid morning sun that pierced the haze. The rest were busy with some small mending task, but they all kept looking to the horizon with equal interest. A line was stretched from the bow of the ship to a longboat about fifty yards ahead where a handful of men were slowly rowing. The first mate shook his head at the way the sea dwarfed their meager efforts, and he then turned, walked the length of the ship and climbed the steps to the quarterdeck.

"It ain't natural, I've ner' seen waves of this kind on any of the seas I've sailed" said the helmsman. He was short and weathered by many voyages, but anyone who took time to notice could see that time had only toughened him. "Look how smooth they are, like there's not a breath of wind for a hundred leagues and all roll'n in from the same quarter."

Jonathan Stormbold gazed at the smooth, straight, geometric swells. "Yes, Mr. Barkley, not a cloud, not a bird nor sail have we even seen all day...just these strange swells. It's as if we've slipped off the edge of the world," he replied as he continued around the afterdeck.

Hugh Mannfield

He looked up into the rigging, and everything was as it should be. The ship was ready to sail again. The hasty repairs, made after the storm, had been replaced by complete ones. The carpenters had spent their time well. While inspecting the repairs, the events leading up to the present played back through his mind.

It had been five days out of Cape Town when a winter storm hit them. They may have encountered a southern cyclone spun off the coast of Africa spending its fury in the Southern Ocean. Four days and nights of beating to the southeast against mountainous waves and a series of frigid north easterly squalls had taken its toll on both man and ship. They had crossed south through the so-called Roaring Forties, going near fifty degrees south in latitude searching for the prevailing westerly winds. After what seemed like an eternity, the captain decided it was time to tack to the northeast. Shortly after this, the east wind finally began to moderate; it swung southeast and then south, blowing in strong gusts as if to speed them on their way to warmer latitudes, having paid their debt to the Southern Ocean. It was then that the westerly finally came, and with a vengeance. The wind shifted to the southwest, then west, coming in strong gusts, and began driving the ship harder and harder, raising the waves into terrifying mountains of black water. The captain had to bear off running before the swells with the wind just off the port quarter. Even so, this was not enough and he was forced to shorten sail or risk losing the rig, calling to reef the topsails and topgallants. All watches were called out, and the men were sent aloft. Work was slow in the swaying rig, hands and feet numb with cold sometimes slipping in the foot ropes as the ship rode the waves below. The task was nearly complete when a ferocious gust caught the ship cresting a wave and the mizzen topmast snapped at the splice, sending a man over the starboard side to his death in an icy sea and leaving several others clinging to a nightmare of tangled line, splintered timbers, and canvas flailing and crackling in the gale. The wreckage was blown forward and hung for a terrifying moment just long enough to allow the remaining hands to scramble free. Then as the stays parted, it swung aft, crashing down, driving a splintered yard through the quarterdeck. The dangling rigging was cut free and hove overboard, and the vessel sailed on as she was until the weather eased up.

THE SCEPTERS OF TIME
THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN STORMBOLD

They had provisioned at Cape Town and had plenty of food, water and spare timbers, so in spite of the damage they pressed on northeast by east for Java Head. The landfall there promised to be as delightful as the rounding had been hard. Upon reaching warmer latitudes and lighter winds, repairs were made while the voyage continued. As they made way into the Indian Ocean, progress became slow and their luck had not seemed to improve. Things began to seem wrong. It was difficult to describe at first, just an ill feeling. The weather became sporadic, and when the tropics were reached, the trade winds failed to fill in as expected. The first expected land sight was also missed, although repeated navigation checks indicated that several islands should have been near. A few days later a fog bank had appeared on the horizon, and the captain, upon viewing it with his glass, became very grim and ordered the helmsman to steer for it. That was the last time he had appeared on deck.

Stormbold shook off the gloom and looked again into the rigging. The white sails glistened against a deep blue of the sky that pierced the fog at its zenith. His feet were planted on the deck of a good ship, her hull in the midst of the sea, her timbers and rig repaired and ready for anything. That in itself was enough to make his heart light.

"We've got her in shape again, sir. I think she could even take on the cape again," said the helmsman as he smiled through several crooked teeth. He had once again guessed the first mate's thoughts.

