

# **THE CUSTOM OF THE SEA**

*Written by Joseph R. Abbott © 2017*

## **ONE**

**Panel 1:** [LARGE] A two-masted squared-rigged brig, the "Cerebus" is on fire. A tiny ship's boat escapes into the stormy sea with 3 men aboard.

1. CAPTION: Aug 24, 1766 A.D.

2. NARRATION: My name is Horatio Brown. Conjuror, alchemist, scientist.

**Panel 2:** HORATIO BROWN, sitting in the boat, middle-aged, balding, with a Salvador Dali mustache and a mesmerizing look to his eyes, dressed as a Egyptian themed magician, *Le Grand Osiris* with a turban and silk cape.

3. NARRATION: I was traveling to America for my first tour outside of England under my stage name *Le Grande Osiris*.

**Panel 3:** Mr. Brown, frazzled and forlorn, sitting in the lifeboat with two other men. All 3 star at the burning ship.

4. NARRATION: Now all my props and apparatus were aflame, and I shared a tiny dingy with the only two other survivors...

**Panel 4:** AGATHA SWELTER, A grotesquely fat man, nearly tipping the small boat with his weight. His tiny eyes transfixed by the blazing ship.

5. NARRATION: Mr. Agatha Swelter, the ships cook...

**Panel 5:** JAMES MCCLOUD, A boy in uniform clutches an oak box and looks on in horror at the burning ship.

6. NARRATION: And Mr. James McCloud, Midshipman, a mere boy of 16.

## **TWO**

**Panel 1:** The burning ship is smaller in the background as the little boat has drifted from it. Brown sits in the middle while Swelter and McCloud appear to bicker.

1. NARRATION:                   As I watched our ship burn I was reminded of my dear Elizabeth, who had implored me not to travel to America, where she feared I might be burned as a witch for my acts of "*hocus pocus*". I assured her that such superstitions were no longer popular in the colonies and that no harm would befall me.

**Panel 2:** Swelter turns angrily to McCloud with a threatening glare.

4. SWELTER:                    The blaze started in the armory!
5. MCCLLOUD:                 It was the galley! I saw it with me own eyes!

**Panel 3:** The "Cerebus" explodes in flames on the churning sea.

6. SFX:                         KABOOM!

**Panel 4:** McCloud clamors to the stern of the boat in fear, clinging to the oak box that held the sextant, as Swelter threatens him with the knife with a satisfied grin of his chubby face. The "Cerebus" burns in the background

7. SWELTER:                    There goes the armory, ye little *gigg!* Call me a liar? I'll skin ye alive!

**Panel 5:** Brown gets between the two men, separating them.

8. BROWN:                    Stop. We need to band together, not be at each other's throats!

**Panel 6:** McCloud has gathered some courage now that Brown is standing between them. Swelter has a terrible sneer on his face.

9. MCCLLOUD:                 As highest rank on this vessel you shall call me "Sir", Mr. Swelter or I shall have you court-marshaled when we reach England.
10. SWELTER:                 Aye "Capn"...

## **THREE**

**Panel 1:** Overhead view of the tiny boat and the men in the vast empty sea.

1. NARRATION:                    We laid out the supplies we had on board. As fore mentioned my companions had a knife, and a sextant in an oak box.

**Panel 2:** Laying out their meager supplies on the seat of the tiny boat.

2. NARRATION:                    Additionally we had a measure of "salt horse" wrapped in cloth, an old canvas, and a bale bucket.

**Panel 3:** The castaways look gloomy as the sun beats down on them.

3. NARRATION:                    At first we thought we would be rescued after a few days. We couldn't have been that far off the well-traveled trade routes.

**Panel 4:** Mr. McCloud attempts to use the sextant, but seems unsure.

4. NARRATION:                    We talked about it endlessly, calculating how many ships must surely be headed this way. At least one a week according to our Midshipman's calculations.

