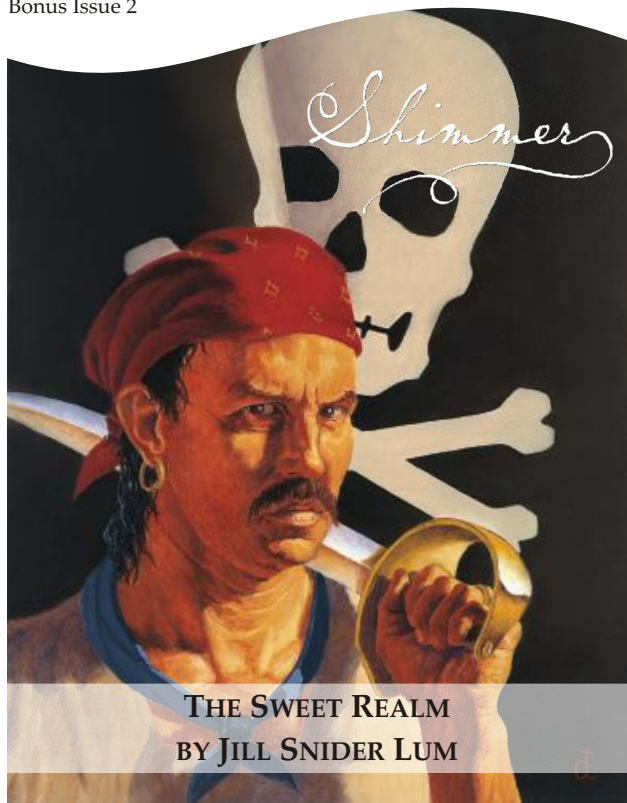


Volume 2
Bonus Issue 2

International Talk Like a Pirate Day, 2007



International Talk Like A Pirate Day Issue
Volume 2, Bonus Issue 2



Shimmer

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The Sweet Realm

By Jill Snider Lum

The inlet shoreline beside the sloop *Pearl* tilted to an unnatural angle, and Edward Teach began to feel strangely detached from himself. Oddly, as though he dreamt, he saw the Navy lieutenant turning over a dead body that lay on the deck, and recognized the body as his own.

"Round up the rest of these damned freebooters," the lieutenant said to a passing ensign. "They'll come easy now that Blackbeard's gone."

"Most of them will," Teach said. "They're easy to sway, the snot-brained apes." But no one heard him, and it didn't seem important just now. He turned his glance from the retreating ensign and watched the lieutenant examine the blood-soaked body on the deck.

"I'm going to

make sure this

monster won't

walk."

The lieutenant pulled off the shirt—*my shirt*, thought Teach, in a confused way—and whistled. “What in Hell? How many... good God. Five shots, and... twenty sword-cuts?” The lieutenant stared at the corpse. “Bloody monster,” he said, under his breath, and Teach, whose hearing had always been remarkably acute, noticed the grudging admiration in the officer’s voice. “Ensign Burrows,” the lieutenant went on, “I’m going to make sure this ghost won’t walk. Have the body tossed into the sea when I’m through. I shall hang his foul head from the bowsprit myself.”

“Aye, Lieutenant Maynard,” Burrows said. “Daresay they’ll know him back at Virginia, with that beard of his.”

Lieutenant Maynard nodded grimly, drew his sword, and slammed it into the neck with such force that the head rolled away along the planking.

My head, thought Teach, with rising panic. *They’ve cut off my head. How can I yet see and think, if they’ve cut off my head?*

Maynard picked the thing up by the hair with obvious reluctance. *Don’t drop it, damn you!* thought Teach, and stared at the face, seeing it in a way he never had before. The famous black beard covered the cheeks, spreading downward in tangled twists where the chest

would have been. Above the beard, he saw a long nose, heavy brows, and close-set eyes—dead eyes, still seeming to stare at Maynard with lingering fury.

“Well, I doubt if this is what the poor devil wanted,” Maynard told his ensign, “but it’s what he’s earned. He could have been something heroic. Why, I wonder, did he turn freebooter?” The lieutenant sighed. “Well, I daresay we’ll never know. Have them toss the corpse overboard now, Burrows. Fish food.”

