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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

# The Ocean Ogre

By DANA CARROLL

*A tale of the sea, and the thing called Alain Gervais that came aboard the Jolly Waterman*

**J**UNE 2.—Our stiff canvas, faded and gray, hangs lifeless from the yard-arms. We are stilled in one of the great calms. There is slowly rising water in the well, and our food is nearly gone. We heave on the greasy, heavy water, foul and green. The fog hides all from view. I confess that I am afraid. What an expressive word is despair! Luckily a flying-fish came scudding over the rails this morning.

*June 3.*—The fog has lifted a bit, but there is no relief in sight. The seven of us worked all last night on the pipes, until our backs ached and our hands were raw. The crew seems gruff and surly, but I haven't the heart to assert my authority at a time like this. They don't realize how near death they are. I write for record only, for who knows what may happen in the next few days? We are at present in the open sea a thousand miles from land. A fine situation for the skipper of the *Jolly Waterman*! Three months ago I had a full crew and a lucky boat, but now—scurvy isn't pleasant. No, sir, not pleasant at all.

*June 4.*—Hope! I have given up even entertaining the word. By working desperately we are able to keep the water in the well down, but our hardtack is nearly gone. We have pumped and sweated on empty stomachs for twelve hours. Losier collapsed. He folded like the others, but thank God he died quietly. No reproachful blasphemies heaped on my head. Just a tired fading, glad it was all over.

*June 5.*—It was funny. Another fly-

ing-fish came aboard today, and Herbie Tastrum made a dive for it. He looked like a maniac as he slid along the deck, filling his belly with splinters. He caught it between his two hands and bit into it, and finally disposed of it, bones and all. I was a bit put out. He could have divided it. I could shred a donkey's carcass in my present state. Yet, I write it was funny.

*June 6.*—Our case is desperate. No two ways about it, something has to happen, and soon. There isn't a breath of air stirring, and Hanson is below, unable to raise a limb. The five of us are able to keep the water down, but we are tired—dog-tired.

*June 7.*—We have one thing to be thankful for, the water hasn't risen much in the last twelve hours. Not that we would pump it out if it did. We are too tired to pump. We lie on the decks and curse, and make faces at the sky. I lost my temper many times today, but I am suffering acutely. Why do I continue to write futilely in this log book which no one will ever read?

*June 8.*—We are saved! What glorious good luck! A boatload of provisions and a jolly companion to cheer us up. He says he is the sole survivor of the *King William*. You have probably heard of the *King*. A finer brig never put out from Marseilles. A hurricane and a leak did for her. Six or seven pulled away in the longboat, but my friend (what else could you call your savior?) threw them overboard. They died first, of course. They

died from fright, or from drinking salt water. My friend didn't elaborate on details, but not liking the unsociable company of corpses, he naturally disposed of them. That's his story, and I accepted it at its face value. I am not a man to go poking about and asking questions. It's enough that he brought us a boatload of provisions and his own buoying companionship. He has actually injected spirit. We were growing to loathe each other, we five. He calls himself Alain Gervais.

*June 11.*—Gervais (he insisted we call him that) has been with us now for three days. He has the run of the ship, and I have turned the mate's cabin over to him. The mate has no further need for a cabin—he spends his nights rolling on the ocean floor. Gervais is tall and emaciated. His face is oyster-colored, drawn and haggard. His eyes are set deeply in dark caverns and actually seem to consume you. There is something devastating about those eyes; sometimes they seem a hundred years old. His forehead is high and as yellow and dry as parchment, and his nose is shaped like a simitar. With long, gangling arms and thick wrists he presents an awesome picture. A very peculiar fellow now that I get to know him better. But he is one of us.

**JUNE 12.**—Gervais has kept more to himself. He remained locked in his cabin all morning, and answered my anxious questions curtly, through the closed door. But I was too busy to investigate; there is a chill in the air that encourages hope for a wind in the near future. Some of the crew seem too tired to work. They came across a bottle of rum in Losier's locker, and by mixing it with salt water they concocted an elixir to alleviate their suffering. Who am I to assert my authority, but I hope for the

first breeze, as it will surely bolster the ship's morale. At that time I plan to regain my old power of discipline.

*June 13.*—A breeze is surely coming. It is eerily still, all around us, except for a sharp report every now and then, as another deck plank snaps under the direct rays of a broiling sun. I am working frantically on a miserable substitute of a rudder. I am stripped to the waist, and the sweat rolls down into my eyes, almost blinding me. I have been over the side twice this afternoon for relief, but there is very little in the brackish water.