"You better hope so, Barkley, 'cause we'll be crossing again loaded with all the tea in China," said Jonathan with a smile as he climbed back down to the main deck and made his way forward. He was still a bit apprehensive. Being trained to captain a trading ship, he was constantly watching for any danger to his ship, including the crew, vigilant for signs of ill health or ill will. Recently his burdens had increased.

"Mr. Stormbold," a voice called from behind, "the captain calls for you!" It was the cook leaning out of the companionway. The first mate turned back and headed for the captain's quarters.

Life at sea requires one to adapt to many tasks and become somewhat of a jack-of-all-trades. On any given day a sailor may be

Hugh Mannfield

called upon for many things from reefing a top sail in a midnight gale to rowing a longboat to a tropical island. He may find himself pulling needle and thread repairing sails or oil skins one day and manning the deck gun against cannibals the next. On another day, he will be loading cargo in a distant port, doing a freezing watch aloft, holystoning the deck, doing carpentry work or breaking his back at the capstan. There is always work of one kind or another to be done aboard a ship, and if there isn't, the captain sees that there is.

The cook, Jacob Ericson, was a case in point. He was a big man with a round face and bright red hair now becoming thinner and touched with gray. His Viking spirit had led him to a life at sea, and although he claimed this to be his last voyage, few believed it. He had begun sailing with merchantmen in his teens and quickly learned the trade; many thought him destined to become a captain himself. He had served as one of the ship's mates for many years, sailing with Jonathan's grandfather, Ian Stormbold. It was on one of these voyages that he had acquired the job of cook. It seems that a heated discussion had occurred between Jacob and the ship's cook concerning the evening fare. The discussion ended with the incapacitation of the cook. Ian, not wanting to lose the services of one of his best mates, decided not to lock him below decks, as was custom, but instead gave him double duty. So for a fortnight, while the cook recovered, Jacob manned both the deck and the galley and slept very little. He seemed to have a natural talent for his new job, however, because Ian was faced with near mutiny from the crew at the prospect of going back to the original cook. So it was that Jacob took up the new assignment, and it suited him. He was still involved in much of the operation of the ship but now served fewer watches.

One thing usually leads to another, and Jacob acquired another vocation as the ship's medicine man. This was a rather natural development. The galley has access to the ship's stores, including those used to relieve many maladies, and Jacob was called upon to dispense these as well. Having the largest table (usually made of planking over several cargo crates) and the brightest lanterns, the wardroom was also the place where the injured were brought. A merchant ship does not have the luxury of carrying a separate man for every separate job. Few carry true doctors, so Jacob was a ship's

THE SCEPTERS OF TIME
THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN STORMBOLD

mate, cook and general healer. It was in the latter capacity that he was now tending the captain.

The captain was propped up in a chair in his quarters beside the starboard porthole, his leg resting on a small cask. It hadn't been until the morning after the dismasting that the full damage from the storm had been told. The captain had been struck by some falling debris and his left arm was badly bruised, a minor thing, but a great gash had been cut in his lower leg. The wound had been hastily tied with a strip of sail cloth and he had remained at the helm until the gale blew itself out. Word of this injury had been kept from the crew and tended by the cook and first mate. Healing, however, was slow, and a fever had set in. There were now signs of mortification in the wound. He had been above deck less and less frequently, and the crew suspected that something was amiss.

"How is the ship?" Captain Tomkins asked.

"She's in better shape than the day we left Baltimore, sir," replied Jonathan.

"And the crew?"

"Mostly working hard, although I'm running out of repairs. If this weather doesn't break I'm afraid they will holystone right through the deck."

"Very well. How about provisions?"

"We've got bread, beef and beans, and some fruit remains, sir. The water supply is at two thirds. There is plenty of salt pork and biscuits to fall back on. I'd say we could make another fifty days without a landfall without much trouble. And may I ask how you are doing sir?"

"I'm better today."

Stormbold could see that he wasn't. "I'm afraid that I haven't been able to make out our position, sir. Since this fog set in I have not been able to sight a proper horizon. But by dead reckoning from our last fix we should, by all rights, have sighted land days ago. We must now be right in the middle of the Indian Ocean."