“Aye, aye, Sir,” said Burrows. “Right away.”

Aye, aye, Lieutenant Maynard, ye purse-mouthed Navy toad, thought Teach. 'Tis fine, I'm sure, to look down upon me—you with your privilege and money, shaking your head at what a villain I am. I want the same things as you do, but I've had to turn freebooter to get them. Privilege and money... and more than that, I want... I wanted...

It was such an important thought; but he couldn't finish it, and he didn't know why. *I must be dead*, he thought, watching the Navy men heave his body over the taffrail. A shiver of fear went through him, fear he couldn't manage to quell. *Well, then, 'tis Hell for me, but I'm no stranger to smoke and sulphur. The Devil and I'll get on like old shipmates, I'll be bound.*

He knew the thought was hollow; he was afraid.



by James Owen

*"The Devil," thought Teach,
"the Devil... is a lobster?"*

He leaned over the rail with a queasy feeling, and felt himself falling forward, downward. Contact with the bobbing body sent the impulse of instinct through his being, and for a few moments he heard the horrified screams of Maynard's sailors, as his headless corpse swam purposefully around the ship.

Down, thought Teach, and he and the body plunged beneath the waves.

It couldn't have been water, for he moved through it like air. He moved, and he breathed. He realized after a few moments that he still had some sort of body, or the sensation of one. It was confusing.

He walked forward over stony ground. Dim light showed him a tall gate, black iron over weathered wood. Worked into its bars and scrolls was a skull over two crossed bones.

Hell, thought Teach, and heard blood pound in his ears.

He willed the familiar, ferocious bravado to overcome his terror. "Where be you, Devil?" he called out, trying not to notice that his voice shook. "Come now, Lucifer, I'm a-waiting for you! Being sent to Hell is but a homecoming for Blackbeard, so welcome me in, and let us carouse together!"

Someone—something—had heard him. Slowly, soundlessly, the gates opened inward. Terror rose unbidden and bubbled in Teach's throat. *Hell*, he thought. *I do have a soul, and it is condemned to Hell. Devils will meet me, with tortures and fire—'tis true after all, eternal damnation, and I cannot escape it.*

He gasped, thoughts halted. There, standing before him on eight spindly legs, was a shellfish.

It was monstrously large, bigger than a rowboat, and Teach took a hurried step back from its huge front claws. Flotsam and barnacles clung to its lumpy gray-green shell; horns and spikes protruded from its forehead, and its long feelers twitched like eyebrows. Revolted but unable to look away, Teach stared into its eyes—pale green eyes, with pupils like coal, but without the dead flatness of a shark's eyes, or the wary, unreachable otherness of a cat's.

The Devil, thought Teach, *the Devil... is a lobster?*

"Welcome, Edward Drummond!" the Lobster said, waving its antennae in a cheerful way. It had a pedantic, fussy voice, like a schoolmaster.

Teach found himself clutching at his famous beard, and let go of it deliberately. "I—I daresay the Devil knows everyone's name," he said, trying not to

stammer. "I've not gone by the name Edward Drummond in quite a time—but there are no secrets in Hell, eh?"

"Who knows?" said the Lobster, airily waving a claw. "Don't worry, it's all right; you're confused, having just died and all. This isn't Hell."

Teach stared. "'Tisn't?"

"No indeed," said the Lobster, with a chuckle. "This is the Sweet Realm. Oh, come now, don't look blank like that. You must have heard of the Sweet Realm. The Bright Shore, the Port of Refuge—it's like a kind of freebooter's Valhalla. Don't you know any Norse mythology?"

"No," said Teach, feeling his eyes bulge.

The Lobster sighed. "Pirate heaven," it said. "Think of this as Pirate heaven. The Sweet Realm, for the Sweet Trade. Like Fiddler's Green, but more fun—a sort of eternal Tortuga. Drinking, wenching, drinking, fighting, drinking, gaming, drinking, great stores of gold for all... have I mentioned rum? And who better to grace our gates than Blackbeard, Terror of the West Indies, Scourge of the Carolinas, most feared of all the Brethren who ever flew the black colors. Why else did you take to the Sweet Trade, if not to finish here?"

