



One-Eyed Willie is back on an amazing adventure on the high seas. Willie and his friends find themselves unwitting passengers on a pirate ship and ultimately on a quest to find Magellan's body and the treasure rumored to be buried with him.

**Before the End:
The Adventures of One-Eyed Willie and His Friends**
By Michael J. DeGrow

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Before the End

THE ADVENTURES OF
ONE-EYED WILLIE AND HIS FRIENDS

A novel by Michael J. DeGrow

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CHAPTER 1

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In a small, run-down section of London two boys, with sharp sticks in their hands, parry with each other as if they were pirates fighting over a treasure.

A mother's voice rang out over the commotion.

"Willie! You'll put your eye out!" she scolded.

Turning to his mother's voice, Willie was accidentally slashed with his opponent's sword just below the eye and he covered the wound with his hand.

"Now see!" Willie's mother shrieked. "Who'd be wantin' a dockboy what ain't got but one eye. Now get to work! I be needin' me rent money!"

A chorus of admonitions rang out from other windows.

"You boys get outta' here and quit'cher makin' trouble," another hag wailed from her doorstep.

Ignoring all the rebukes, his companion rushed to his side and apologetically offered to get something to dab the blood running down

his friend's face. Willie angrily brushed him aside.

“Let’s go. I’m tired of this game,” he said, defying the pain.

Tolliver shrugged his shoulders and dutifully followed his friend up the street until they were out of earshot of the cacophony of insults and aspersions.

Tolliver, Willie's partner in crime, was the son of a local strumpet and a Royal Navy officer who, after years of service at sea and failed attempts at schooling the boy, turned the child's upbringing over to his mother - and ultimately the streets. As a result, Tolliver considered the many street urchins his family - especially Willie. They were inseparable friends and, when they weren't being forced to work for Willie's mother's rent and rum, they fancied themselves to be ruthless pirates who exacted revenge upon their oppressors and fought for the honor of ladies in distress. Now, far from their tormentors, they turned their attention to more profitable adventures and rushed through the cobblestone streets waving their make-shift swords in the air challenging all who dare to be in their way.



CHAPTER 11

The crew of the *Inferno* were approaching sixty-eight days out on their journey at sea, sailing along the East coast of South America near the Amazon, when they spotted a crude wooden cross on shore near the mouth of a river. In the center of the cross was a strange splotch of red.

"T'is a curious marker, Cap'in," Francois said as he joined the captain at the bow. "What do ye make of it?"

The captain held up the old log book from Magellen.

"This is definitely one of Magellan's," Captain Max replied. "It's mentioned here in his log, but some bleedin' moron spilled wine on the remainin' part of the page and I can't be makin' out the rest of what it says." "Shall we chance it, then?" Francois asked.

"We ain't in any position not to," the captain sighed, staring vacantly toward the shore. "The water and supplies are runnin' low."

After a moment, Captain Max turned his head and looked at Francois with a restored sense of purpose and gave his command.

"Bring her to starboard and ease her on in," he ordered.

"Aye, sir," Francois said as he turned and began giving orders to the crew. The inlet, a lazy, muddy river ending its journey out of the jungle, provided a perfect stop for the crew to replenish their fruit, water and enjoy a much needed bath and rest on dry land. After a couple of hours, most of the men had retreated back to the ship with their newfound supplies and wet from a freshwater swim. A few stragglers were still in the water slowly making their way back.

Tunny, a sailor who had the mentality of a 7-year old, had his back to the ship as he waded lazily in waist-deep water. Behind him, closer to the ship, stood Big Luke, a very tall muscular man washing out his shirt. Between him and the ship's bow were Thumbs, Willie and Captain Max. Francois noticed something from where he stood on deck and began waving wildly at the crew members in the water.

"Queue Nez!" he shouted again and again.

It was too late.

Silently and almost magically, a hundred or more warriors flanked the river on both sides seemingly appearing out of nowhere. The natives were dressed in nothing more than a waist cloth made of skins, except for necklaces fashioned out of eerily familiar white, articulated bones. Their most disquieting features, however, were the blood-red lines running from the middle of their foreheads to the tips of their noses.

Captain Max shouted back to Francois in French. Francois then replied in his native language, his voice taking on a serious tone. The

captain frowned and looked a bit terrified.

Willie, never taking his eyes off the natives, moved to the captain's side.

"What did Francois say?" Willie asked.

The captain also had his eyes fixed upon the strange sight and seemed to be sizing up his chances against this formidable force.

He says that the French know them as the Queue Nez (*Cue Nay*), meaning 'line nose,'" he answered haltingly. "The French have encountered them in the past and are terribly frightened of them for what they do to 'uninvited guests'. The necklaces are evidence that what he says is true." Willie knew from his father's stories that the one true test of a great captain lies in his ability to assess the dangers of a situation, devise a strategy and calmly put the plan into action to diffuse the situation.

None of this happened.

Instead, Captain Max's eyes fell upon what he assumed to be the chief. The captain slowly reached back near his shoulder blades, and in one quick motion, a flash of steel flew through the air and a knife embedded itself deep into the chief's chest just above his heart. The captain figured that he had just one chance. He was betting if their chief was dead, the warriors would flee.