The captain sat up and gingerly lowered his leg to the floor. "I've checked your calculations myself and can't find fault with any of them. The ship's clocks are working, and they agree with each other as well as my watch. The sun and stars tell us that we're where we

Hugh Mannfield

should be, but the wind and water say we're not. Don't doubt yourself. I have reason to believe that there is something else at work here."

"I'm afraid if things don't change soon we're going to have some trouble on our hands sir. There was a scuffle this morning and I've got one of the Portuguese in the hold." Jonathan hesitated. "I was planning to report it at the next watch change, sir."

"I see." Tomkins paused. "An idle crew becomes restless very quickly. Perhaps a sail or gunnery drill would liven things up." The captain shifted in his chair, a grimace flashed across his face, and he turned to look out the porthole. "I want to talk to you about your grandfather; you should be prepared to assume command of this vessel."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"It's my leg; I've seen this before in other men. I'm afraid it could get worse. It may even have to come off." Tomkins glanced up toward the deck beams that formed the cabin ceiling. "If the worst happens you should be ready to do what you must."

"Sir! Jacob is a fair healer but he is no surgeon! If there is no improvement soon we shall have to make a landfall to find a doctor. I'm not certain I would have the confidence of the crew in your absence."

Tomkins's eyes flashed. "This crew is loyal to the Constellation line! Many have sailed with your grandfather. If I place you in command, by God they will follow you!" He had nearly risen from his chair with this speech but now seemed drained and slumped back in his chair. "There is more to consider than just my leg," he continued. "By the look of this fog and the waves, I would say that we have sailed into what your grandfather described as 'the vortex.' If true, there will be no landfall soon, nor will we see another friendly ship."

"What do you mean? This fog will lift, and with a fair wind we could make the coast of Java within a week."

"Do you recall the morning we sailed from Baltimore?"

"Yes, sir, it was a fine summer morning. I remember that an early wind filled in and blew the mist off the waters. By mid-afternoon we were roaring down the Chesapeake on a broad reach! A perfect day

THE SCEPTERS OF TIME
THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN STORMBOLD

to begin a voyage!" Jonathan's eyes gleamed with the memory of that day.

"I had a visit from your grandfather that morning and he gave me some unusual instructions."

Jonathan's thoughts reached back to that morning. It was a cool morning. He had risen before dawn with great excitement and hurried down to the ship, eager to get aboard. It was his first trans-ocean voyage as a ship's first mate. The wind had already begun to rustle the tree tops on shore and flutter the pennants in the rigging. A bright blue sky was revealed by the dawn above the mist. The gulls cried and circled over the harbor, and the fresh sea air filled his lungs. By mid morning they would sail with the tide. As he strode up the gangway he saw a solitary figure in a long coat standing against the bulwarks. The gray-white hair and close trimmed white beard, dark eyebrows over penetrating blue eyes, were unmistakable; it was his grandfather, Ian Stormbold. He was one of the principle owners of the Constellation Shipping Company, having built the business up from small schooners sailing packets to the northeastern states and the Caribbean, to the great ocean-going square rigged ships that they now sailed around the globe.

"Grandfather! You came to see me off!" Jonathan regarded his grandfather with great admiration and a bit of awe. He was a strong and direct man, a leader who took no nonsense. He had emerged victorious from many seemingly hopeless situations and encounters. He was also a true friend and mentor.

Ian turned and faced Jonathan sternly, "You forced me to come by disregarding your father's wishes." These words stopped Jonathan short.

He had ignored a letter from his father requesting a visit to the plantation before shipping out. Several years ago, his father Benjamin had departed from family tradition and used the profits from his sailings to purchase land and establish a plantation inland. He was presently in the business of growing the products that he had carried as cargo in the past, and now he rarely went to sea. "I was working day and night to finish the classes at the academy early so I would be able to make this voyage. It was impossible to make the trip!" Jonathan exclaimed.

Hugh Mannfield

Ian's eyes flashed. "Was it? Or did your differences with your father get in the way? You may not agree with him but you still owe him your obedience and respect!" Jonathan stood silent. Ian turned and began to walk toward the bow, motioning Jonathan to follow. "You will come of age on this voyage and it was his intention to bestow on you your family heritage. Now all I can give you is a few hours of my time"

"What was so important? I'll go see him when I get back."