Teach felt vaguely dizzy. "'Twas because I wanted," he said, and faltered. "I wanted..."

"To get into the Sweet Realm, I know," said the Lobster. "It's what all of you want; and here you are. An eternity of pleasure, your fine efforts justly rewarded. Come in, come in! We welcome you, most fearsome and dangerous of pirates, Edward Drummond—Edward Teach—Blackbeard! Believe me, it's better than going to Hell."

Teach stumbled toward the Lobster. The gates closed behind him with a quiet click.

It was very much like Tortuga, but with benefits impossible in that Earth-bound port. There were no diseases, no rats, no lice, and no authorities. Sword-cuts caused no pain and healed instantly. There were endless meals without sour stomachs, all the fine rum one could drink and never a blackout or hangover, wenches both beautiful and willing—and treasures galore, scattered on the beach, to be taken and spent and enjoyed.

At the end of the third week, the Lobster came to Teach where he sat in a luxurious tavern, drinking rum from a tankard of solid gold.

"Edward," said the Lobster with concern, "you don't look happy."

Teach contemplated the Lobster with narrowed eyes. "You're right, ye filthy mongrel," he said. "I'm not."

"Really?" said the Lobster. "But how can you not be happy, in the Sweet Realm?"

Teach curled his lip. "This isn't a place for the likes of me," he said. "And I suspect that's why you've made me come here, to pay for my crimes and misdemeanors in the world above. You're not some merciful angelic shellfish carrying all the world's good freebooters to Pirate Heaven. You're Hell's own thrice-damned lobster, that's what you are, and you've delivered me up to judgment for my sins."

"Now, why would you say that?" asked the Lobster, sounding plaintive. "This is where you belong, with the others of your kind."

"I do *not* belong here, ye damned bottom-feeder." Teach gestured with his free hand at the buccaneers drinking nearby. "I'm not one of these brainless sots. They're no different from the stupid apes who sailed for me—can't think beyond the next fight, or the next wench, or the next quart of rum. But an eternity of lolling here will be torture for me. 'Tis no kind of Heaven you've brought me to, ye scurvy monster. 'Tis Hell, pure and unvarnished. And I always figured on Hell being a little

more engaging, not so bloody dull. I could scream in agony."

The Lobster's feelers waved randomly. "Edward," it said, "you are a difficulty. This really is the Sweet Realm, Pirate Heaven, the place where all successful pirates go once they've met their Earthly end. If you truly feel you don't belong here... well, perhaps you were not a successful pirate, after all."

Teach frowned like a thundercloud. "Not successful?" he said, in a booming voice, so that the other drinkers looked toward him for a moment. "Not successful? Why, ye wretched creature, I was the smartest, boldest, biggest, strongest, meanest bastard of all the freebooting bastards afloat—my very name set them shaking in their shoes from the West Indies to Virginia! And you dare to call that 'not successful'?"

The Lobster shuffled a few of its feet, and made a frown with its antennae. "I must review your case, Edward," it said. "I will be back in a few days. In the meantime, think about your life; we'll need information. And please, try to enjoy yourself, will you? Just a little?"

The Lobster turned with a swish and scuttled from the tavern, knocking over a couple of chairs with its tail.

"At least the rum here is good," it called back, over what passed with it for a shoulder.

Teach rested his chin in his hands and stared into his tankard. It was full of rum, beautiful golden rum, as smooth and mellow as though Heaven's own angels had distilled it. *Filthy slop*, he thought. *Wish it would make me pass out.*

The Lobster returned a few days later, to where Teach was sitting on a rock beside the shore.

"Have you been thinking about your life, Edward?" it asked, in an anxious voice.

"I have indeed, beastie," said Teach, sour-faced. "What else is there to do in this damned boring hell-hole?"

The Lobster looked agitated. "Who told you?" it asked quickly, swivelling its weird green eyes.

"Told me what?" said Teach.

"Oh—never mind," said the Lobster quickly, waving a claw. "Come with me."