**Panel 5:** Swelter and McCloud argue bitterly over the sextant.

5. SWELTER:                        If you don't know how to use it, then why did you bring it?

6. MCCLOUD:                        It's worth a lot of money!

7. SWELTER:                        I'd trade the whole thing for a nibble of hard tack!

**Panel 6:** Overhead view of the boat and the forlorn looking men, sheltering from the blistering noon day sun with the canvas tarp.

8. NARRATION:                    The canvas was too small to provide much protection from the blazing sun.

## **FOUR**

**Panel 1:** The men look unkempt, unshaven, but enthused as a SEA TURTLE approaches the boat. Brown's mustache is dropping and his turban is becoming unfurled.

1. CAPTION: Aug 27, 1766

2. NARRATION: Our hopes were raised that we could catch some nourishment.

**Panel 2:** McCloud tries to hit the turtle with the oar.

NO COPY

**Panel 3:** The turtle dives back into the safety of the ocean.

NO COPY

**Panel 4:** Looks of disappointment on the men as the turtle disappears beneath the waves

3. NARRATION: But it wasn't to be.

**Panel 5:** It is raining. The men scramble in the downpour to stretch the canvas out and collect rainwater.

4. CAPTION: Sept 1, 1766

5. NARRATION: The heavens opened up and we collected the bounty.

**Panel 6:** The men drink joyously from their cupped hands.

6. NARRATION: It was like ambrosia to our lips.

**Panel 7:** The wicked sun blazing again. The castaways curl up in their positions in the boat.

7. NARRATION: But the sea is vast. And we were insignificant flotsam in an endless expanse.

## **FIVE**

**Panel 1:** The castaways are looking more forlorn, their beards growing longer, their skin sun-burnt.

1. CAPTION: Sept 8, 1766

2. NARRATION: We drifted for many days, growing more hungry, thirsty and desperate. The “salt horse” was long gone. We were so cramped from lying in the boat that none of us could stand anymore.

**Panel 2:** Swelter attempts to squeeze out a few drops of piss into the bale bucket.

3. NARRATION: The blessing of rain never returned. We began to drink our own urine.

**Panel 3:** The tiny boat in the middle of the ocean, no land or ships in sight. The sun blazing in the sky.

4. NARRATION: Gradually, hope began to fade. We stopped talking about ships and trade routes.

**Panel 4:** McCloud looks near death, huddled in the bow of the boat. Brown is curled up in the stern trying to sleep. Swelter is hunched over in the middle.

5. NARRATION: The midshipman stopped talking altogether, while the cook wouldn't shut-up.

**Panel 5:** Swelter rambling deliriously while the other men ignore him.

6. NARRATION: Telling the same stories over and over. Mostly about wenches he had diddled in ports. At least he didn't talk about food.

**Panel 6:** Close up of hands unfolding a tattered cloth that conceal the knife.

7. CAPTION: Sept 25, 1766

8. NARRATION: The unthinkable kept creeping into my mind. I knew the others were thinking about it too.

**Panel 7:** The unrelenting sun blazing in the sky.

9. NARRATION: We all couldn't go on like this for much longer. One of us would have to die.

## **SIX**

**Panel 1:** The men sit in the boat in a circle.

1. NARRATION: As was custom, we drew lots.

**Panel 2:** Swelter holds three slivers of wood clenched in his chubby fist.

2. NARRATION: Curiously, I had noticed the cook handling the sticks in an unusual way. To the untrained eye it wouldn't have been noticed, but... To *Le Grande Osiris* it was plain...

**Panel 3:** Swelter gleefully draws a long stick.

3. NARRATION: Swelter was cheating.

**Panel 4:** Brown draws a medium stick.

4. NARRATION: I don't know why I didn't say anything.

**Panel 5:** McCloud draws the smallest stick with a dumbfounded expression.

5. NARRATION: Perhaps it was because James was the weakest. A sickly lad. He probably wouldn't have survived long anyway.

