



DAVEY JONES' LOOT

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

Hurricane-lashed waters! The rending crash of ship against ship—and the Stinger spikes a warship's guns to levy toll on a South Seas killer!

“STINGER” SEAVE had many enemies. The greatest of them all was Larsen of Singapore, but there

were others who gave him as much trouble. Buck Morgan of Levuka was a case in point. Time and again his path crossed the Stinger's

and time and again Seave wished he had finished the man with hot lead. But for some reason or other Morgan never mixed with the Stinger when the little man was in a particularly evil mood, and so he lived to be something of a terror in the Islands until the day the Society of Scars trapped the Stinger on Ysabel and he wiped them out.

The first time Morgan and the Stinger met was in Laviata Lagoon. Strictly speaking, ships had no business in Laviata at all, for it was a beautiful little atoll in a Japanese archipelago and the floor was choked with virgin oysters. However, as it was exactly the place for a man to garner a fortune in a day or so, it was inevitable the Stinger should some day anchor there, especially as he was then only a penniless small shipowner, with all his fortune to make.

To anchor in Laviata and to dive for the untapped oysters invited, if a warship chanced along, almost certain death, if not from rifle fire almost certainly from years in a stinking jail. Such prospects never bothered the Stinger, as all the Islands knew later on. This was proved when he served four months in Siberia for poaching seal, and the story of his escape and vengeance is an epic in the South to this day.

At this present time, however, the Stinger was little known, and Morgan, running into a lagoon at Laviata, had not the slightest idea of the sort of man he was bucking. He saw, did Buck Morgan, already at anchor and busily diving for the shell, a small, battered old schooner and he sniffed with contempt. He himself had a brig, heavily manned and splendidly outfitted, and he bore a reputation for toughness that many adventurers envied. As soon as he had his ship anchored he dropped a boat, manned it with six armed men and pulled across to the schooner. He came overside grinning to himself and was a little astonished when a voice said, "You can tell your men to remain below."

HE looked at the speaker, a small, frail man with a sandy, ragged mustache, mild blue eyes and a suit of comfortably baggy whites.

"Oh," said Morgan, grinning more widely. "Who the hell are you?"

"Seave," said the little man mildly. "And your name?"

"I'm Buck Morgan of Levuka. You must be green in these waters," said Morgan with something of a sneer. He placed his hands on his hips and laughed malevolently. "How come you didn't skip out when you saw my tops'ls?" He peered aloft to where one of the schooner's crew was perched in the rigging with a telescope and incessantly scanning the horizon. Seave blinked.

"The Japs use steamers," he explained mildly. "I saw no reason to run from a sailing vessel."

"Is that so?" Morgan laughed again. "Well, I suppose you've got her about stripped."

"Half stripped," corrected Seave. "You see, it's foolish to clean out a lagoon. Leave half there and in a few more years you can come back. The oysters propagate...."

"Aw, don't give me a lecture. I'll take what you've brought up."

"I don't understand," murmured Seave, rubbing his throat. "I'm afraid I'm not very quick at understanding things, Captain."

"Half the shell, fool! You're not opening it here, I take it. Got it in your holds, eh? All right. I'll send some men aboard t' relieve you of it."

"Piracy, eh?" said Seave, blinking again. "Well, you see ..."

"Piracy?" Morgan laughed, his face crinkling up derisively. "What in 'ell d' you call looting the lagoon? ... Aw, what's the use o' talking? Come on up, boys."

The men in the boats below laughed and two of them stood up ready to shin aboard. Seave coughed and went on rubbing his throat.

"I hate to soil my decks," he said crisply. "But I shall kill the first man to board me."

Morgan swung back on him with an astonished oath, his right hand dropping to his gun butt. The little frail man's mild blue eyes had changed to the color of sheet ice and something about them caused Morgan to swallow involuntarily. He recovered himself next moment, however, and the hot blood flooded his face as his rage mounted.