Teach followed it down a path, into a square gray building he hadn't noticed before. He thought the air inside smelled stale and tangy, and wondered why the corridors were gray too.

Eventually they turned a corner to a huge gray door. The Lobster opened it a crack and peered in with one of its eyes.

"They're ready for you," it whispered to Teach. "Make sure you answer honestly. They'll know it if you lie, and that won't be good."

Frowning wildly, in denial of his jumping stomach, Teach opened the door and stalked into the room. Behind him he heard the scuttling sound of the Lobster's footsteps. He was walking down an aisle over gray carpet, toward a single wooden armchair. And seated on either side of the aisle...

They were all different sizes and colors, all sorts of shapes and configurations. Some had the heads of goats; some resembled scorpions; some were like badgers or serpents or skunks. Some didn't look like animals at all, but had strangely distorted human features, and wore many different types of elaborate clothing. Some were simply monsters, nightmares plucked from a madman's mind. Some muttered to each other or rustled the documents they held, and a few even coughed, like the audience before a theatrical performance Teach had once attended. Walking that long aisle, Teach clamped his jaw shut and made his hands into fists, and concentrated on

not throwing up his last meal. By the crackle of controlled power he felt in the air, by the sense of pure evil that clutched at his heart, he knew what these beings were.

They were demons.

When he got to the chair he turned and sat down, facing them all. There was no smell of sulphur. He was a little surprised.

"Another one, so soon," one of the demons murmured—it looked like a large squirrel, with fangs. "Wasn't there a case like this in Fiddler's Green last month? That rebellious Japanese fisherman who wanted to go back to toiling on the ocean, because before he died he'd figured out a way to catch giant squid and he wanted to see if it worked?"

"Oh, dear, I never heard about that," whispered the ox-like demon beside him. "Dashed awkward, these cases. They always disrupt the project plan."

The Lobster came and stood beside Teach's chair. "So," said Teach, in a whisper, "I was right about this place, was I not? And you told me 'twas not Hell, ye crawling liar!"

"I am *not* a liar," said the Lobster, indignantly tapping its chest with a claw. "The Sweet Realm is not Hell. Well... not really, anyway. Not exactly. It's... it's

what you might call an annex of Hell. A division of Hell. Not really the samething at all... I mean, you can't expect murderous, thieving, bloodthirsty pirates to go to Heaven. And having a separate place for them makes the rest of Hell easier to manage. I mean, the things they like to do, fighting all day, burning towns, cheating each other, staying stinking drunk for weeks on end... it'd be like Hell for normal people. I mean—"

"Drawn butter," said Teach quietly, through his teeth. "I'll boil you first, if I can find a cook-pot big enough. And if not, you'll taste just fine raw."

The Lobster's look of disgust pleased Teach, though he wasn't sure how it managed to change expression. Then it made a throat-clearing noise loud enough to rattle its shell, and the demons came to order.

"You all know why we're here," said the Lobster, projecting its voice. "The case of Edward Drummond, known also as Edward Teach, professional name Blackbeard. He was sent to the Sweet Realm as per the consensus of this committee, but I'm beginning to think we may have made a mistake."

"Who was Chair that day?" asked a crow-shaped demon with a long, sharp beak.

The Lobster's antennae drooped. "I was."

"Ah, so that's why you were so anxious about this," said the crow. "It's not going to look good on your review, is it?"

"Yes, well," said the Lobster hurriedly, "we all make mistakes. If he doesn't belong in the Sweet Realm, I'd like to get him passed to the appropriate authorities, whoever they may be."

"I've been meaning to ask you about that," Teach said quietly, but the Lobster nudged him with a claw and shook its head. Teach felt his stomach sink some more.

"Should he be in the Main Hell Complex, then?" asked a greasy green monster with tentacles for a nose. "Is it going to be a simple case of paperwork and relocation?"

"I don't know yet," said the Lobster. "That's why I've called this review."

"Well, look," said the nose-tentacled monster, "when you recommended him for the Sweet Realm, didn't you examine his case? Didn't you get documentation? You know what can happen when you ignore the documentation."

