

BAD TRAVELING

beat sheet 9.1.2019

Based upon the short story by Neal Asher

-With the SHIP lurching in a STORM, a CREWMAN shouts "Thanapod!" The gigantic CREATURE is already climbing on board, its maw yearning and claws snapping. The CREW battles, their SABERS and HARPOONS glancing off the monster's impenetrable shell. TWO CREWMEN are slain, including the CAPTAIN who the thanapod gobbles down alive and screaming.

A third MAN is tossed up, sliced in half, and skewered onto one of the monster's appendages -- made into a sickening puppet. The colossal crustacean uses the flailing, gurgling shell-of-a-man to SPEAK, shrieking protestations at the crew, who recoil in collective astonishment.

The thanapod scuttles across the deck to snap the lashings and throw the cover off the wide, square HATCHWAY to the vessel's HOLD, retreating thru sideways and down into the darkness, gone from sight.

-The stupefied crew regroups, shaken by this madness. What to do now... now that there is an unspeakable monster onboard? Bosun TORRIN is the one who suggests that since the creature spoke then perhaps it can be reasoned with. But who shall be the unfortunate to venture down and "negotiate?"

-STRAWS are drawn. The massive First Knife, JORVAN, pulls the short straw, looking upon it dourly. "Very well," says Jorvan, facing the crew, "Now that we've chosen our leader... I'll be deciding who goes."

Jorvan points to Torrinn, whose idea this was in the first place, after all. The crew -- happy to a man that it's not them who've been selected -- without hesitation drag a protesting, struggling Torrinn towards the hold.

Claiming to have accepted the undesirable ambassadorship, Torrinn is released so that he -- straightening his uniform -- may go with bit more dignity thru the separate, narrow HOLD DOOR leading to a steep LADDER down into the inky black.

The door SLAMS behind terrified Torrinn. In the scant light below decks, amongst the RACKS of large WOODEN BARRELS, Torrinn can hear the horrid SOUNDS of the hidden Thanapod. He can see the hulking shape of the thing in the dark, and its independent-of-each-other eyes shifting on tall stalks.

Expecting his own grisly end to come at any moment, Torrin nonetheless manages to begin a discussion with Monster and nearly mono-syllabic Puppet. It is still the remaining half of Torrin's shipmate, with eyes rolled back to whites, who does the talking on the thanapod's behalf.

Torrin says he and his fellow crewmen desire only to have the sea beast gone; they should go their separate ways with no more harm done. What could *it*, a citizen of the deepest ocean, possibly want on board their ship?

The thanapod wants to be taken to land. "What do you mean?" asks Torrin. "What for? Phaiden Island is closest, but..."

"Phaiden Island," becomes the monster's insistent refrain.

"Phaiden Isssland!"

"Phaiden Issssssland!"

Torrin agrees to fulfil the thanapod's wishes, and can even see that it is fed during the journey, if need be, but only so long as the thanapod makes certain to spare him rather than other men who are "expendable." Also..

"First and foremost," says Torrin, "There's something I need from you."

-Emerging partially into a weak shaft of moonlight, the thanapod begins heaving -- VOMITING from its terrible mouth a morass of sand and fragments of sea shells, as well as HUMAN BONES and SHREDDED CLOTHING. Torrin must queasily dig through the expelled, goo-soaked offering in search of what he seeks... a large, BRASS KEY.

-The horrified crew listens around the hold door, unable to hear anything. A KNOCKING startles them all back. The crew cautiously unbar the door. They watch in disbelief as Torrin emerges, nodding as he passes. He whistles quietly to himself while casually crossing away from them.

Using the KEY to unlock and enter the CAPATIN'S QUARTERS, Torrin quickly searches amongst the captain's belongings. From a heavy CHEST, he takes a large REVOLVER.

"I negotiated with *it*..." Torrin says, confronting the crew with the gun in hand, "now you negotiate with *me*."

The thanapod calls itself CERVAL, God of the Depths, tells Torrin, and firstly it demands a sacrifice -- a show of faith, which Torrin has reluctantly agreed to provide.

And yes, Torrin says to the men, certainly they could have another drawing of straws, or... or would the men rather stick with the decision fate has already made?

All eyes fall upon Jorvan.

-Jorvan, overpowered, thrashing and cursing, is thrown headlong thru the hatch into the hold. The crew replace the cover to the grotesque SOUNDS of Jorvan's demise.

-Torrin says he has a plan that may just see the rest of them surviving this ordeal. Jorvan, a sizable meal, might even hold the monster's appetite at bay for long enough, if they make great haste towards Phaiden Island. "Which if we're good and we're lucky," says Torrin, "is only the rest of this night and tomorrow and one more night's sailing away from this place."

-At DAYBREAK, Torrin is curled asleep, in the high CROW'S NEST, gun cradled. Below, the crew works, making good sail, but they're also unable to resist glancing skywards as...

...crewman DEACON slowly climbs the rigging, with KNIFE between his teeth, spidering up towards Torrin.