"You're crazy, man!" he roared. "I've got enough men aboard my packet to eat this ship alive. Get up on the poop and keep still. I'm taking what shell you've got and cleaning the lagoon of the rest. Beat it!"

"You heard what I said," snapped the Stinger, but Morgan only laughed and, slowly drawing his gun, he tapped the Stinger's chest with the thick blue-steel barrel of it.

"Beat it, son. I'm Buck Morgan of Levuka and I've killed better men'n you for saying less. Thank your lucky stars that I ain't taking your ship as well. Come on up, boys!"

There was the sound of a man climbing up the schooner's side, and Morgan turned contemptuously away to watch. The first of his men shoved a head above the scupper, reached up for the rail, then dropped back in a limp heap to crash into the boat below, a neat hole between his eyes. The roar of a shot filled Morgan's ears and he whipped round with a frightened oath.

He saw the Stinger standing exactly as he had stood the second before Morgan turned from him to the rail. The little frail man was slowly rubbing his throat and there was no sign of a weapon about him, nothing, in fact, to betray that he had fired save wisps of blue, acrid smoke curling up before him.

"You swine!" roared Morgan, and lifted the gun he was carrying. He never knew how the other man found a weapon but suddenly in the Stinger's right hand there was a glint of steel, a spurt of orange flame and

Morgan's revolver crashed to the deck while he stood looking stupidly at a bleeding scar across the back of his own right hand. "Hell!" he whispered thickly, and that was all.

"I suggest you go," said the Stinger gently, "before I get angry."

"I'll kill you for this," said Morgan slowly, looking up at the other, his face white but his eyes burning with rage. "No man can shoot me up and get away with it." He turned abruptly, slid overside to his boat and gave word to push off.

Seave was motionless for as long as it took the boat to get far enough from the side so he could see it. Then he walked to the rail, smiling coldly, his right palm caressing the worn butt of a gun under his left armpit.

"Something tells me I have not seen the last of you," he murmured. He remained contemplating the receding boat and the anchored brig until he was aroused by the excited voice of his mate, Brockwell, demanding to know what was the matter.

"A little unpleasantness," sighed the Stinger. "Have you ever heard of Buck Morgan?"

"So that's his brig, is it? We were just pulling in from the beds when she anchored. Thought I recognized it. Have I heard of him? He's the biggest cutthroat south of 'Frisco."

"I'm glad of that," said the Stinger. "I have just been forced to kill one of his men and to wound him."

"Wound Buck Morgan?" Brockwell looked scared. "Well, we'd better cut th' cable and slide. He'll wipe us out. He carries a big crew."

"I did intend to sail this evening," Seave replied gently. "But we will now put in another day's diving."

"That's just asking for trouble," protested Brockwell, nervously cocking and uncocking a Winchester carbine he carried. The Stinger smiled his little wintry smile.

"Why else did you think I was

staying?" he said.

IT was near midnight when Morgan attacked, exactly as the Stinger expected him to do. The attack came in two boats, one planning to round the schooner's stern and the other to make for the fore chains and effect a boarding that way.

Seave, walking his poop unperturbed, gave a curt order to Brockwell as soon as he caught the phosphorescent flashes of the muffled oars, and the mate lighted and set adrift on thick flat boards two white flares. The oncoming boats rowed full into the bright radiance and stopped irresolute until Buck Morgan's angry voice could be heard urging them on. In each boat a man began to shoot at the flares and one was actually extinguished by this means before a rifle began to speak slowly and with precision from the schooner's poop.

Brockwell declared later it was uncanny. For a man even to make a hit in that uncertain, wavering light was wonderful enough, but the Stinger placed his shots as if he was firing in the glare of full day. He killed two men in the leading boat, crippled one in the other boat and with his fourth shot whisked the cap from Buck Morgan's head. He seemed to have a whim to let the leader live, for even after the boats had turned back, pulling in frantic haste for the brig, Seave could have shot Morgan but refrained.