"Jonathan, *Cassiopeia* is a fine ship, still my favorite of the fleet if the truth be known. She has seen me through many a tempest, but there is no guarantee she will return from this voyage." Ian gazed up into the rigging and continued, "An excursion to New York or Boston is child's play next to a China run. There are many dangers, and a man should make his peace with the world before starting such a voyage."

"I'm not worried. I know I'm ready for this and I'll get back all right. You've picked the captain and crew yourself; what could go wrong?" Jonathan strode briskly next to his grandfather as they rounded the foremast and started back down the port side.

Ian broke out with a booming laugh. "Ahh...the exuberance of youth! Would that it were mine again!" He shot a smile at Jonathan. "You may be right, those accountants have probably infected me with their ability to worry about everything. Still, son, never turn your back on the sea, and don't let your guns get rusty."

Jonathan breathed a sigh of relief. He knew he was out of the doghouse. "It's a great day to put to sea isn't it? I wish you were coming!" he exclaimed.

"I've got my own voyage coming up soon enough," Ian said turning with a wink.

Jonathan's eyes opened wide "The *Andromeda*! You're taking her yourself aren't you!"

Ian's eyes sparkled like a child on Christmas morning and he held up his fist. "This arm can still hold a tiller in a gale and this fist can drop any man in the fleet to the deck, and until the day comes that they can't, I'll be sailing the ships of my line!" he exclaimed. "And I'll lay low any man who tries to stop me!" The *Andromeda* was the newest ship commissioned by the Constellation Shipping

THE SCEPTERS OF TIME
THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN STORMBOLD

Company. She was the largest yet, and promised to be the fastest in the fleet (perhaps in the world). "Her rigging is nearly finished, and I expect to take her out within a fortnight," continued Ian.

Jonathan suddenly looked disappointed. "I had no idea she would be ready so soon." He hesitated. "Why didn't you tell me? I mean...if I had known I could have signed on her instead."

"We will sail together again perhaps, lad, but you must cut your teeth on your own. It's time to make a name for yourself." Ian paused, considering the young man who stood before him. "Now, I believe you have some work to do, and I have some business with the captain. Keep an eye astern while crossing the China Sea. I could easily be on your heels by then." Ian clasped Jonathan's hand and shoulder firmly, then turned and went below deck. Jonathan looked across at the wharf; the men were beginning to arrive, and he had to oversee the final loading and account for crew and company. He was quickly immersed in his work and had only one other chance to speak with his grandfather again before the ship had sailed.

The events of that day now half a world away seemed somehow diminished in significance, dimmed by time. Jonathan realized that he had learned many lessons since then. He had worked hard to prove himself to those in the crew who felt his position as ships mate was by privilege only and without merit. The Stormbold name commanded great respect in many ports and on many decks but also demanded much living up to. Jonathan now looked across the cabin at Captain Tomkins and realized that he might have even more responsibilities in the very near future.

Tomkins reached beneath his collar and took off a silver chain that he wore. Hanging from the chain was a key. "Your grandfather gave me this on that morning. It will open that strong box I had stored in your quarters."

"He brought that on board didn't he!" exclaimed Jonathan.

"Aye, he also informed me not to allow you to open it unless certain events unfolded...and unfold they have." Captain Tomkins looked at his leg and then continued. "He told me that it might come to pass that I would be gravely injured on this voyage. He also instructed me that if this happened to watch for a fog bank on the

Hugh Mannfield

horizon that would follow the ship and would not be influenced by wind or weather."

Jonathan looked puzzled. "I've never known my grandfather to be given to superstition or prophecies. This all seems very strange."

"I've sailed with Ian in his early days as a ship's captain, and he has always had an uncanny knack of being in the right place at the right time. I have learned not to question his instructions. He told me to sail into this fog bank and once inside to give you this key." Tomkins handed Jonathan the chain and key.

Jonathan looked at the key. After a moment of reflection he looked up. "Is there anything else you require of me?"

"Not at the present. I plan to assemble the crew before sunset and inform them of the situation. Have the mates report to me before the evening watch. Until then I suggest you find out what is in that box."