*June 14.*—Gervais slept on the planks with the crew last night, and this morning he looks ten years younger. His face is flushed and full, and the greenish hollows have disappeared from beneath his eyes. But Hanson isn't well. He complains of pains in his chest, and once or twice he spat a mixture of blood and rum. His big face seems sandpapered by age, and he is abnormally pale.

*June 15.*—No breeze. Hanson is surely stricken. Death hovers over him like an impatient doorman. He lies in his cabin and groans, and I can do nothing for him. His pallor is genuinely alarming. Even his lips are bloodless. He complains of his nose, and noises in his ears. And Gervais has shown his first glints of ill-nature. His eyes smolder when he speaks, and for the first time I discern a hard cruelty in the man. He is an alarming personality.

*June 16.*—Hanson died this morning. A horrible, racking death. It seemed as though he wanted to tell us something. I laid my ear on his broken, watery lips, but was unable to make out anything intelligible from his forced moaning. Gervais actually gloated over his death. 'What can it mean? Why such a metamorphosis in the man we befriended? He owes everything to our generosity. Human beings are utterly despicable, and

I have lost faith in them. He gloats over the misfortunes of others. He actually smiled as we dropped poor Hanson into the sea. Imagine it!

*June 17.*—There is still no wind. There is something unnatural about this floating hulk. Even the cook has noticed it.

"It ain't natural," he said, "for a ship to smell like this, and that Gervais fellow's cabin, phew! It not only stunk, but——"

I clouted him behind the ear. "You're a fool!" I shouted. "He's all right."

You have a feeling that he knows more than ten ordinary men whenever he opens his mouth to tell one of his amazing yarns. And that tale of the French fleet he told yesterday was so real, so vivid! But it set me to thinking. I must confess the smell of Gervais' cabin did horrify me. I entered it while Gervais was on deck, and the stench nearly laid me out. The place smelt like a charnel house. The odor of decaying shell-fish mingled with a peculiarly offensive and acrid smell that in some way suggested newly shed blood. Tonight I shall finish the rum. Oh, I will get gloriously drunk, but what does it matter?

*June 18.*—Gervais has grown currish and cynical. He has assumed the authority to curse my men, and refuses to speak to me. This morning Harry Knudson went below to lie down. He was as white as a squid's belly. All I could do was to perform a cursory examination. I told him to strip, and examined his entire body. He was pitifully lean and bloodless. Something had bitten him in the chest. A round discoloration showed plainly on the center of his chest, and in the very middle were two sharp incisions, from which blood and pus trickled ominously. I didn't like the looks of it and told him so. Harry smiled grimly and turned over in his bunk.

*June 19.*—Gervais seems to have ap-

pointed himself king of the ship. He does whatever he pleases. This morning he cut a strip of sail down and improvised a novel marquee for himself on the poop-deck. All during the late afternoon he reclined under the canvas, smoking his briar and gazing reflectively out to sea. None of the men approached him; they want as little as possible to do with so temperamental a person. We were all occupied forward when we heard a triumphant shout from Gervais. He was jumping around under his marquee and pointing over the side. It was Hanson's body, floating face upward, not ten feet from the ship. His nose was gone, and his cheekbones protruding through the wasted skin. The water was so still he seemed to hang there, leering up at the ship. When we buried him yesterday, we sewed his body in canvas and weighted it. Evidently the stitching had loosened, and the suddenly released, air-filled body had popped to the top like a cork.

*June 20.*—An unaccountable incident occurred on deck today. I am obliged to believe that Gervais is insane. Roland Perresson was working on the braces, and his hand accidentally slipped. He cut himself badly. The blood gushed down his arm, and we all feared he had severed an artery. His under lip trembled, but he didn't complain or cry out. He simply walked with unsteady steps toward the fo'castle. Gervais was on the poop-deck, in his throne room, as we have begun to call it. The sight of Perresson's uncertain steps somehow excited him. He made for Perresson. Perresson saw him coming, and stopped, a little puzzled, a little hopeful. In a moment Gervais had seized upon the injured arm. He gripped it forcefully and stuck it under his shirt. Gervais was sweating and acting like one possessed. I feared for Perresson. The situation was unhealthy. I stepped forward to interfere. But when I reached

them they were free of each other. Perresson held his arm and groaned.

