

BLUE SAIL

== THE ==
IRON AGE
OF PIRACY
BOOK ONE

AARON S GALLAGHER

The Iron Age of Piracy Book One: Blue Sail ©2020 by Aaron S Gallagher.
All Rights Reserved.

Published by Indies United Publishing House, LLC

All rights reserved worldwide. No part of this publication may be replicated, redistributed, or given away in any form without the prior written consent of the author/publisher or the terms relayed to you herein. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author. The only exception is by a reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

Cover designed by Aaron S Gallagher

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Visit my website at www.aaronsgallagher.com

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: March 2020

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020932348
ISBN 13: 978-1-64456-108-9

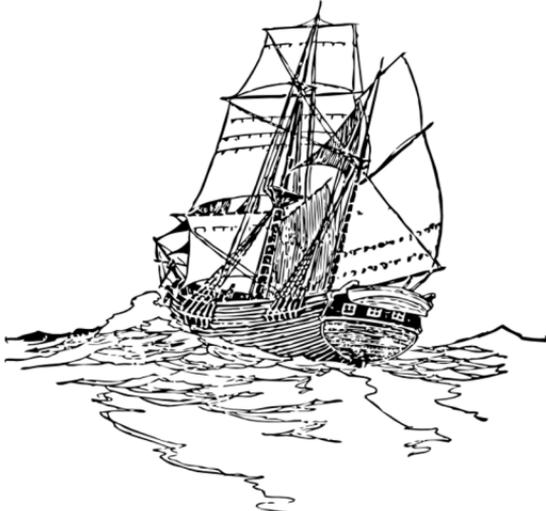


INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC
P.O. BOX 3071
QUINCY, IL 62305-3071
www.indiesunited.net

This book is dedicated to Ian Bullard,
one of my oldest friends,
who helps in ways he cannot possibly imagine.

The Iron Age of Piracy

Book One: Blue Sail



Aaron S Gallagher



INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC



PART I



BLUE SAIL



The soft and clear creak and squeal of rope and sail, the sound of the deck flexing, the palpable thump of sail cupping the scant breath of wind. These sounds and no others, for they were under orders, and his crew always obeyed orders or they suffered mightily for it.

He peered through the tiny rip he'd made in the canvas with the point of his dagger, watching, gauging, and calculating. He gestured with his left hand, and his Quartermaster, Quail, came to him silently. Quail bent his gaunt head close to his captain's lips.

"Have Master Gunner Chase make ready. Five minutes, more or less. Drop cloth at my signal. Prepare for the battle," the Captain whispered. His lips barely moved, and the words carried only an inch or so, more breathed than spoken.

Quail nodded and turned, taking care to make not a sound. The board beneath his foot creaked and he froze. His Captain's head turned and his emerald eyes stared. Slowly Quail lifted his foot from the offending wood and continued. He made his way across deck and whispered the order to the barrel-chested gunny.

Chase nodded gravely and gave hand signals to his powder boys. They held shielded and shuttered oil lamps and fuses, ready to light and touch off powder on the deck guns.

The captain peered through the cloth again and waited, a smile slowly spreading across his thin lips.



It had been a long crossing, but the warmer climes and gentle weather had cheered everyone immensely. Three weeks in Port Royal had seen them fill the hold with cargo and rotate the crew off-board for some well-deserved mischief-making, but they were back at the sail again, and the time for merry-making had ended.

Bosun Rodrigo took his posting very seriously, and he had designs on his own captaincy within five or ten years. He glanced at the horizon. It was a beautiful calm day, bright and hot, the sun almost directly overhead. Lunch would be soon, and he grinned in anticipation. They had caught a turtle just three hours previous, and the heady aroma of soup had spread throughout the ship. The bells sounded, and he clapped his hands thrice. "All hands!" he shouted, "begin—"

Movement caught his eye and he cast a glance again off the port side of the ship. His mouth dropped open, eyes popping. A ship appeared, seeming to shimmer into view like a mirage, the gentle blue sky rippling and revealing the broad side of a clipper.