"He slept like a kid all the rest of the night," Brockwell declared later. "He hasn't a blasted nerve in his body. I can tell you I was hopping all over the ship with nervousness until the moon rose. But Seave had the right idea. Morgan didn't bother us again that night."

The Stinger came on deck the next morning, freshly shaven, dressed in spotless white and apparently as much at ease as if he'd been anchored in Apia. He seemed unaware of the fact that in stripping Laviata he

had already violated every caution other men used.

Other men had not dared to work after dark, whereas the Stinger had, for two nights running previous to the last, worked by flare light. The accepted method was to put to sea at night and to run in again with the dawn so that a steamer could not turn the lagoon into a trap. Seave explained his actions by merely saying to Cassidy afterward that he knew nothing was going to happen because his palm hadn't itched until Morgan came along. Morgan, of course, had no fear of being in the lagoon, for without a shell aboard it would be hard to convict him.

Once the sun was well up, Seave sent his boat's crews out again as if nothing had happened. An hour later Morgan attempted to launch two boats to dive some distance from the Stinger's, but they were hardly clear of the brig's side when once again that rifle began to talk slowly and with precision from the schooner's poop.

Seave seemed to be enjoying himself. He sat in a comfortable cane chair, his rifle resting on the taffrail and a glass of gin on the deck beside him. His first six shots riddled the boats, three holes in each, and Morgan, on his own poop, shook his fists and swore in a high-pitched, hysterical voice. Also he was foolish enough to open fire with four men hidden behind his deck houses and the Stinger got them, one after the other, through the shoulder as they exposed themselves to shoot.

By this time the half-foundered boats belonging to the brig had returned to the mother ship, and Morgan, in furious despair, tried to snipe at Seave's boats far out on the lagoon. When Seave had wounded two more of his men the other captain gave up. It dawned upon him that he had no ordinary free-trading sailor to face and that, if nothing else, he faced a man who was a wizard with both rifle and revolver.

Wherefore Buck Morgan of Levuka, a

terror to many and a man who never admitted defeat, picked up his anchor and fled from Laviata as if the devil himself were at his heels.

The Stinger smiled his little wintry smile, and that was all.

"He told me that if Morgan had been any decent-spoken sort of chap he'd have let him pick up what was left of the shell," Brockwell declared. "But he can't stand any funny business. I can give you one tip. You can talk and argue with him so long as his eyes are blue. But when you see 'em turn sort of like ice, then back off and run. The argument's done."

NOW there would have been no more to this incident, perhaps, save that Morgan would have remained an enemy, had not the brig, running furiously south for the whole of that day and the next night, been halted the following dawn by a shot across her bows. A snaky-looking stubby-funnelled warship slid alongside and Morgan sighed with relief that he had no shell aboard when he saw her flag. Quite tranquilly he submitted himself to a search.

"I was blown out of m' course," he explained moodily to the dapper little Jap lieutenant who boarded him. "I'm not a poacher."

"Of course not, Captain," said the Jap, smiling. "You haven't seen any other vessels around, I suppose?"

Morgan's eyes glittered malevolently at that and he saw the way to repay for his scarred hand and his dead men.

"Oh, sure. There was a schooner in Laviata Lagoon."

The Jap stiffened and eyed him suspiciously.

"You're not sending us on a wild goose chase? We were at Laviata only four days ago. I warn you...."

Morgan jerked a stubby forefinger at

his bandaged hand.

"The swine gave me that. I buried men yesterday. Look at the bullet holes in my boats."

"Ah, so you were there, too," breathed the Jap.

"I went in for water," said Morgan sulkily. "You've got nothing on me. Go and take a look at Laviata."

"To be sure," said the Jap, smiling and bowing. "And we thank you, Captain."

Morgan laughed outright when he saw the Jap climb up the side of the warship and that vessel's course set to the north while black smoke began to pour from her funnel.

"That'll give this Seave bird something to think about," he boasted thickly. His mate, a man named Boris, shook his head and looked troubled.

"That's ag'in all th' rules, Cap. If they ever found out we told 'em, all th' Islands'd be ag'in us."

