

# the storm of the sainte claire

by Adam Husted

Warm, salt-ridden wind whipped the sails of the Sainte Claire as brutish screams filled the air. Her mighty canvas sails thrashed against the beating and the sun bore down through spots of dark clouds on the ship as the pirate crew of gritty men dressed in dirty, torn clothes ran heavily up and down the decks, scrambling frantically to hatch her down in time for the gusts of the North. Saltwater sprayed their worn faces and snatched their words away in its wind as the waves clashed against the barnacle-ridden bows of their long-worn ship. The yells grew louder as the men began to attempt to raise the Sainte Claire's sails, struggling against the harsh gales. Just when they were about to call for the help from those on the lower decks, the door of the captain's quarters flew open. The crew went silent, fearing the captain's harshities at their inability to complete the job.

A gasp of fear swept through the small crowd, but instead of the tall, burly captain, a blur of matted, flaxen fur jumped out of the dark doorway and sprinted towards the canvas. Cheers arose from the crew as the captain's dog approached, his signature black handkerchief whipping in the wind, the skull and crossbones sewn onto it looking as dirty as ever. His strong jaws clamped down on the rope controlling the sails, and the hound pulled with all his might as the crew did so alongside him, his claws digging into the hard deck of his ship. The sails of the Sainte Claire groaned in protest, and with one clean swish, flew open to the winds of the seas. The ship bounced back against the waters and shot ahead just as harshly, riding the wind faster than ever before.

"Ye did great, Scurv!" a crew member yelled in congratulations at the grinning dog as cheers once again broke out amongst the toughened men. Scurv barked with their cheers, and ran to the bow of the ship, placing his paws on the bowspit, soaking his fur in seawater and forcing his sandy eyes to squint against the warm winds. He howled a deep, powerful howl at the top of his lungs in victory as the Sainte Claire pushed through the waters with all her might. The crew began to howl with him, their voices filling the air with victory and joy.

The deep voice of the captain rang out from behind them, silencing the howls. "O'right, that's enough o' that. 'tis time fer grub," he called out, his voice scratchy from years of breathing in thick, salty air. Scurv ceased his howling, and he grinned as he ran across the decks, surpassing all the other crew members. Scurv was always the first to get to the table, on account of his four legs.

Deep into the lower decks of the ship, burly voices sang and laughed as food and wine was passed around the table. The waves of the ocean rocked the Sainte Claire roughly, even more roughly than they usually did, but none payed it any mind, as they were all used to it, especially Scurv, who was born on the ship as it sailed the seas. Scurv messily ate his meal of beef and vegetables, dirtying the fur around his mouth even more so than before. He sat up in the co-captain's chair, listening to the voices of the men around him. They were loud, and they were messy, but he could be louder, and he could be messier. Scurv threw his empty bowl onto the floor with his muzzle, and howled to the ceilings of the dining room, his voice overpowering all others. The laughter grew in the room and the captain howled with him, though the captain's howl could never be as great as Scurv's.

Scurv and his crew abandoned their empty, dirty bowls at the worn table for their hammocks in the room over, as they were all exhausted from that day's fight against the mighty Poseidon that ruled their seas. A storm had begun to grow from the single clouds and harsh winds during dinner, and was now raging outside, but the men were too inebriated from that night's drink to notice, all except for Scurv. Lightning struck the waters near the Sainte Claire, and Scurv whimpered from beside the captain. The captain merely shushed him, and continued to sleep. Scurv whimpered again, and got up to look for any crew member that was sober enough to realize the storm. If the winds got bad enough with the sails still up, it would rip their beloved ship apart piece by piece until they sank and joined Davey Jones' Locker.

Scurv whimpered at every man, licked every hand, and barked, every time being ignored and told to sleep. There was no other way, it seemed. Scurv pushed open the door leading to the main decks, exposing his matted, tawny fur to the violent rains and winds.

The strong gusts pushed Scurv over, forcing him to dig his claws into the wood of the Sainte Claire in order to not slide across the wet deck and fall overboard. Ice-cold rain pelted his body, and within seconds, he was soaked and shivering. But he had to hurry.

Fighting against the wind, he began to trek across the main deck, trying to reach the restraints of the sails. If he could just untie the ropes, the Sainte Claire may be saved. The rain pushed him a step back for every two he took, and the intensity of the storm quickly rose until he could not see in front of his own face. He would have to go by memory, he would have to remember where every restraint, every rope, every sail was at on his boat, on his home. He had to. He had to save her.