Before the bosun could even shout a warning, the clipper's guns bellowed, the explosion dashing him to the deck. Agony flared along his ribs and he stared down in disbelief. A shattered length of spar protruded from his ribs, the white flowing shirt he wore puckered into the edges of the wound, wicking blood outward in a ragged star pattern. He sucked in a single breath and died, wondering where in hell that ship had come from.



Upon hearing the first chime of the noon bell, the Captain had dropped his arm. Quartermaster Quail crossed and uncrossed his arms over his head at the men in the rigging, and those men each threw a ten-pound ball tied in a basket of knots over the top line.

A line had been strung from the tip of the bowsprit to the end of the main boom, and ran the length of the ship's spine, over the top of all the masts. It served a single purpose: to hold a ship's-length of painted sailcloth over the entire broadside of the ship. Midnight black sail on the ship-facing side, the outward-facing side of the cloth had been painted a deep azure-remarkably close to the shade of sky under which they now sailed. The cannonballs heaved over the line from the lee side pulled the cloth from that bow-to-stern line, and ensured that it dropped with the swift suddenness of a closing curtain at a theater. The three cannonballs bounced over the side and splashed into the crystal waters, pulling the sail from the ship with it. Barrels attached to the ends would assure the sail recoverable in the aftermath of the coming battle.

The very instant the giant cloth cleared the bow, the Master Gunner nodded at his boys. Twisted hemp wicks were lit at hooded flames, and touched more or less simultaneously to the bared breeches- and the guns boomed and jumped in their harnesses.

The powder monkeys leaped to their work- with haste but no wasted effort- clearing and reloading the six deck guns to be ready for the next volley. The eight-pound cannon took considerable muscle and movement to reload. It would be nearly five minutes before they were ready to fire once again- but the nine longs on the second deck below were ready to fire at once.

All six shots had landed, and the upper deck of the merchant ship *Alcott* heaved, smoked, splintered, and bucked as the round shot tore through the wood like paper, casting men and wreckage into the air like so much confetti.

The Captain leaped to his rail, one hand finding purchase in the rigging without conscious thought. "Master Chase- again!" he barked.

"Below-guns *fire!*" Chase bellowed, and the nine cannons fired almost at once, the smoke and noise enveloping the crew. The side of *Alcott* burst and buckled, and the screams carried, even from a quarter-mile off. The Captain grinned, turned to his Master of Sail, and inclined his head in a respectful

gesture.

“Master Gibb, if you please,” the Captain called, “alongside.”

“Aye, sir,” Gibb called. He spun the black and gold wheel before him, judging correctly by eye the angle needed to cut in and broadside the crippled merchant vessel.

Quail appeared at his captain’s side. “Your orders, sir?” he called too loudly. Quail was a steady hand and an even taskmaster, and there was none finer at the keeping of a vessel, but he tended to get excited in times of stress. The Captain turned to him with a fierce grin.

“Prepare to board yon ripe fruit, Mr. Quail,” the Captain told him. He could feel the flames of battle rising within his breast. He well understood how Quail could lose control of himself, but he would never reveal such a kindred burning, nor show it. He placed a hand on his cutlass. “I’ll be leading them myself.”

“Aye, sir,” Quail growled. “Shall I—”

“You *know* your duties, Quartermaster,” the Captain admonished.

Quail scowled, his stubble-grayed cheeks contorting. “Aye, sir,” was his only reply. Quail had sailed with his captain for nigh on two years now, and knew his habits. He’d not let his men plunge headlong into danger without himself at their head. Not out of any sense of duty or leadership, but because he wanted the fun for himself. Quail shook his head and turned to the deck. “Boarders ready! You there, stand fast! Prepare the grapples!”

Six men with oversized hooks and lines stood to the rail, waiting for the ships to be close enough to heave. It was tricky, dangerous work to bind two ships together. While the heaving and pulling were simple, it left the men open to return fire by musket and pistol, not to mention cannon. Rifle-armed covermen stood beside each grapple-bearer, and between the grapple-men, the riflemen, and the powder-monkeys working diligently to reload the deck six, the rail was crowded and full of elbows and muttered curses.