Nearing his prey, Deacon takes knife in hand. As he reaches with his free hand to grip the edge of the crow's nest, rising... he comes face-to-face with the barrel of Torrin's revolver, which Torrin presses to Deacon's forehead.

"Wait, sir, wait, please!" begs Deacon, dropping the knife.

Men below leap away as the falling knife EMBEDS in the deck.

"Weren't my idea, sir! They... they made me," says Deacon, reaching to take a SHORT STRAW from where it's tucked behind his ear, holds it up to show to Torrin.

Below, a THUDDING draws everyone's attention. Midship, the heavily barricaded COVER of the hold hatch LIFTS and is shoved off. Men draw swords and run to heft harpoons, girding for another lopsided battle, but...

It's only the puppeted CREWMAN'S gangrenous remains that pop up, "looking" briefly around although one eye ball dangles from its eye socket. The puppet-man's crooked, slack jaw moves as it bellows for "Torrin! Torrin! Torrrrrinnnn!"

-Having descending the ladder, Torrin attends his second audience with the fearsome thanapod. In daytime, and with the hatch above open, Torrin can see more of the wretched thing. It moves more sluggishly and its body is noticeably larger and more bloated from feasting.

The monster is growing impatient. And it warns it will soon need again to feed. Torrin's daunted as the slathering beast moves closer, its eyeballs greedily eyeballing him.

"Just remember," says Torrin, "I'm your only friend in this. Eat me and the deal's off." He points a thumb back towards the upper decks, keeping his voice low. "Despite what they believe, you'll have what you want. We're only a day away from land."

"Phaiden Isssssland!"

"Yes, yes," nods Torrin, "Trust in me. In twenty four hours... this will all be over."

-With all the crew gathered before a NAVIGATION TABLE in the CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS, gun-toting Torrin literally maps out his plan. "*This* is where it wants to go," shows Torrin, pointing to Phaiden Island on the MAP on the table.

The crew voice quiet approval.

When Torrin reminds them that Phaiden Island is heavily populated, and many would certainly die as a result of them letting the thanapod off at its preferred destination, several crewmen disparage the place and make excuses for why that might not *necessarily* be such a bad thing.

"*This*," adds Torrin, "is where we may yet manage to take it without it ever realizing." He runs his finger past Phaiden Island to a group of ISLANDS further on. "Uninhabited. However... would mean another whole day's traveling again."

The crew grumbles.

Torrin acknowledges that they would be facing higher risk by traveling further with their blood-thirsty stowaway, but in exchange for the sparing of perhaps countless lives. How can they possibly pass their terrible, deadly burden along to innocent men, women and children?

"However... since we all share the risk, each of you have a voice in this decision," says Torrin, distributing small PAPER BALLOTS.

While this shall be a SECRET BALLOT, with no man -- not even Torrin -- knowing how any other voted, Torrin still urges the men to vote with moral compunction as their guide.

He explains that a CIRCLE marked on the ballot will mean a vote for traveling onward and saving the peoples of Phaiden Island. An X marked on the ballot means a vote for the shorter voyage, and for fulfilling the thanapod's wish. "Go secretly make your mark, fold the ballot once, and return here... place your ballots in this bucket," says Torrin.

Identical twin crewmen MELIS and CALIS share a worried look. Tentatively, Calis raises his hand. Torrin nods to him.

"Um, what...," says Calis, "what's X again?"

With a sigh from Torrin: "A circle means you vote for us to travel beyond Phaiden Island. While an X means..."

-Crewmen wait outside the closed door to the CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS, some pacing nervously. The door swings open and Torrin exits, gun in one hand, ballots in the other. He wears an expression of weary disappointment.

"To start, I have a confession to make," says Torrin. He reveals that the ballots were marked, holding them up. "A folded corner here, a torn edge there, and every single ballot was uniquely distinct. Unbeknownst to anyone but me."

The crewmen look worried and confused.

"The worst of it though, the sad reason for it..." continues Torrin, "is that there are cowards amongst us. Cowards who would gladly thrust others in the way of their doom, if it meant a chance of saving their own skins. Two craven cowards! Two amongst you who voted to unleash the thanapod upon unsuspecting, Phaiden shores."

Everyone exchanges wary, mistrusting glances.

"Calis," says Torrin to the twin who is standing as always near his brother Melis, "please step to your left."

"What?" says Calis.

"Take one step to your left, if you please," orders Torrin.

Calis, not understanding, obeys... Torrin raises his gun and FIRES -- sends a single, blood-splattering BULLET straight thru both Calis and thru Melis, since Melis is directly behind now that Calis has moved.

-Men remove the cover from the hold and back off.

Others drag the corpses of Melis and Calis. No one wants to linger by the open hatch once the two bodies are tossed down. Except Torrin, who steps up. Seen thru the hatchway: the thanapod creeps forward, with a certain cautiousness, into the light. It consumes Melis.

Above, Torrin watches, allowing a crooked half-smile.

Below, at least a DOZEN relatively small THANAPOD BABIES scutter out from their hidden nesting place beneath the giant monster. The baby thanapods clamor across their mother's underbelly and back, leaping down to swarm their meal: Calis.