Scurv tensed his body under his thick coat of soaked fur, feeling the salt harden, forcing him to use even more willpower to move. One wrong move and he would be gone, fed to the ocean forever.

He tried to smell out the ropes, searching for the sweat from the hands of his crew members, but all he could smell was the briny salt lodged in his nostrils. The wind was making it impossible, impossible to see, impossible to walk, impossible to hear, impossible to smell. There was nothing left to guide him, and Scurv began to give up. His shaken body lied on the deck as he thought, desperately searching for way to save his ship. He whimpered, his ears full of the violent storm, his nose full of salt, and his body dripping sea water and shaking. Even if it killed him, he had to try. For him, for his home, for his crew, and for his captain.

Scurv stood up on shaking legs, and closed his eyes. He drowned out the sound of the storm, and did his best to stop smelling the salt overpowering his senses. Blind, deaf, and without his scent, Scurv took a step forward. He knew his way to the masts. Slowly, Scurv took another step, digging his claws into the softened wood to keep himself from being thrown into the cold, endless ocean. Two steps starboard. Scurv whimpered. One step stern. Two more steps stern. He began to pant. One step starboard. Scurv opened his eyes, feeling the sting of the salt, and directly in front of him, saw one of the three masts. The main mast.

Scurv grinned, and using his numbing paws, located the ropes tying down the sails of the main mast. He clamped his shaking jaws around the first, biting and pulling on the rope until it came loose. He heaved with all his body towards the stern, growling at the effort. Usually it took himself along with five or six other men to get the sails up or down. Now, he would have to do it alone. Scurv heaved again, throwing all of his weight in the opposite direction of the mast. The rope loosened suddenly, and he was thrown across the deck at the sudden change, the familiar noise of the canvas falling down making it's way to his ears through the storm.

Scurv picked himself up once more, already exhausted, already shaking, and closed his eyes again. The foremast was next. Scurv blocked out the violence of the storm and the threatening clashes of the sea against the Sainte Claire's hull, and began to walk towards the stern. His numb, dripping nose soon enough bumped against the familiar wood of the foremast, and Scurv once again took the dripping ropes into his maw and pulled as hard as he could. The sea suddenly churned beneath the Sainte Claire, and Scurv could do nothing but whine as he slid across the deck, slamming into the side of the ship. He could hear the waves swelling violently, threatening to come on board, and once again, he forced himself to block it out. Ropes, mast, sails. That was all that mattered. He trekked his way back, and pulled.

The canvas of the foremast fell, and Scurv panted against the cold air, silently relishing his second victory. One more, and his home would be safe. Two steps port. Five steps towards the stern. One more step port. Wood against his nose. Scurv grasped the worn ropes in his jaw, and heaved. He was weak, he was tired, and he was cold. He pulled too hard, and his paws came out from underneath him, forcing him to fall onto the gritty decks. He panted, and gave himself a moment of breath before getting up against. He took the ropes once more, and heaved. Scurv put more than he's ever put into anything into pulling on those ropes, working himself harder than he thought possible. He growled into the ropes, and kept growing in volume until all he could hear was his own powerful growl. One last tug, and the sail fell free.

Scurv dropped to the deck, unable to move. But he had done it. The Sainte Claire was safe, and so was his crew. The storm didn't matter now. He didn't matter now. Scurv's eyes closed, and he was happy. Rough, warm hands pushed underneath his matted fur, and Scurv was lifted up to a body. He was too tired to open his eyes, but felt himself being carried below the deck. He vaguely felt himself being dried off, and became warm before being lied down. Through the salt in his nose, he smelled the captain. Scurv sighed, and fell asleep swaying softly in his hammock.

Screams tore through the calm air as the Sainte Claire fought against the waves of the ocean. The crew got the sails up, and celebrated in the warm sunlight of the tropics. The air smelled fresh, vaguely of fruits, hints of bananas and pineapple. And salt. Always salt. Scurv liked that, though. Ever since that night, he always smelled salt. Always smelled the storm, the storm that would always be with him, the storm he fought against impossible odds and won. Scurv grinned, and moved further up the bow. Palm trees came into his view, and he howled in victory, the captain turning the ship in the direction Scurv indicated, leading them to the first land they had seen in weeks. Scurv kept howling, both in victory of land, but in victory of his life, as well as the life of the Sainte Claire and all of his crew members. Every day was a new victory, every howl, every sail, a new challenge, a new success. Scurv howled louder, and grinned as his crew howled in his echos behind him. Warm sea breezes whipped across his face, rippling his fur and wetting his face. The ocean swelled against the hull of his home, and Scurv howled into it in triumph.