"There's no blood on it," he bellowed, "and it's as cold as ice."

I could only stand and stare. Is Gervais mad, or has he mastered some monstrous system of healing?

June 21.—Roland Perresson is dead. I disposed of the body this morning. It was white and rigid, and I noticed an extraordinary discoloration above the wound on his wrist. From the elbow down, his arm was a bright green. I cannot explain it. Blood-poisoning, perhaps; but I will stand little more from Gervais. His presence has become odious to me.

Something walked again tonight. It bent above my bed and I heard it gulp. We have become so few, we are mentally drawn together for protection against an alien evil. We are not certain what it is, but we must do something.

JUNE 22.—This morning after a half-hearted gesture at making my rounds I retired to the ship's library. It was fairly cool there and I thought I could get away from myself for a bit, although there is no breaking from this ship and sea and sky. But now I wish I hadn't. I picked up an old water-stained parchment volume, called *The Islands of France*, a ridiculous miscellany of witchcraft and spirits. I chuckled to myself as I indolently flicked the pages until my interest was finally arrested by the childish awe and belief in the following:

"There lies a beautiful island called Gautier off the southwest tip of France. You may walk from heavy 'Druid' depths of the forest to the brilliant blue glare of the ocean, where the fishermen spread out their nets of bright blue cord to dry, and fisherwomen make out at low tide to gather mussels, sold in the shell for two cents a quart. If you ask them what is

the next land they reply, '*L'Amérique est là-bas*'—America is over there. They are a naive folk, few of them ever having been away from the island. They will gladly tell you about the old legends of the island, and what's more, believe them. There was the unfortunate Suzanne, the young girl, cruel or unfaithful to her lover, who was changed into a big black dog or female wolf. Unless she repented or a miracle restored her to her natural shape, she was doomed to lope, howling through the black naked woods, longing for death, until killed. Only a special bullet, properly blessed, could kill her, which made it difficult:

"There were also the beak-faced hunchbacks, that lived in the sea. These deformed people made periodical raids on the good villagers. If they were displeased they had the unpleasant habit of dragging corpses through the streets with loud cries. And it didn't take much to displease them, although no one could remember their ever having perpetrated bodily harm.

"There were the 'slacks' or noisy drones. Spirits of those that had met a violent death, they wandered through the night, repeating the cries of agony with which they had died, often from age to age. The old fisherwomen even yet hear them howling on long winter nights.

"There were, and according to the belief of many still are, sorcerers and sorceresses; they are looked upon as outsiders, feared, hated and never touched. It is a form of our ancient and respectable belief in witchcraft. If you meet one in your path, to avoid destruction you must immediately make the sign of the cross, seize a piece of earth, and hold it above your head, because between two pieces of earth, the ground under your feet and the piece held in a quivering hand above your head, no evil spirit can harm you.

"It is a dangerous sign on this island when those little corpse-dragging dwarfs ring a bell as they go along, for that means another death; a bad sign also if a church bell rings without any hand touching it.

"Those are still living who have seen the *dames blanches*—white ladies—howling in the night at church doors, seeking salvation and relief.

"Alain Gervais, the villagers relate, was swimming with other youths of his age in the St. Jacques basin; of a frolicsome and adventurous nature, he swam some distance from shore. According to another youth who was making his way to Alain at all possible speed, he took what seemed an intentional surface dive, and did not appear again. Many hours were spent fruitlessly diving for his body. A few years later, one of the boys, now grown into a man, was stationed at the watch of a fishing-boat, when he saw the rough caricature of a man, diving and breaking for air a short distance from his craft. He insisted he recognized Gervais."

A few lame conjectures followed, on the ability of a man being enabled to live at the bottom of the sea.

I remember flinging the book from me as if it were some abhorrent dead thing, and rising weakly, I made my way on deck with a troubled mind.

**JUNE 23.**—I buttonholed Peter Bunce this morning forward of the lee scuppers. I told him in ragged, forceful exclamations just what I had read. He ponderously turned my story over in his numbed brain. His eyes rolled crazily and his mouth sagged. His face turned yellow, but he caught himself with determination.

"We must act at once," he said.