Gibb maneuvered the ship closer. He barked an order at Davy Missive, the desk bosun. “Kee’ ready on th’ sails, lad, prepare to drop all aught!”

“Aye, sir,” Missive nodded, eyes fixed to the merchant vessel being drawn near. They were still shipping water, and needed to match speed with the vessel in order to stay side-by-side.

“*Now*, blast ye,” Gibb growled in his throaty hasp. “Drop all but the topsail!”

“Aye, sir!” Missive called to his own charges. “You there! And you! Douse sail! Douse sail, you dogs! Douse now! All but tops’! Lively now!”

BLUE SAIL

Hands ran out lines and sails slack-bellied in the rigging as they dropped wind and slowed the ship. Quail judged the distance, and nodded to himself. "You lot, cast out! Cast out, and make fast!"

The grapplemen hauled and heaved, and six heavy iron hooks arced through the air. One of the hooks cast short, bounced off the *Alcott's* hull, and splashed into the sea. Chagrined, the man heaved on his line, desperate to pull in his grapple before the ships converged. The other five gripped the lines tightly and heaved, turning backs to the merchant vessel and throwing their weight to the rope. Ragged, asynchronous cracks filled the air as the riflemen fired at the responding crew of *Alcott*.

There came a slow thump and a grind as the two vessels collided and clung. The Captain stood astride the rail, drew his cutlass, and called, "Ahoy the vessel! Parlay! Captain to captain! You're wounded but seaworthy for the moment! My guns are readied and the word can be given! Ahoy the captain! Parlay- for your lives!"

The *Alcott* captain's voice rang out over the screams, the groans, the bustle of orders, from the flying bridge of *Alcott*. "A guarantee of safe passage! I require--"

"I couldn't give a toss what you require, my good man!" the Captain called. "This is the Captain of *Der Tiegel*! Lay down arms and you'll be spared!"

A moment of silence and then, "Your word, Captain! Your word my men will be- bloody hell! What ship? What ship did you say?"

The Captain allowed himself a tight grin, a fierce, cheerful moment. He savored the taste of victory, knowing the moment he announced his ship's name that the captain of *Alcott* had frozen in place, heart growing cold and still.

"I said the name of my vessel is *Der Tiegel*!" the Captain called joyously.

"Bloody 'ell," a second voice came, fear echoing through the din. "The *Cauldron*! The bloody *Cauldron*, out of Tortuga, it's only the--"

"Be silent, you grub!" the first voice commanded. Through the smoke and gunpowder, clearing now in the gentle breeze, a figure appeared. Dressed in a blue frock coat and a jauntily-feathered hat, it could only be *Alcott's* captain. He approached the rail. His hands were empty, though a rapier rode at his side in a polished black scabbard, and a pistol showed in his belt. "Be silent all!"

The two captains stared at one another from a distance of mere feet. The *Alcott's* captain studied his opponent carefully. Finally, he nodded, as if to himself. "If that ship is truly *Der Tiegel*, then you'd of course be--"

“Captain Vierling,” the Captain said, sweeping his brandished cutlass in a broad gesture and bowing, but never taking his eyes from his opposite number. “Captain Piter Vierling, to be sure. At your service, Captain...”

“Rutledge,” the captain of the *Alcott* grudgingly admitted. “Bastion Rutledge.”

“Captain Rutledge,” Vierling said, “please come aboard my ship, that we might negotiate for your ship, crew, and continued safety. Mr. Quail?”

Quail brought forth two men with a plank, and they laid it across the gap. Rutledge studied the board for a moment. His second in command came to him. “Cap’n,” the man said in a low tone. “Ye’ve no need of- we can *fight*, Cap’n! You-”

“Silence, Weatherby,” Rutledge said. To Vierling he said, “Your word, then, Captain? Safe passage?”

Vierling grinned, his pencil-thin moustache and the narrow strip of hair that ran from the bottom of his lower lip to the tip of his chin stretched by his welcoming smile. “My word, such as it is, of safe passage- until the conclusion of our negotiations.”