"If you keep yer blamed mouth shut, who's goin' t' know?" demanded Morgan irately. "Think I'm letting a little swine like him shoot me up?"

Boris subsided but he was very troubled just the same. It was against all the unwritten rules for one free-trader to inform on another.

TWELVE hours later Brockwell, Seave's mate, shot down the companion to the main cabin and leaned across the table toward the Stinger, who was slowly eating a light meal.

"Warship," he jerked breathlessly, his face ashen. "The lookout saw her smoke. We ain't out of Jap waters yet."

The Stinger masticated the mouthful of food he was already engaged on, drank a glass of water, lighted a cigar, pushed away his plate and said gently, "Is there no sign of wind?" The schooner had been becalmed scarcely twenty miles from Laviata and lay without motion save for a heavy rolling.

“Jest catspaws,” choked Brockwell. “It ought to freshen any minute. The glass’s right. What shall we do?”

The Stinger stretched his legs under the table, leaned back in his chair and slid his right hand under his left armpit.

“What can we do, Brockwell? We must wait. How far off is she?”

“Way over the horizon yet, sir. But her smoke’s plain against the sky.”

“She wasn’t due for two days yet, according to the secret schedule Cassidy gave me,” said the Stinger aloud. “I wonder how she knew?” He appeared lost in thought for a moment, then smiled his little wintry smile. “Have all hands stand by, Brockwell. Get the hatches off. Get all sail on her and wet the canvas down. I wish I knew these waters better.”

Brockwell darted back up the companion and after a few minutes of calm enjoyment of his cigar the Stinger followed suit. He stared a while at the working men, all of them casting scared glances at the horizon; then he, too, contemplated the smoke smudge against the sky, and after that he commenced a slow and unhurried pacing up and down, his arms folded and the tips of his fingers caressing the butt of his gun.

Two hours later the spars of the warship were plain, but as if they had been pushing it before them the wind freshened and the schooner was able to stand away from the east at the rate of three or four knots. Seave went below for a look at the glass.

Then he came back on deck, wetted his finger, held it to the wind, scanned the sky for a long time and slowly shook his head. The wind would freshen, but not for many hours. With a slight shrug of regret he walked to the fore’ard taffrail and called to Brockwell.

“All right. Get it overside.”

Brockwell and the men who had been standing near the hatches in frightened impatience, heaved sighs of relief and sprang

to work. No onlooker would have thought, to watch the Stinger as he stood by the rail, unmoved, his face expressionless, his eyes mild and blue, that he was watching with each sling-load that dumped into the sea the first fortune he had ever gained being flung away.

THE wind continued to freshen sooner than the Stinger had expected it, and the schooner raced away to the east under a full press of canvas. The warship lay dead astern of her, overhauling her slowly and grimly, until at last, toward evening, there was a spurt of orange flame from her forward gun and a shot splashed into the sea far ahead. Seave signed with his hand and the schooner hove to.

“I was blown out of my course,” said the Stinger mildly to the Jap lieutenant of the boarding party. “What is it you want?”

The little yellow man smiled vindictively.

“Pearls. You have been stripping the bed at Laviata.”

“Nothing of the sort,” Seave replied gently. “I was blown out of my course, I say, and becalmed.”

“So I have heard from another man,” said the Jap. “Have you by any chance buried some dead men and got holes in your boats?”

“Ah,” said Seave softly. “So that was why you came back? You met Captain Morgan.”

The Jap did not reply but turned to fire orders at his men. The Stinger looked on without emotion, save that his eyes had turned icy again and he fondled many times the butt of his gun. When the Jap lieutenant returned to him on the poop after an hour or more the Stinger had not moved.

“I shall arrest you,” choked the Jap with suppressed fury. “You have jettisoned them.”

Seave looked cautiously round. There was no witness to hear.

“Yes, I dumped them,” he admitted

calmly. "And I washed my hands clean. May I ask what course Captain Morgan had set?"