The Lobster sighed. "I know. And I take full responsibility. But he's Blackbeard, after all. His reputation was such that I didn't think any further verification was necessary."

“‘Trust, but verify,’” said a crone sitting in a mortar. “How many times I have to tell you? Always you do this, you young people.”

“I’m not young,” said the tentacled monster. “In fact, as you may recall, I am considerably older than most of the rest of you—”

Teach’s fingers curled around the arms of his chair. *A blessing I’m dead already, he thought, else sitting through this council would kill me.*

“All, right, then,” said the Lobster, raising its voice, as a minor hubbub broke out among the audience. “If we could get on with the review, please? I’m sure we’d all like to get to the bowling party early.”

“Another team-building exercise,” said the crow, smacking its own forehead with its papers. “I hate those.”

“Oh, let’s get it over with,” said the squirrel with fangs. “I’ll start the questions. Edward Drummond—everyone, it’s on page three of your notes—Edward Drummond, please stand up, and describe your career as a pirate. Be completely honest. You will be penalized if you lie.”

Honest, thought Teach. *In Hell*. He got to his feet, keeping his face blank, and realized his brain hurt.

"Aye, well, then," he said, "I'm a Bristol man, and my family had a little money—enough so I could learn my letters and figures. I was a privateer for Queen Anne in the French Wars, and they said I was uncommon brave. But my father didn't approve, and cut me off without a farthing. After that I took to the Sweet Trade, beginning with Captain Hornigold, and then out on my own, with my own men." He coughed. "I made my name the most feared on the water, from the West Indies to the Carolina coast. After I took the King's Pardon, I stayed ashore for a while in North Carolina, but kept my hand in, as you might say. So much so that Governor Spotswood of Virginia put a bounty on my head. In Ocracoke Inlet, a filth-eating Navy lieutenant named Maynard succeeded in collecting it. And that would be the way of things, in summary."

The monster with the tentacle nose rustled through his papers. "Summary, yes, Mr. Drummond," it said, "but not details. Reading over those details, I find some interesting—not exactly discrepancies, but—inconsistencies, shall we say? For instance, how many victims did you torture during your career as a pirate?"

Teach glanced at the Lobster. It wasn't looking at him.

"None," he said.

"How many ships did you burn, or sink?"

"I think 'twas seven or eight," said Teach, scratching his beard.

"With how many crew aboard?" asked the ox.

"None."

"So, how many people did you actually kill?" asked a large, pustule-encrusted blob that smelled of coffee. "Kill directly, I mean, not just incidentally during sea battles. How many victims did you and your men murder?"

Teach clasped his hands tightly behind his back, wishing he could lie. "Well," he said. "None."

There were murmurs for a moment amongst the demons. The lobster's shell, Teach noticed, was turning faintly red.

"Then how did you gain your reputation as the most feared pirate in your district?" asked the green-tentacled monster.

"Ah," said Teach, "well, that was my plan, you see. The idea for it came early on, when my ship, *Queen Anne's Revenge*, engaged a 30-gun man-of-war, the *Scarborough*. We bested her, and my men wanted to sink her, but I said, 'No, we'll run her off, and let those Navy rats carry word of us back to Barbados and the Indies.'

Which they did; and then we took more ships; and with me being of such frightening aspect, and with this *Scarborough* business noised about, we had scarcely to do aught but run up the black colors and draw our swords, and crews would surrender. 'Twas the finest joke! I'd wear my scarlet coat, and my cutlass and knives and three brace of pistols, and stick lighted fuses in my hat so I'd be smoking like a demon—begging your pardons. With the size of me, and my beard, and me making a face like a devil—again, your pardons—well, there was never any need for torture and murder. Crews would see Blackbeard coming for them, and give up, hoping we'd be merciful. And since they were all willing to hand us what we wanted, we let them live, so they'd spread more word of how terrible fierce I was."

The monster waved its nose-tentacles and looked significantly at the crow. "You see?" it said. "Documentation."