Rutledge studied the cap of blond hair and its well-groomed owner. Vierling grinned rakishly, eyes never leaving Rutledge’s own dark steel-colored eyes. Finally, Rutledge nodded. “Your word, then.” He raised his voice. “Stand down, men! Hear me! This is Captain Rutledge! Stand down and be easy. I shall parlay with Captain Vierling! Make no aggressive moves without my say-so!”

Rutledge turned to his first mate. “Weatherby, I trust you to keep the men in check. Fetch the doctor for those who require him. Arrange the dead, if any, for proper respect later.”

“If there *is* a later,” Weatherby grouched.

“There’s little enough profit in slaughter,” Rutledge said to his mate with more confidence than he felt. “We shall be released in due time, I’m sure.”

Rutledge kept his eyes upon those of Vierling, whose smile never wavered or faltered. “Come, Captain,” Vierling said with a gesture. “There are refreshments in my cabin.”

Rutledge hesitated only a bare fraction of a moment before striding over the plank. He stood before Vierling, who sheathed his cutlass and offered a hand. Rutledge took the proffered grip.

“Well met, Captain Rutledge. My apologizes for the rough contact. In my experience, no captain will stand down without a show of force,” Vierling said, grinning. Rutledge couldn’t help but notice the man’s teeth were straight and blindingly white. One rarely saw teeth so perfect,

especially in a sailor's mouth.

Vierling wore a dark coat of forest green trimmed with lighter green brocade. His narrow, regal frame held the tailored clothing well, from the frock coat to the deep green breeches. He wore polished leather knee-high boots. At his throat was a pendant crafted of fine gold and gemstones. He wore no hat, oddly enough. His blond hair was close-cropped and spiky, short enough to stand in the slight breeze. His eyes were the same shade of green as the brocade of his coat, something Rutledge instinctively knew to be no accident.

A popinjay, obviously, judging by his smooth-shaved cheeks and the carefully-trimmed darker blond hair that rode his lip and chin, the immaculate clothing, and his jaunty manner. A man more concerned with appearance than substance, unless Rutledge missed his mark far off.

Vierling patiently withstood Rutledge's judging gauze. He didn't mind a man's eyes on him, nor did he fear judgment. It often suited his purposes to be filed into a category, for he alone knew to which actual one he belonged, and the wronger his opponents' opinion, the better his advantage. Eventually, Rutledge bowed his head slightly and strode forward across the deck to the stairs down, heading for the captain's quarters.

"Quail," Vierling murmured.

The old Quartermaster stepped to his captain's side. "Aye?" he asked, matching his captain's quiet tone.

"Stay the men. No movement until I give the word," Vierling said.

"Aye, sir. No man stirs unless you give the word," Quail agreed.

Vierling settled his merry, volatile eyes upon his Quartermaster. Their ship had never had a first mate. Quail fulfilled those duties and those of quartermaster both, duly elected by the crew, as had been Vierling himself. "I never said 'unless'," Vierling said to Quail. "I distinctly recall the chosen word, and it was no 'unless.' I *said*, 'until', did I not, *Mister Quail*?"

Quail swallowed. He knew Vierling well as you could know a man whose past you didn't have a guess to. He'd sailed with his captain for two years, and knew when his killing moods were high.

"Aye sir," Quail said, far more calmly than he felt. He did his level best to hide the shiver of fear traversing his spine. "Until."

"Good man," Vierling agreed. He followed Rutledge across decks to the stairs that led to the main deck, and around, into his cabin. The door snapped shut with a soft click. Quail let out his held breath. He made sure not to make a sound, though, for Piter Vierling's hearing was supernaturally sharp and he had a disturbing tendency to know things he had no natural

right to.

“Mr. Missive, secure the deck,” Quail barked. “Master Chase, keep the guns ready. We’re at rest... until Captain says we’re not.”

Missive nodded. In the fighting he’d taken a blow to the temple and the side of his face showed drying blood. Quail eyed him. “See the doc, Missive, after you’ve stayed the crew to rest.”