Jonathan left the captain and went forward to his own smaller cabin. There beneath his small table and collection of books and charts was the box he had largely ignored, thinking it some of the captain's possessions that he wished not to clutter his own cabin with. He dragged the small chest from under the table and inserted the key.

Inside he found several rolled charts. Some he recognized as the East Indies, the coast of south Asia, India and the Bay of Bengal, but others were strange to him. On them all he recognized notations in his grandfather's hand. Beneath the charts he found several sealed letters. One was to himself, another was addressed "Lord Admiral Nelson of His Britannic Majesty's Royal Navy" and there were two more with names he did not recognize.

"Why would he write a letter to a man now dead these many years?" thought the young Stormbold.

Next he found a large ring. It was gold with jewels and many embellishments and inscriptions on it. Along with it was an amulet on a leather strap. The amulet was made of bronze with some colored stones inlaid. It had the form of four diamond shapes arrayed as a cross connected by four smaller circles arranged in a square. The amulet appeared to be of little value. Under these he found a bound volume containing printings of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States and many other

THE SCEPTERS OF TIME
THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN STORMBOLD

papers relating to the revolution and founding of the United States of America. The remainder of the chest was filled with Ian's accumulated log books, including those of *Cassiopeia*. Jonathan checked the dates of each and found them to cover Ian's entire life as a ship's captain and of *Cassiopeia* from her maiden voyage to the present, not including those still in use by Captain Tomkins.

He replaced the contents into the chest except for the letter to himself, which he opened. He could almost hear his grandfather's voice as he read;

Jonathan,

It is my greatest hope that you will never read this letter. I thought the chances were small that this would be the voyage that you encountered the vortex, but still I had to prepare. If you are reading this then beware, the world you know is in jeopardy. The ship that you sail, the men on board her and the contents of her hold will be all you have to prevail. May she protect you and carry you well. Her speed is her greatest asset. Use caution in confined waters. From this moment on wear the amulet, for it will guard your life and help you find your allies. Carry the ring with you as well, but keep it concealed. It will buy you a favor from the British crown, so use it wisely. You follow now the path of your ancestors. In Cassiopeia's logs you will find many useful facts of my journeys. Never allow them out of your possession even if it means that they must be destroyed. Abandon the trading mission you sailed under: today you have a greater purpose. You must seek the Temple of the Sun; only there will you find the answers you need. Do not doubt the importance of this mission. You must not fail to reach the temple! The path you must take is dark and narrow, and even now the Black Dragon stalks you. I regret that this is all that I can give you. With luck it will be enough. Welcome to the adventure.

Ian Stormbold

Hugh Mannfield

Jonathan sat in silence for a few minutes, then read the letter again. He was filled with a strange mixture of bewilderment, excitement and apprehension. This voyage to the Orient had promised to be filled with mystery and adventure, but now he seemed to have been drawn into more than he had bargained for. He opened the chest again, took out the amulet and put it on. He then tied the gold ring into a small pouch and thrust it into his deepest pocket. He locked the letter back inside the trunk and prepared to ascend to the deck.

The longboat had returned and was being swayed up when he arrived amidships. Barkley turned and offered an explanation. "The swells have diminished a bit, sir, and she rides well enough without the need to face 'em." Jonathan scanned the horizon, such as it was. The fog had thickened, and the returning crew showed their obvious relief at being back aboard. The swells were now no more than a foot or two high.

"Very well, Mr. Barkley," Jonathan considered the situation for a moment. He sensed the apprehension that was growing aboard and decided to give the crew something to keep hands and minds busy. "The captain will address the full ship's company this evening. Have the crew secure for heavy weather and then assist me on the quarterdeck for the noon sight."

"Aye aye, sir," replied Barkley, a bit taken back by the sudden formality of the first mate. Jonathan turned, and as he headed for the stern he could hear murmuring behind and the efficient Barkley, "You heard him, secure for weather! You can start with this boat...now step lively!"

The noon sight was a daily ritual taken to establish the ship's progress. The distance the sun reached above the horizon and the time of day that it reached its zenith would yield a geographical position after a series of geometrical calculations. Jonathan was an experienced navigator and excelled in mathematics. In this case, however, taking the sight was a useless effort done mostly for show. Without a good horizon the angle of the sun could not be accurately measured. Still, the crew, being ignorant of the mysteries of

THE SCEPTERS OF TIME
THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN STORBOLD

navigation, seeing an apparently successful sight taken, would feel confident that the ship was well managed.

