

# RAKASA

BY KYLE WARNER

## CHAPTER 1.

I might have killed the captain but the crew would agree that he had it coming.

Six weeks lost at sea. The man with the map is responsible and no other.

Aye, he might've blamed the unseasonable weather, the lack of stars in the sky, and the sickness in the ranks... but a man can live off of excuses for only so long.

I was supposed to meet up with Mary a month ago. We would have been married by now. Our honeymoon, if I could afford a honeymoon after this trip, would have been glorious.

Instead of spending time with my lady, I clean the decks as if we're expecting company, as if we're not lost at sea, as if...

As if the captain wasn't dead.

We like to joke that the candle in his quarters is for his ghost while he reads over the maps that he could not comprehend in life. It's not a joke, *exactly*—nobody's laughing—but we're all in on the imagining.

And meanwhile, down in the cargo hold, the animals starve and die. They smell worse every day. The doc thinks that's what's causing the sickness in the crew, but I don't know much about medicine and science.

I'm a pirate.

Our ship, the *Nightwave*, was hired to transport rare animals to a French merchant named Boucher. The animals weren't meant for Boucher himself, but rather the Frenchman's spoiled children who demanded things that not even Kings and Queens could acquire.

And so we loaded the ship with animals from all corners of the globe and started our long journey across the Atlantic to deliver the beasts and receive our gold.

Should have known it was doomed for failure. This is just a miserable recreation of Noah's last trip. And we never did find out what happened to that boat, did we?

The rhinoceros died first. Shelly, her name was. Sad beast. Looked half-dead when she first boarded back in port. I don't remember the names of the tigers and I doubt anybody bothered to name the reptiles. The zebra is on the way out next, I suspect. Just as well. It cries a lot and it's been affecting my sleep.

When I killed the captain, nobody was surprised. I think they all considered doing it themselves but were too afraid to pick up the blade and put it to skin.

I think they loved me for a couple days while the blood on the knife dried out in the sun.

Their love did not last. The crew grew uneasy once it was clear that Jarvis Jenks, the new captain, was no better suited to directing the ship towards land than the last man in the chair.

Some approached me with the idea of taking over the ship. Problem is I don't know the way home either. I look around and all I see is the malevolent ocean that means to kill us all.

*Adrift.* Never have I spoken or even thought that word while out at sea. It's completely foreign to me.

Speaking of foreigners...

The Indonesian deckhand Ahmed has been telling ghost stories about lost ships. I barely understand him beneath that heavy accent, but the rest of the crew thinks he's quite the

storyteller. I don't know. I've never been much of a fan of ghost stories unless they got naked ladies in them. And Ahmed's stories aren't like that.

Ahmed told this story about a crew dying in the middle of the night as a mist rolled over the sides of the ship. Said they got their blood drained out of their necks. I say that sounds like a vampire, but Ahmed shakes his head and the others shush me.

I don't appreciate being shushed and I tell them so, but Ahmed says, "It wasn't the vampire. It was a Rakasa," as if that's meant to make it all better.

One of the crew nods and says, "More original that way, I expect."

Ahmed was nodding, his point proven true.

I didn't get it, but I liked the word.

*Rakasa.*