**June 24.**—Our plans have been worked out. Peter and I are to bunk together

tonight. We have my revolver and a razor-sharp, double-edged knife. Peter contends that the knife will be necessary. He insistently babbles of vampires and other blood-sucking demons. His obsession took an active form this noon. He jumped up and stepped around deftly, brandishing his knife in dark corners, and lunging wildly in offensive alacrity, cutting an imaginary victim to bits. I smiled rather wanly. Finally, exhausted, he slumped down on a stool, his head between his hands. My smile faded as I contemplated his abject dejection. Frankly, we don't know what to expect.

**June 25.**—It is over—poor Peter is gone—but Gervais will trouble us no more. I am stunned, horrified, but I owe it to Peter to write it all out.

I lay awake in my bunk, flat on my back, and the gnawed beams above me twitched like raw tendons. I had that tight, sick feeling of excitement twisting my stomach. We distinctly heard the door creak on its hinges. Something poised itself in the doorway. The door closed and it slid snake-like into the room. We could hear the thing gulp. Peter gripped my arm. I made ready to strike a match. I stiffened until its soft, slimy approach became unbearable; then I waited until it swayed at the foot of my bunk, until its green, glassy eyes were vaguely discernible in the almost total blackness. It was watching me, and I realized it could see in the dark.

I clawed at the match, lit it, and with a frantically shaking hand carried it to the tallow wick, and then—it sprang. But it didn't spring at me. It went higher and got Peter by the neck. I could hear him choke and gasp. In passing me the thing had knocked the match from my hand, plunging the room once more into total darkness. I was paralyzed, unable to move or think. I sat on the edge of my bunk, deathly sick, and my heart

seemed to come up in my throat. The small room careened drunkenly. I finally became conscious of two dark objects struggling on the floor. I heard a gulping and a low moaning, and then the still night was rent with Peter's forced screams of horror. "Oh Lord, where are the rest?"

He shrieked and shrieked, and between the screams he vomited a torrent of jumbled words. "Green—eyes! Ugh! Ooze! Mouth! Wet!"

His last throttled shriek lashed at me like a whip. I finally managed another match and lit it. I kept my eyes averted, and carried the match quickly to the candle-wick. I knew that if I looked at the thing on the floor I would drop the match. I waited until the sickly glow flared, and then—I looked. Something was on top of Peter. It covered him and seemed about to absorb him. In its evil, distorted features I recognized a caricature of Gervais, but the evil in the man had sprouted. It had turned him into a jellyish, fishy monstrosity. His middle was festooned with soft flesh. His legs and arms actually gave. But worst of all, the body of the creature was covered with greenish scales, and it had pulsating pink suckers on its chest. These were lustily at work on Peter.

I thought of the revolver on my bunk, found it, and gripped the butt and leveled it. I aimed it at Peter and the thing on the floor. I fired at the two of them, for I honestly had no intention of sparing Peter. I knew that Peter would not want it, and the mute appeal in his eyes was unmistakable. Again objects refused to retain their identity in my sight. I cracked mentally.

I have a vague recollection of bringing two bodies on deck. I remember one was light, brittle and hollow like an empty match-box. The other, wet and strangely

heavy, silvered its path with slime as I laboriously dragged it up the companion-way. In the dim half-glow of the ship's watchlights, I bent over the bodies. Peter was done for, there was no doubt about it. My merciful shot at short range had found its mark, and one temple was singed with powder. I stooped and lifted him tenderly; then with a sob I lowered him gently into the ocean. I stood for a moment looking over the side, thinking of the finality of it all, and watching the ever widening ripples on the surface of the oily water.

Finally I turned to regard what was Gervais. With a mingling of loathing and interest I unhooked a lantern and set it near his head. The sickly glow jumped and played on the cruel, twisted features. To my surprize I perceived a slit deep in the folds of his neck, very much like the breathing-organs of a fish. The gill was rigid and distended now, revealing a dark inner lining of red. The body exuded an oily scum, malodorous even in the clean salt air. I hunched closer over the body, and to my amazement a look of ineffable happiness and gratitude had suffused Gervais' face. Was it the weird light, the softening touch of death, or final liberation? No one will ever know. But I do not think it requires an answer. I am ready to be finished with the entire matter, just as Gervais is finished. I later went down into Gervais' cabin and breathed deeply of the fresh, clean air that blew through it.

*June 26.*—We are saved. There is a breeze this morning. The heavy canvas is bellying, and all hands are busy forward. The gray sky above us is sagging like a wet blanket filled with spring rains. Our casks are on deck waiting for the down-pour. I thank God that we are safely headed toward France.