On the deck, Torrin turns from this sight, smile gone, eyes wide. He slowly brings his hand to his agape mouth.

-With the ship traveling quickly, NIGHT SAILING, Torrin is with crewman SAPARIN, who's at the HELM. Torrin uses a TELESCOPE... sighting distance LIGHTS ahead.

"Maintain course. Unless she's got some... sixth sense, we'll skirt past Phaiden Island with the thanapod none the wiser."

"And tomorrow? If the monster and its *family* down there start getting hungry again? What then?" says Saparin grimly.

Torrin hands the telescope over. "Just maintain course. If anyone asks, I've gone to get some well deserved rest."

Saparin watches with disdain as Torrin goes.

All of the remaining crew eye Torrin with some mixture of mistrust and hatred as he crosses towards the captain's quarters. *If only Torrin wasn't carrying that ever-present REVOLVER* you can practically hear the men thinking.

-LATER NIGHT, as the ship travels swiftly and quietly on...

Inside the CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS, the wooden DOOR is BASHED INWARDS and the CREW rush in en masse. With enraged shouts, drawn SWORDS and thrusting HARPOONS, they set upon the SHAPE beneath the COVERS of the captain's BED -- sending up FEATHERS and SHREDDED PILLOWS.

Torrin moves from a dark corner, training his weapon, SHOOTING! Booming MUZZLE FLASHES punctuating the scene.

Torrin GUNS DOWN some men. He THRUSTS and SLASHES with his CUTLASS to end other lives. The crew make an able effort, although those with harpoons find them far too long to effectively counter Torrin's attack in this confined space. In the end, Torrin's gun has more than evened the odds.

The last attacker is SHOT -- BLOWN BACKWARDS out the doorway.

In the swirling, dissipating SMOKE, Torrin looks around. He starts counting those who lie dead around him.

-Moments later, on the DECK, Torrin kicks open a LOCKER to find Deacon cowering within. "It weren't...", says Deacon, holding his hands up in surrender, "it weren't my idea."

-Torrin and Deacon throw all the dead crewmen down into the hold thru the open hatch. Torrin holds a LANTERN, peering down as thanapod babies climb the corpse pile and consume.

The colossal, slow-moving thanapod shows herself, even larger than before, with more of its fleshy innards pressing apart -- and out from -- the seams between the plates of its armor-like shell. "Keep eating," mutters Torrin, "Keep eating."

Deacon shoves the last body in, wipes his brow. He bends backwards, groaning, with his hands on his aching lower back.

"It's only fair that you know: it wasn't truly a secret ballot," says Torrin. "I didn't mark them, because I knew I didn't need to."

Torrin draws his sword. Deacon turns, realizing as... Torrin runs Deacon through.

"Every single one of you wrote an X."

There's a look of almost sad resignation on Deacon's face as Torrin shoves forward -- lets Deacon slide off of his sword to fall backwards into the hold.

-Later NIGHT, Torrin is at the WHEEL, watching the shores of PHALIDEN ISLAND and the LIGHTS of its TOWNS grow nearer.

-Moments later, the DOOR to the HOLD opens. Torrin enters. With the "children" moving around in the darkness, Torrin calls out the lumbering, bigger-than-ever thanapod.

"We've arrived at Phaliden Island," says Torrin. "Although you'll never reach her shores. I've made certain of that."

The moldering puppet that the thanapod uses is unsurprisingly in even more deteriorated. "Phaiden Issssland! Yesss!"

Torrin shows his gun. "Only one bullet left," he says, "but it's enough."

"Not hurt me!" the puppet intones, one arm falling off. "Ssshell protectssss me."

"You're on a whaling vessel. Or hadn't you noticed?" says Torrin, pointing his revolver towards stacked BARRELS. "We harvest oil."

Torrin FIRES! A BARREL EXPLODES, throwing BURNING OIL.

As the thanapod SHRIEKS, discarding its puppet, Torrin flees towards the ladder. A few thanapod babies SCREECH, engulfed in flames. Other babies leap onto their mother.

Torrin's halfway up, glancing back as the behemoth monster arrives, swinging a clawed arm -- SPLINTERING the LADDER.

Torrin's made it into the doorway, scrambling thru.

The thanapod backpedals to the center of the hold. FLAMES SPREAD rapidly. As it leaps and reaches upwards to grip the hatchway above, the monster discovers the hatch is too small now. The thanapod is too big bodily to fit itself through.

On deck, EXPLOSIONS from below reverberate while Torrin cuts a WHALING BOAT free. The boat SPLASHES into the water below. Torrin climbs the rail, DIVES over.

Within the hold, no matter what angle it tries nor how desperately it struggles, with its clinging babies screaming and FLAMES rising, the thanapod is too large a round peg to fit this square hole. More BARRELS EXPLODE.

-Across the water, drenched Torrin rows his boat away. He looks back. The burning ship lists... beginning to sink.

Torrin rows on towards the LIGHTS of Phaiden Island.

END