The afternoon watch was coming on deck, and the second mate ascended to the quarterdeck. He was tall and dark skinned with a smooth flowing muscular form and an easy nature. His homeland was Jamaica, and he was born to a life at sea. "Oh, I don't like the look of this," he commented as he surveyed the glassy sea and the hazy horizon.

Thomas May was brought up sailing small trading vessels in the West Indies. While the three flags of England, France, and Spain wrestled for political dominance of the region, independent native traders plied the waters and ports, carefully shifting allegiances as circumstances dictated. He was an able seaman but being of mixed heritage had few prospects of rising in the British merchant fleet. Thomas was no doubt bound for a life among the privateers of the Caribbean, many of whom crossed over into outright piracy, if he could avoid impressment by the Royal Navy. Fate had interceded. Ian Stormbold, while sailing under a letter of marque in 1813 searching out prizes in the West Indies, had come across a half drowned individual clinging to the hull of his capsized craft and plucked him from the sea. A seasonal storm had caught May in open waters. When life had been restored, Ian was unsure what was to be done with him. May, grateful for his rescue, offered to join the crew and try to repay the life debt. For the next decade he had proven to be a steadfastly loyal crewman and had become an indispensable part of the Constellation line.

May's brow furrowed as he looked around. "Jonathan, there is something familiar about this fog...". He struggled with his memories for a moment and then said, "It reminds me of a tale told by an old sailor many years ago. He claimed to have sailed with your grandfather and told of a strange ship that came out of a fog like this. There are similar tales from the islands, too, I think something could be brewing and nothing good at that."

Jonathan turned with a grin. He regarded island superstitions rather lightly. "You may be right. I've ordered the ship secured. Whatever fate has in store for us, I plan to be ready! I leave her in your capable hands, Mr. May," he said with a bow. "By the way,

Hugh Mannfield

Captain Tomkins suggested a gunnery drill." With that, Jonathan went below and immersed himself in the logs of the *Cassiopeia* and those of Ian's earlier ships.

The reading was somewhat dull and was interrupted by the frequent rumbling of the gun trucks overhead, but in the notes and paragraphs, spaced between the regular position, speed and weather reports, a story began to unfold. Jonathan had heard many of the stories of Ian's travels told around the dinner table in his youth and later in the taverns and ship's galleys, but now the fragments began to knit together along with some new facts that he had never known. An amazing world opened up before him. He roused himself shortly before the evening watch and gathered with the ship's officers and mates in the captain's quarters.

The ship's officers stood in a circle facing Captain Tomkins, who drew himself upright in his chair with as much dignity as he could muster. "I believe you all know why you're here," he began. "My injury continues to worsen, and in the event of the worst I want to let it be known that Jonathan will be assuming command. This is my wish as well as that of Ian Stormbold." The group nodded agreement. This was what everyone expected. "While I have you all here," he continued, "I want you to witness that in the event that I succumb to fever and delirium and no other option is available, I want you, Jacob, to do your best to remove the leg."

Jacob shifted his weight nervously, he had assisted once in such an operation. However, he recalled few details, his primary job had been to hold the patient down. "Aye sir, I'll give it my best," he replied.

"You will find a book on the subject in the locker above my chart table," said Tomkins. "Now if there is nothing else, will you gentlemen assist me to the quarterdeck to address the crew?"

Captain Tomkins was lifted up the steps to the quarterdeck where he leaned heavily on the forward rail. Jonathan and Jacob stood by to lend support, but he shrugged them off with a glare. "I'll not be seen held up before the crew," he rasped. "Now call all hands aft if you please, Mr. Stormbold!"

The total ships company of *Cassiopeia*, officers and crew, now numbered sixty two. Perhaps a bit light for a ship her size, but in

THE SCEPTERS OF TIME
THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN STORMBOLD

Ian's own words, "Three good hands are worth more than five average ones and more than a hundred poor ones." Some ships carried extra hands to accommodate losses, rounding up whatever they could find in the way of able-bodied men prior to sailing. The Constellation line hired fewer and could thus offer a larger share, thereby attracting and keeping the best. Two thirds of the crew had sailed many voyages under the Constellation colors, and most of the rest were at least on their second. Now they were gathered at the main mast facing aft to hear what the captain had to say.