"You will come with me," insisted the Jap. "You have admitted you stripped Laviata."

"Your mistake," said the Stinger coolly. "What proof have you? Have you been to Laviata? Did I mention the place first?"

"I must arrest you," said the Jap determinedly. "My commander can decide what must be done."

The Stinger smiled and the Jap's face went ashen for some reason he could not determine. He fell back a pace.

"I shall kill at least five men before you take me," said Seave crisply. "You have held me up on the high seas. I am flying the British flag. You have no proof I am a poacher, no proof I have even been to Laviata. If you capture me by force it will be piracy and I have friends at Apia and Suva."

"Well," choked the Jap. No one could blame him for his fury. As a loyal man it naturally roused him to wrath to know that this adventurer, this alien, had looted a part of his country's treasure, then flung it beyond recovery into the sea. There was not a shell on board. Even the oyster slime was washed from the holds and they reeked of lime disinfectant. If it was possible to capture the little captain and his ship without the use of force, much might be made of a case in Japan. But if the little man insisted on fighting, and it was likely he would, grave international complications might ensue. Still choking, the Jap turned away.

"One moment," said Seave gently. "Will you drink with me? I wish to know what course Captain Morgan took?"

The Jap swung back.

"I will not drink with you, Captain. Your ... er friend ... was heading due south when we overhauled him. I understand he was heading for the Marshalls."

Seave nodded. The Jap left him with a

suppressed oath, called to his men and ushered them into the cutter waiting below. Seave stood motionless until the warship had started for Laviata, and then said to Brockwell in a voice that made the mate jump, "Head due south. Call me when you sight a sail."

He turned then and went below. He sat at his table in the main cabin, a bottle of gin beside him and a glass in his hand. Brockwell declares he sat that way and did not move, save to call the steward to bring a fresh bottle, right up until the time Morgan's brig was sighted. The chances are that, for all his coldness, Seave was angry and disturbed. He had had a fortune in his grasp, had dared greatly to loot one of the treasured lagoons of the world, and he had lost it because a free-trading captain he had fairly beaten had betrayed him.

IT was three days before Morgan's brig was sighted, quicker than Seave or Brockwell had expected. But the wind had freshened to almost hurricane force and Seave had given no orders to shorten down. Brockwell carried on as long as he dared and the afternoon of the second day had given orders himself to shorten down.

The schooner labored a great deal less as they got canvas off her, and Brockwell was just about to order all hands below when the steward came up from the main cabin with the cryptic message that Captain Seave would like to speak to Mr. Brockwell. The mate went below with some misgivings.

"Who told you to take off sail, mister?" the Stinger said gently. His eyes were mild enough, but there were great circles under them and his jaw was hard. The mate licked his lips and shifted from one foot to the other.

"Why, no one, sir. I was in charge of the deck at the time and I considered...."

"I do all the considering here, sir. Make all sail again immediately and keep the

course.”

“You’ll drive her under, sir.”

“That will be all.”

Brockwell went away shaking his head. Six hours later, after the schooner had been twice pooped and once badly battered in the trough, all hands came aft in a body. The Stinger had not with him at this particular time that bunch of hard cases he was later to gather and who feared neither God nor the devil and very little else save the Stinger. This present crew was good enough, husky, able men with a normal amount of courage. But the terrific driving of the schooner before the wind had terrified them. She was beginning to strain open and they had already had a spell at the pumps. Unless she carried something aloft, every moment threatened to see her sailed clean under.

“Well?” said the Stinger coldly, when they were all gathered before him. They were afraid enough to be desperate and bold.

“You’ll have to take sail off her,” said the spokesman, a lean, hatchet-faced American. “You’ll kill us all.”

“Get for’ard,” said Seave quietly. “I know what I’m doing, and know this ship better than you.”

“Unless you take in sail we’ll cut her free,” the man threatened. He dropped a hand casually to his sheath-knife. The rest muttered sullen approval. The Stinger sighed.