Time seemed to stand still. Nothing happened.

He watched in anticipation as he awaited the retreat of his adversaries. Instead, the captain beheld a scene where the warriors and

the chief, with the knife still hilt-deep in his chest, stood silently frozen in place staring forward as if in a trance. Max, along with his crew, was momentarily confused and bewildered by the lack of expected retaliation.

Then, a low almost inaudible sound, seemed to rise in the air. He couldn't quite locate or identify the sound. Almost a chant. It came from everywhere, yet nowhere. As the chant-like rhythm increased in volume he could now see that it was coming from the natives. It evoked an ancient consciousness within and induced a primal fear that warned of a dark terror deep inside your soul.

No one could speak. No one could move.

The beat of the chant rose louder until the sounds of the jungle could no longer be heard, or perhaps just blended in to the surroundings to form a perfect chorus of fear. Then, at the very height of the unnerving canticle, the natives slowly began to raise their arms in unison, continuing the primordial drumbeat chant.

No one really noticed it at first. It started slowly - ripples in the water near Tunny.

Tunny didn't seem to mind the strange ripples. They were almost hypnotic as they moved in straight parallel lines toward him. Then he felt a slight bumping sensation on his feet and legs and he wondered if something might be in the water. The chanting reached a fever pitch and the ripples erupted into a roiling mass of turbulent waves around Tunny. It wasn't until he noticed a red tinge to the brown water that he

became alarmed. Something jostled him violently and he reached down into the water to investigate what had jolted his body. Curiously, the water roiled around his hand. But, to his horror, when he pulled his hand out, or what was left of it, he saw many strange looking creatures with scorpion-like tails. They were fish-like, yet like nothing he'd ever seen; their razor-sharp teeth clamped firmly to the exposed bones of his hand.

What Tunny didn't know, or couldn't know, is that, prior to stripping off their victim's flesh, the creatures stung their prey with their tails and released a toxin that rendered the flesh of their victims numb of all feeling. By the time the victim sensed any danger, it was too late.

That was now Tunny's problem. A startling, horrible realization swept over him. He was slowly melting into the dark, turbid water amidst a frenzied splashing of flesh and blood, and still felt nothing.

The din of chanting continued to fuel the sailors' worst fears. Still, no one moved.

Big Luke, the closest to the carnage, stood transfixed in horror as he watched poor Tunny slip beneath the water with a look of confused terror on his face. Big Luke's expression slowly turned from revulsion to fear as his mind began to wake to the realization that he could be the next victim of this unseen terror. Standing as still as possible, he scanned the water for movement. For just a moment, the water was still and he thought he might escape an unspeakably, horrible death.

Then, as it had happened with Tunny, the telltale ripples began to appear, increasing in numbers and heading straight for him. Instinctively, Big Luke spun his large frame around in the water and began a frantic, slow-motion run toward the ship, hampered by the dense water clutching at his legs. It was a race he knew he probably could not win, but he was desperate to try to beat the odds. Directly in his path the plump figure of Thumbs bobbed about, also trying to escape the danger behind him. With one fluid motion, Big Luke scooped up Thumbs like he weighed nothing and continued his death race to the vessel.

Willie and the captain signaled Francois to pull up anchor and the Frenchman hurriedly began the laborious process of winding the rope around the windlass.

Within seconds the deadly ripples caught up with Big Luke and an unfamiliar thumping against his legs began to register in his consciousness as misplaced relief - maybe it was just river debris. Then he noticed something strange happening to him. From a casual observer's point of view, it would be a mystifying sight: a large man running through the water with a child on his shoulders, appearing to be getting shorter with every step.

Big Luke knew something was terribly wrong. He lumbered through the river toward the ship, yet the water seemed to get deeper. But he knew that couldn't be the case since moments before he had walked through that area without noticing any holes or depressions in

the river bottom. He dared not look behind him, fearing what he would see, but prayed to God it wouldn't happen to him.

But the situation was all too real.

Big Luke was being devoured with every step he took and sinking closer to his demise. He started to become light-headed from the loss of blood and strained to stay alert to protect the human cargo on his shoulders. Thumbs had hoped he would be safe upon Big Luke's shoulders, but he began to think that he, too, wouldn't escape the menacing waters as his feet were now dangerously close to the surface.

Just a few steps away from the ship, Big Luke could see the captain and Willie slowly rising out of the river standing atop the ship's anchor. His clouded mind flooded with renewed optimism that he and Thumbs might actually have a chance to escape with their lives. But his brief optimism faded with the realization that he was too far gone, and these creatures too relentless for him to escape. The world seemed surreal through his fading vision, but he put all of his remaining energy into taking one more step as the water and blood swirled around his chest. The last thing Big Luke saw through the murkiness was Thumbs' hands grabbed by the captain and Willie as he was hoisted aloft onto the swinging anchor.

The final image etched into everyone's memory of Big Luke was his expression of satisfaction and eternal peace as he disappeared beneath the water after saving Thumbs.

As the captain, Willie and Thumbs scrambled aboard ship, the

crew frantically hoisted the sails and manned long poles to push the ship out to sea. As they looked back one last time, they could see the natives wading into the water and retrieving two new, gleaming white human vertebrae necklaces.



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