The crow gave a bitter, cawing laugh. "What about the question of plunder?" it said. "On page fourteen, everyone. Mr. Drummond, there are a number of incidents here that seem inconsistent with your status. For instance, was it not your habit, at times, to capture a

ship in order to obtain provisions and supplies? Flour, and such?"

"Surely," said Teach. "If I needed them."

"But you would selectively leave behind things that would have fetched more money if you'd sold them. Indigo, and sugar, and so on."

Teach opened his mouth, and shut it again. "Sometimes," he said. "I—I felt sorry for the poor swabs."

"And is it not true," the crow went on, over the resulting murmurs, "is it not true that you captured several ships to relieve them of their wines and spirits, and then let said ships and crews sail freely away with other valuable cargo still in their holds?"

"The liquor was the important thing," said Teach. "Most of the men were uncontrollable without their rum and wine. But when I kept them supplied with it, they took their orders and stayed mostly in line."

The crow looked stern. "And—page nineteen—there was the incident during which you blockaded the harbour at Charleston, and took hostages, and stopped all shipping for days, in order to extort something from the Governor... what was it? Vast sums of money from the colonial treasury? A yearly tribute? Control of the town?"

Teach felt a bead of sweat run down his face. "A chest of medicine," he said. "Some of my men were sick. But I'd taken some gold from a few ships before that; and I robbed the prisoners of what coin they had on them."

"Edward Drummond," said the tentacled monster, loudly over the outbreak of comment from the demons, "you certainly are not giving us the picture of a successful pirate. In fact, you seem barely to have been a pirate at all!"

"I deny that," said Teach, his indignation at last overcoming his fear. "What about Governor Eden, of North Carolina?"

There was silence throughout the room. "What about him?" asked the crow.

"Only that I had him in my pocket," said Teach, proudly. "After I took the King's Pardon, I bribed Governor Eden and terrified him by turns. By the time I was through with him he was as good as a pirate himself. He gave me back the *Queen Anne's Revenge*, with false papers signed by the Admiralty saying I'd taken her lawfully as a prize from the Spaniards. Then I cozened him into letting me take ships and cargoes again—but safely, for sometimes I shared plunder with him and his Secretary-Collector, Mr. Knight, and when I didn't, I

made sure they were in fear for their lives of me. Between them they made me look upright as a judge. And I'd arrangements with the richest New York traders, and the planters on the Carolina coast... why, until Governor Spotswood decided to spite Governor Eden and put that bounty on my head, I was a better pirate ashore than I'd been at sea! And I'll admit, my lords, that I hate your Pirate Heaven—but you're saying I didn't do well at the Sweet Trade, and that I cannot abide."

There was a long silence.

"He's right about the governor," said the crow quietly. "Page thirty-two."

There was more silence.

Then the crone in the mortar cleared her throat. "Mr. Drummond," she said, "you did not act like normal pirate. Is confusing to me. Is confusing to us all. Vy did you become pirate? Vat did you vant?"

Teach let out a long breath, feeling his brain clear. He uncurled his fists, and he squared his shoulders.

"I've been thinking on that for a while now," he said. "The arse-licker who killed me was asking that, too. And I know what the answer is now, having had so much time to ponder the matter."

"And?" said the green monster.

"I wanted command," said Teach, "and I wanted power; but I wanted to lead by my wits. I was never fond of killing—'tis messy, hard, vile work. 'Twas much more fun, finding ways to trick people into giving me what I wanted. And I used to do all kinds of foolery to the men—burning sulphur below-decks to see who could stand Hell the longest, pretending I'd seen a devil in the topsails 'til they thought they saw one too. The men were as feared of me as the prize crews were. Oh, not the smart ones, like Israel Hands and poor old Richards, but the ordinary fools, like the ones in your Sweet Realm. Just plunder for the taking, they were. 'Twas fine sport and amusement. And it kept them under my hand."

"You sound as though you believe you're superior to others," said the crow.

For the first time since his death, Teach grinned. "I've no need to believe it," he said, "for I know 'tis the truth."

The demons were a long time conferring.

Teach, biting his nails in an anteroom, heard vague murmurs and the occasional indignant shout from beyond the doors, and wished he could be in at the debate. He had no idea what possible choice of fates there might be for the demons to condemn him to, or how

much worse his situation might become. He was uncertain even whether the Lobster was for him or against him.