“You know me well enough to know I keep my word, men,” he commenced at last. “The first man who cuts I’ll kill. Now get for’ard and stay below if you’re afraid.”

“You’ll have to take in sail,” insisted the spokesman thickly. “We’re not leaving here until you agree.”

HE went so far as half to draw his knife, perhaps only in bluff. The Stinger neither knew nor cared about that. He was in a cold fury still because of the pearls, because of lack of sleep and a steady round of drinking. His

hand moved. There was an explosion. The spokesman looked shocked, swayed a bit and cried out, “You’ve killed me!”

“Just your hand,” said the Stinger contemptuously. “Don’t draw a knife on me again. Get out, all of you! The first man who cuts I’ll kill!”

They nearly ran out of the main cabin after that, the American holding his wounded, dripping hand, and the schooner went madly on as before, two men at her wheel and her masts and cordage creaking with the awful strain. And so, on the third day, playing right in luck, she lifted the spars of the brig away to starboard. Morgan was shortened down, as any decent ship should have been in that weather, and he was electrified when his mate, Boris, called him from below with the information that Seave’s schooner was forging up under his counter.

Fear took possession of Buck Morgan of Levuka. In an instant he was transformed from a swaggering, ruthless bully to a frightened, somewhat fat man. In the first place he already secretly feared the Stinger’s shooting. And in the second place he knew that by giving the Japs information on a free-trader he had violated all the Island ethics.

Morgan clapped on all the sail he dared, clapped on until Boris protested and the men began to mutter.

Seave was on the poop by this time, walking up and down and staggering to the press of the wind. His eyes were set on the brig and his hand constantly wandered to his left armpit. His crew, huddled in the lee of the midship house, watched him with fearful eyes and knew he was mad, temporarily at least. No one, not even Brockwell, had the courage to speak to him.

The hurricane began to abate something of its fury. Had it been a real hurricane, of course, Seave could never have carried on, but it had never developed quite to that, though at times it had verged perilously

close. Now the wind began to drop and the sea to run smoother and longer.

The schooner was running dead abeam of the brig, and even slowly forging ahead. The abating wind, however, gave the advantage to the brig, which sailed best in medium weather, and she drew on until both vessels were dead level. They ran like this for several hours, the wind dropping all the time, the sea growing smoother. Night approached. Seave began to frown.

Then Brockwell came on the poop with the low-voiced information that there was a foot of water in the forehold and it was rising. The schooner had strained herself badly and opened her seams. Almost at that moment there came an ominous crackling from the foretop and a port backstay snapped with a vicious twang. Seave stood stock still, his glance running rapidly from point to point. Then he smiled his wintry little smile, coughed, blinked once or twice and said to the helmsman in a very quiet voice, "Hard a-port and stand by to jump!"

"My gosh!" choked Brockwell. "Are you mad, sir?" Seave did not answer. Brockwell, after one look at his coldly smiling face, dived for the main deck to get all the crew standing by. The schooner swung round, lunged across the water and crashed into the brig.

THERE were five minutes of unutterable confusion, spars crashing down, ropes giving, wood splintering; then, as the night swept in, the schooner fell back half-foundering and a total wreck and the men who had composed her crew were clambering frantically over the brig's rails.

The brig had gone into the trough at the impact and was being swept by light seas that did not do much damage but made a foothold hard to keep. Boris, the brig's mate, after one awful oath, gave all his time to straightening the ship out and, by the time he

had her on her course again and had sent men aloft to take off some sail until he could see what the damage was, he found the poop filled with grim-looking, somewhat dazed men with the frail figure of Stinger Seave at their head.

"Where is Captain Morgan?" the Stinger was saying crisply.

The astonished Boris looked up and down the frail figure, then at the other wet and dripping figures behind him.

"You're a crazy man," he managed to gasp. "You might have sunk us. There's a hole in the side now you could put a door in."

"Get your carpenter to work," said Seave unperturbed. "Where's Captain Morgan?"

"Below," gasped Boris. "Good heavens...."