"I want all of you to hear this straight," he began, sounding fairly strong. "Ten days ago, when the mizzen blew off, I took a shattered spar in the leg." Tomkins's voice began to waver. "The wound has not yet healed," he continued. There was a murmur from the crew - they all knew that the longer an injury remained open while at sea the greater the chance for gangrene, and with that, death could follow. Tomkins glared them into silence. "Until the time I regain my strength, Jonathan will be in command of this ship. If need be, I shall direct Mr. Stormbold in the operation of this ship from the confines of my cabin. I trust all of you will respond to his orders as if they were my own." He leaned on the rail and then raised himself up again. "This is not only my decision but the expressed wish of Ian Stormbold given to me before we sailed," he continued. "Jonathan has been well trained in the business of his family and is a fine navigator. We have the utmost confidence in him." He then turned to Jonathan and said "You may dismiss the men now."

Jonathan called out, "Port watch relieved, starboard watch to stations!" The idle crew withdrew to the forecabin, and the rest returned to their appointed tasks.

Once the deck was clear, Jonathan and Jacob helped Captain Tomkins back to his cabin; the display of strength he had put on for the men seemed to have nearly drained him. He was feverish and shaking and by the time they reached his cot he collapsed into it without reserve. Jacob remained to undress him, pull a blanket over him and attend to a new dressing for his leg.

The sun was setting orange in the west, its intensity dimmed by the fog so that it hung like a great disk surrounded by a milky magenta sky. The sky faded to a deep violet blue above, then to a

Hugh Mannfield

dark milky gray in the east where the moon was peeking above the horizon not orange but blue-white and cold. The sun and moon seemed to be in exact opposition, for as the moon came into view, the disk of the sun began to be cut by the horizon. In hopes of fixing their position, Jonathan noted the time that the lower limb of each orb met the horizon. Soon Mars sparkled forth red above the setting sun, followed by several stars that reflected on the smooth quiet waters. The ocean seemed to vanish into the fog some 50 yards out in every direction, and as the ship rocked slowly on the transparent swells it seemed as if she were floating free in space suspended with the heavenly bodies.

Darkness came on fast, as it does in tropical waters. Stormbold made his rounds of the deck in the dwindling light, checking that all was secure according to his orders. Topsails were furled, staysails were stowed and halyard lines neatly wound. The longboats were double lashed, and the deck was clear of nonessentials. He made his way forward. The anchors were pulled tightly into their blocks and secured below with several coils. A single jib was set in the large triangular space between bowsprit and foremast where upwards to a half dozen sails might be flown. Returning aft, the small lanterns at the quarterdeck steps had been lit, casting a dim glow forward that lit up the deck as far as the base of the main mast but darkened the companionway with shadow. He proceeded to the quarterdeck where, as Barkley adjusted the binnacle light, a red glow sprang up under the glass that covered the compass.

"Bring your lantern, Mr. Barkley, and let's have a look below decks," said Jonathan. They descended through the main hatchway to the cargo hold and worked their way aft and then forward checking the lashings on all the crates and casks. The hold was barely half full, having traded much of the cargo in Cape Town for silver specie and gold (the currency of the Orient). Aside from spare timbers and repair materials for the ship, what remained were manufactured goods from the factories of America. Cast iron implements and tools, casks of nails, sugar, rum, turned hardwood and a lot of cotton sail fabric, all could be sold at a great profit in China. "All appears to be well here; let's get topside."

THE SCEPTERS OF TIME
THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN STORMBOLD

As they made their way aft out of the hold Jonathan noticed an odd feeling to the ship. "Have we gone aground, Mr. Barkley?"

"Aye, I know what you mean, sir!" he replied. "She ceases to roll. Let's see what's afoot."