Missive shrugged. “It’s naught but a scratch, sir, I’m able.”

Quail scowled. “It wasn’t a request, boy,” he ground out.

Missive nodded convulsively. “Aye, Master Quail.” He turned to his work.

Quail kept an eye on the *Alcott*. The men there moved in sullen, desultory time, clearing the deck and dragging bodies off to the center line. Quail grabbed Missive’s arm. Davy turned to his Quartermaster with a questioning look on his blood-streaked countenance.

“Make sure the cover sail doesn’t stay in the water overlong, Mr. Missive. It’ll get heavier the longer it floats. And the last thing we need is to foul in their rudder with our own secret weapon.”

Missive nodded. “I’ll have some lads pull it to the port and reel,” he assured Quail, who nodded.

“Good lad,” Quail said. “Be off now, smartly.”

Missive hurried to his duties.

Quail scanned the *Alcott’s* deck. When Captain Vierling came up-deck, he might want answers. What they might be, Quail couldn’t guess, but if he saw everything, and knew everything, he stood a better chance of answering.



Afterward



Nothing happens in a void. Several people are responsible for this book aside from myself, and all I really did was the typing. My editor, Jennie Rosenblum, is invaluable for pointing out how terrible I am at keeping names and descriptions straight. Jason May, constant reader and unflagging enthusiast, also deserves a round of applause for putting up with my constant homonym errors and... shall we say... shotgun approach to punctuation. Ian Bullard, for being a steadying influence on me. Last, but first amongst all, my wife, Cara, of course, for putting up with a madman who lives with voices in his head. She could have committed me; instead she married me.

This book was written only with the vast resources of the world of research available about the history of the Caribbean. Gabriel Kuhn's *Golden Age of Piracy* has been invaluable, as has been James Michener's *Caribbean*, and the seminal *History of the Buccaneers of America*, by Alexandre Exquemelin. Captain Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* gave me both insight and a wealth of character names. Piter Vierling's Articles of Agreement I adapted from Captain Bartholomew Roberts's own code. Roberts, of course, was the notorious Black Bart. Countless other sources have been used, from descriptions of slave ships in history texts to maps of the 1700s-era Caribbean. *Der Tiegel* is based on the Dutch East Indiaman *Prins Willem*, constructed in 1650, and named, of course, for King Willem of Orange-Nassau. I have subverted the Royal Family's identities, using historicity when I could. The King, Willem the 3rd, died the year after this book ends, 1702, but his son Willem the 4th, although he inherited the titles from elsewhere, never became King.

AARON S GALLAGHER

The subject has been most interesting to immerse myself in, and despite the science fiction of the story, I did my best to be as true to the real world as I could. Many of the pirates and privateers mentioned are taken directly from history (and several of the bars, taverns, and inns), and I've tried to be as true to their personalities as I could, within the limited resources to which I have access. Who can truly say how these men and women actually behaved?

Astute students of the importance of names (especially of my main characters, but of the ships as well) will understand the seed from which this story has sprung. I didn't steal, exactly, merely... borrowed. A little. An idea is an ethereal thing, and can't be pinned down. Like the fairies of mythology (or history?) they are fickle, ever-changing, and belong to no one. Except perhaps those that can come to some kind of mutually-beneficial terms with them. I hope I've done so, and that those from whom I borrow will bless my little act of piracy.

The Golden Age of Piracy was a mercifully short time, only 1650 to 1730, approximately. Piracy was a thankfully short-lived and tumultuous time in the story of our world.

The *Iron Age* of piracy, however...

Aaron S Gallagher

Also by Aaron S Gallagher

Pros

Return Fire

The Veiled Earth Book I - Magician

The Veiled Earth Book II - Martyr

The Veiled Earth Book III - Savior

The Other Side of the Atmosphere

Dirty Wings and Other Stories

Orphan World

The Long Way Home

What You Wish For

The Bleecker Street Bodies

The Delancey Street Disappearances

The Mercer Street Murder

The Elizabeth Street Epiphany

Nomad