"Hold the poop," Seave snapped to Brockwell, who was right behind him. "Let only this man come and go. Keep the rest on the main deck until I get back."

"All right," said Brockwell wearily. "Nothing can kill me after this."

The Stinger strode to the scuttle of the main cabin, wrenched it savagely back and went down the companion. He found Buck Morgan of Levuka seated at the table, half drunk, and with a look of utter terror in his eyes. He screamed when Seave appeared, dripping at every step, blood running down his face where a splinter had struck him, his eyes icy and bitter.

"It wasn't me, Seave!" shouted Morgan thickly. "It wasn't me who told the Japs."

"Liar!" said the Stinger contemptuously. "I ought to kill you, but I'm taking your ship instead. You've cost me mine one way and another, and you've lost me the pearls. I need a larger vessel, anyway, so I'm taking yours."

"You can't do that," said Morgan miserably. "Seave, I've got some rights and it wasn't me who told the Japs."

"I'm taking your ship," said the Stinger slowly, "and if you cause any trouble about it I'll kill you. Understand?"

Morgan gave one look into the Stinger's eyes and whimpered. Seave strode across the cabin toward a desk where he knew he would find a pen and ink. He had made only half the distance when, in a spasm of sudden rage and hoping to catch the little man unaware, Buck Morgan snatched with his unwounded left hand at the gun he had slung now on that side.

The Stinger, as a matter of fact, was not expecting any fight from Morgan after seeing how afraid the man was, and the action took him aback. Had Morgan not been shaking so he might have killed Seave then and there, for his shot was fired before the Stinger could swing sidewise and draw. As it was, Morgan's lead ran a red scar across the small of the Stinger's back.

The Stinger's shot smashed Morgan's left hand and the erstwhile tough free-trader collapsed in his chair and sobbed, partly with pain and partly because of the liquor that was in him.

"I ought to kill you for that, too," said Seave, breathing hard and conscious that his back was sticky with blood. "But you're the first man who ever caught me off my guard, and I'll let you live to talk about it.... Now get ready to sign what I'm going to write. You'll hand over your ship, understand?"

"Anything," sobbed Morgan, thickly. "Anything, you devil, if you'll leave me alone."

The Stinger came on deck a few minutes later, folding up a paper and putting it in his somewhat dry inside pocket. Brockwell was still holding the poop, a belaying pin in one hand and all the schooner men behind him. At the foot of the companion where he stood Boris was heading a crowd of men with the obvious intention of regaining the ship.

The appearance of the Stinger drew all eyes.

"I'm master here now," said the Stinger coldly. "Has anyone anything to say?"

His icy eyes could not be seen in the darkness, but there was that in his voice that was sufficient. Presently one of the men on the main deck laughed a bit and said, "Makes no difference t' me s' long as I get me pay, sir. Are you taking us on? I've seen you shoot and I ain't exactly charging."

A few others laughed heartily at that and the heavy tension was broken.

"Your pay goes on," said the Stinger more gently. "Get for'ard now and I'll talk to you again in the morning.... Mr. Brockwell! Wear ship as soon as you are able. The course is for Laviata."

"Laviata?" choked Brockwell, who had had enough excitement to last him for a lifetime. "What are we going to Laviata for, sir?"

"I'm an impatient man," said Seave wearily. "But you've done good work lately, so I'll explain. We are going to finish cleaning the lagoon. And we are going to leave on Laviata our friend Captain Morgan and such of his men as may not care to join me."

"But the Japs, sir."

"The Japs, we hope, will be gone by the time we get back. When they return, Captain Morgan will be able to give them a very satisfactory explanation of all events that have happened.... I am going to sleep, but if I hear anything out of the way taking place, or if the course is not set for Laviata as soon as is practical, I shall come on deck and I shall come shooting. I am a very impatient man and I have patiently stood for a lot the past few days. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," said Brockwell very humbly. "Set the course for Laviata, sir. The ship's not much damaged and we'll have her patched up all right in a few hours. For Laviata, sir, I'll remember."