And then, after what seemed like Eternity, the door opened, and the Lobster scuttled in.

"Edward," it said, waving its antennae in a jaunty way. "Good news. You're not going to Hell."

Teach clamped his jaw. "Does that mean—'tis the Sweet Realm for me?"

"Even better," said the Lobster, and its shell-face almost smiled. "We're going to send you back."

"Back to where?"

"Your life, Edward."

Teach stared. "My life? Do you mean, to repeat my life? Or to go on with it, instead of being killed?"

"No, no," said the Lobster. "Now that we've reviewed your case, it's obvious that you got the wrong life in the first place. Given your talents, your inclinations—and certainly your attitude—we've decided to let you have another life, in a different century, under different circumstances. You won't remember your old life... at least, not properly. But it solves the problem of what to do with you. I think you'll be pleased with the result."

Teach's mouth was hanging open. "How will I know I'm pleased with it," he asked, "if I cannot remember the other one to compare it to? 'Tis the damnedest useless rubbish you talk, beastie, and —"

"You ought to be thanking me," said the Lobster, quietly. "The others were divided between sending you back to rot in the Sweet Realm and tossing you into the darkest corner of the Main Hell Complex to shovel at the Endless Pile of Excrement. But I convinced them not to. You should be grateful."

Teach sat down; his knees had given way. "Well, I do thank you, then," he said. "I am grateful, indeed. How did you manage it?"

"Told them that, being a pirate, you'd foment rebellion amongst the rest of the damned, and we'd have a huge great insurrection to deal with—it's why we have the Sweet Realm in the first place. The others saw my point. They don't like complications, and they're very resistant to change."

Teach rubbed his head; his brain was hurting again. "So," he said, "when do I go back, then?"

"Right away," said the Lobster.

"You say you'll be sending me to another century," Teach said. "What kind of century? What will I do in this new life?"

The Lobster looked thoughtful for a moment. Then it clicked one of its claws, and Teach could have sworn he saw it smile.

“Edward,” said the Lobster, “how do you feel about politics?”


The man who used to be Edward Teach flashed a nervous smile at his wife, then made his face appropriately solemn and stood ready while officials finished the final preparations for the swearing-in ceremony.

His stomach jumped with tension. The entire election had been a roller coaster ride, requiring all his cunning and boldness, his unconventional strategies, and his instinctive understanding of psychology and public relations. He’d managed to convince the voters that he really was the friendly, folksy, uncomplicated sort of person he’d portrayed himself as. It had felt right, somehow, to act like something that he was not, in order to get what he wanted, and it had certainly worked.

A broad smile he couldn’t suppress crossed his face as he remembered his opponent’s concession call on election night. “Well, you’ve somehow managed to convince the American people that you’re fit to be their

next President," he'd said, "I guess congratulations are in order. By God, I don't know how you did it, but you did. My wife says you must have been a pirate in another life."

The man who used to be Edward Teach laughed at the memory and found himself engulfed in a sudden, inexplicable, profound sense of peace. He turned to the officials, raised his right hand, and swore the Presidential Oath of Office.



About the Author



The Sweet Realm—**Jill Snider Lum** lives in Toronto, Canada, with a husband who believes cats are evil aliens and a son currently obsessed with building starships out of Lego. She has worked as a gemologist, a computer programmer, a historical interpreter, and a janitor, and enjoys writing about things that are unusual or amusing, preferably both at once.

Artists & Illustrations

Scowls and Scabbards—With a divided interest in art and music, **David Trowbridge** attended the University of Hartford. Art won out and David graduated cum laude with a BFA in Illustration in 1991. He has since pursued freelance work in the sf and fantasy fields winning numerous awards at conventions from New York to Seattle.

Interior—**James A. Owen** wrote and illustrated *Here, There Be Dragons*. He is founder and executive director of Coppervale International, an art and design studio that also publishes the periodicals *International Studio* and *Argosy Quarterly*, develops television and film projects, and is redesigning an entire town, among other ventures.