**Panel 6:** Sheer terror on McCloud's face as Brown grabs him and Swelter comes at him with the knife.

6. NARRATION: In the end he seemed to accept his fate.

**Panel 7:** Swelter whispers something in McCloud's ear as the blood drains from the stab wound in his neck into the bucket.

7. NO COPY

**Panel 8:** Brown and Swelter, their mouths dripping blood.

8. NARRATION: We drank his blood like savages.

## **SEVEN**

**Panel 1:** Swelter has sliced McCloud open from neck to stomach. Brown is reaching in to grab the liver.

1. NARRATION:                      We feasted ravenously on his warm organs like dogs.

**Panel 2:** Mr. Brown tearing into the liver with his teeth.

NO COPY

**Panel 3:** Swelter gorging on the heart.

2. NARRATION:                      Hunger and dehydration had turned us into nothing more than animals.

**PANEL 4:** Brown, looking ill, wiping the blood from his mouth.

3. NARRATION:                      It was disgusting and made my stomach turn but I knew I had to keep it down or I would surely die.

**PANEL 5:** Swelter licking his lips and sucking blood off his fingers.

4. NARRATION:                      The cook seemed to ... Well... He was certainly a man who enjoyed his food.

## **EIGHT**

**Panel 1:** The bottom of the boat is strewn with bones and blood of McCloud.

1. CAPTION: Oct 12, 1766

**Panel 2:** Swelter and Brown look very thin, sun-burnt, covered in caked blood. They are cracking bones to get the marrow.

2. NARRATION: Rescue was elusive. We would have to draw lots again.

**Panel 3:** They prepare to draw lots, Swelter holding 2 sticks in his fat fist.

3. NARRATION: I watched him closely, and sure enough, the cook cheated.

**Panel 4:** Swelter confidently holds a long stick, a sly grin on his gristled face.

NO COPY

**Panel 5:** Brown holds a longer stick. Swelter is bewildered.

4. NARRATION: But so did I.

**Panel 6:** Swelter looks enraged, while McCloud looks defiant.

5. SWELTER: You dirty cheat!

6. Brown: You cheated too! I saw you palm a stick the last time too.

**Panel 7:** Swelter pounces on Brown, tearing at him with his hands and teeth.

7. NARRATION: We fought for our lives, knowing whoever lost would be dinner.

## **NINE**

**Panel 1:** Swelter's fat bloody hand reaching under the planks, searching for the knife.

1. NARRATION:                    He grabbed for his knife which he kept wrapped in a cloth at the stern... But it wasn't there.

**Panel 2:** Brown pulls out the knife to Swelters surprise.

2. BROWN:                        I knew ye wouldn't go like a lamb.

**Panel 3:** Swelters looms up like a madman as Brown lunges towards him, his silk magicians cape flowing dramatically.

NO COPY

**Panel 4:** Brown stabs Swelter in his belly, blood gushes out.

NO COPY

**Panel 5:** Brown slashes Swelter's neck gleefully.

3. NARRATION:                    The meat from his huge body would have lasted a month.

## **TEN**

**Panel 1:** Brown in his boat drifting in the vast empty ocean, gnawing on raw human flesh.

1. CAPTION: Oct 15, 1766
2. NARRATION: "Humanity" is just a silk cape we wrap ourselves in so we can believe there is something good inside. But like silk threads, it is easily torn to expose what is hidden within. I had been reduced to my darkest, most basic instincts. I had become little more than an animal.

**Panel 2:** Brown throws the bones overboard. A tiny frigate is visible far away in the distance.

3. NARRATION: Oddly, I missed the company of my former companions, yes even that of the obese cook and his awful stories.

**Panel 3:** The bones sinking deep into the ocean.

4. NARRATION: A few days after killing the cook, I was rescued by the Dutch frigate "Tertullian". They wanted to know how I had survived so long all alone.

**Panel 4:** Bones sinking even deeper into the ocean.

5. NARRATION: But *Le Grande Osiris* never reveals his secrets.