As they ascended to the main deck they saw that the fog had closed in around the ship. The air and water seemed to be void of any motion. The waves had entirely stopped, leaving the ship silent and still. Looking over the waist they could see nothing but a smooth inky surface on the water, only a few tiny ripples coming from somewhere in the mist forward of the ship. A call went up from the forewatch. "Light Ho!" Jonathan rushed to the bow and peered into the gloom. As his eyes adjusted he saw a dim light like a lantern in the distance. It seemed to bob and sway, so it might not be a shore light or a rising star. The fog swirled around it as it drew ever nearer. The crew of the evening watch gathered on the fore deck and in the rigging, and low murmurs began as they guessed at what it could be. A glance and a raised hand from Stormbold brought silence. A form began to take shape in the fog, slowly revealing a long, low skiff making way toward the ship. There was a shape in the prow, a figure head?...a man with a staff? The craft drew nearer, and Jonathan could make out what looked like two cloaked oarsmen at the stern.

"Ahoy...Ahoy!" a voice rang from the craft.

Jonathan returned the hail. "This is the ship *Cassiopeia* of Baltimore! State your business!"

The skiff drew near, slowing to a stop twenty yards out. The fog and sea between them swirled as if there were a mixing of different airs and waters. Three figures were now revealed: an old man in a red and gold robe stood in the bow with a staff, two hooded oarsmen stood motionless in the stern. "I seek the traveler!" said the man with the staff in a voice of strength unfitting his bent form.

"There is a ship full of travelers here...you may have your pick!" said Jonathan. There was a ripple of mirth from the crew.

The old man scanned the faces along the bulwarks stopping at Stormbold. "You would be the young captain, Jonathan Stormbold, then?"

Hugh Mannfield

Jonathan was a bit taken back "That is a rank I have not yet achieved...How is it you know my name? And how do you come to be at sea in this fog?"

"My apologies...I forget that I appear to you as a stranger while to me, you are a lifelong friend." The skiff drew a few feet nearer. "I am Artilaker, Emperor of the First Kingdom. I greet you through Drammon of the line of hosts."

Jonathan paused. He suspected that there might be another ship nearby. He whispered to Barkley to fetch Jacob and arm some of the long-standing crewmen.

"You look more like a beggar than a King to me," replied Jonathan with a grin.

"And you appear more a boy than a captain," replied the man. "But through time beggars may become kings and kings may become beggars, boys become captains, and strangers, friends."

"You travel light for an emperor...do you always speak in riddles?" answered Jonathan, undaunted.

The old man glared at Stormbold. "My words will become clear in time, mark them well. I have journeyed from the Temple of the Sun. It was foretold that you would be found in the second vortex, and so it is. The world around us now swings between what is and what may be," the old man raised and swept his arms in a wide arc, "but here we are untouched as if in the eye of the typhoon."

Jonathan looked closely at the old man, his robe embroidered with a pattern of squares in even rows separated by rings of circles, his staff of ivory banded with gold. The old man's mention of the Temple of the Sun and the vortex had sobered him. What was this all about? Jonathan considered his words and asked, "I have heard of this temple; where may it be found?"

The old man scanned the ship once again, this time searching out the eyes of each man. Then he spoke: "The temple may be found only by the worthy. The path is narrow, and few may pass. If you are indeed the traveler, you will find your way there, and it is there that you must go. I am here to give you this message and a warning. Sail into the Bay of Bengal. In need, you may find safety in the jaws of the tiger. Beware the black and red sail, it brings death." The skiff

THE SCEPTERS OF TIME
THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN STORMBOLD

began to recede and the mists closed in around it until its form was lost in the darkness and fog.

Jonathan turned to the crew. It had been a strange day followed by an even stranger night. "Well men, it looks like we've chanced upon an adventure!" There was a chorus of agreement from the crew. "I seem to have inherited the luck of my grandfather." This raised a round of laughs. Jonathan paced the foredeck, and lifted his face, feeling a slight stirring of the air. The ribbons at the masthead began to flutter. "It looks as if we will be able to start this adventure without delay," he commented. "I can only hope it will be as profitable as one of Ian's." This raised a cheer.

The fog began to break into ribbons as the wind picked up. Within a few minutes they were under easy sail, clipping along on a moonlit sea. Jonathan had returned to the quarterdeck happy to be underway again. Suddenly he snapped to Barkley, "Pass me that glass! Lets see where that skiff came from!" He scanned the horizon in all directions, but *Cassiopeia* was alone on the water.