

The Journey of the Black Obelisk



by William Jeffrey Rankin

“ I kept my mind clear and let whatever impressions come that would. Images appeared: of the race of men that had built the vessel, their journeys, of the cold and storms it had endured through the millennia, and the long emptiness after the builders had gone away. Other men, with strange beliefs and customs, had appeared. They knew little of the sea. They'd come from another world, and wanted to explore this one. Some were good men and only wished to learn. But there were others who longed for wealth, power, and long life.

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(The Black Obelisk, Part III)
The Carnacki Casebook, Case No. 09

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Web: <http://carnacki.wjrankin.com>
Email: jeffrey.rankin@me.com

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"A ship," he said, "it just appeared on the horizon."

"How?" asked Dodgson. The weather had remained calm and the surface of the ocean shone like a dark mirror.

"It could be a steamer," said Thomas, "or possess some other power source of which we know nothing."

"I don't think so," said Jessop as he climbed down. "It looks like an old frigate, and quite a heavy one at that."

Jessop handed Thomas the field glasses. I could only make out a black speck on the horizon. He watched for some time, then lowered the field glasses.

"The sails are lowered," he said. "Whatever the source of power, she's heading this way. This is no chance meeting: Be on your guard."

As the frigate came closer, her details became more apparent. She was in poor condition: the foremast was broken and leaned precariously toward the starboard bow, the tattered remains of a sail hanging off it. The main deck railing and that of the quarter and poop was broken, warped, and in some places absent altogether. The main and mizzen sails lay in piles upon the main deck, torn and tangled in the rigging. Her hull was dark with age, and the whole aspect of the ship spoke of abandonment. There was no movement on the main deck, yet the ship continued its direct course toward us.

"It's a wonder she's still afloat," said Jessop.

The mystery ship was still several hundred yards off our port bow when there was another exclamation from Jessop.

"I see movement," he said, then paused for a moment. "People—four of them—thin, dirty, and dressed in rags. One is watching us through a spyglass. Another is waving his arms."

None of us waved back, and we had but little choice to wait.

"They could be friendly," said Dodgson. Thomas said nothing.

As the ship came closer, we could see her poor state and that of those on board. The timbers of the ship appeared almost rotten and the sails were torn and shredded as from a great storm. The four men on board were emaciated, with dark lines under their sunken eyes. Their clothing was filthy, although Jessop thought it appeared of a modern cut, and he thought one of the men was wearing a priest's collar. From time to time, one of the men would wave. As the ship came closer, Thomas finally waved back.

The ship came to an abrupt halt some yards off our port. The man who'd waved—the one in the collar—finally spoke. His accent was difficult to place, but he spoke English.

"Ahoy! I'm Father Morris. One of our companions is ill," he said, "can you lend aid? We are willing to trade."

A sample from *The Journey of the Black Obelisk* by William Jeffrey Rankin
<http://carnacki.wjrankin.com/stories/journey-obelisk.html>

"What is it you require?" Thomas shouted.

"Fresh water," replied Father Morris, "and alcohol, if you have it."

"We have both," Thomas replied. "Tell me, what is your destination?"

There was a pause from Father Morris. "We were blown off course by a storm while en route to the portal."

"We came directly from a portal," Thomas said, "although I don't know whether it's the one you seek. How is your boat able to move in these doldrums?"

Another pause. "The ways of this place are strange. Will you trade with us? We have treasure."

"We have no need," Thomas replied, "but can provide what you require."

"Oh, thank you!" said the Father, "we'll send a boat over."

Dodgson and Jessop descended to the hold and brought up two small casks of water and alcohol. We then watched as a cockboat with two of the men from the frigate paddled towards the Fastread. A small, oddly figured, chest sat between them.

Jessop threw a rope down as the cockboat pulled along our port side. One of the men held the line as Dodgson and Jessop lowered the casks. Once these were secured, they tied the rope round the chest.

"We've not much, but 'ere's a few books, trinkets, and such like," he said with a toothless grin. Unaccountably, a wave of prescient fear washed over me as Dodgson and Jessop raised the chest.

I'd been watching Father Morris through Jessop's field glasses as the two men paddled away. He gave one last wave, and it seemed he was laughing, but I didn't like the way he laughed. Suddenly, there were yells of alarm and screams from Dodgson and Jessop.