

BLACKSKULL'S LEGACY

by

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I. Rock of Thull

Shayne Vyne, called “the Saber,” stood over the body of Blackskull—no one living knew his given name—the late Lord of a Thousand Fleets, king of pirates. The body lay in state within a launch, beached upon the Rock of Thull.

If he were honest, Vyne couldn't say whether he missed him or not. A thousand memories came and went as he looked upon the weathered face hidden behind the tattoo of a black skull. Most had seen him as little more than violence in the skin of a man, and Blackskull had done nothing to dissuade them of that notion. He had certainly been capable of overwhelming brutality and ruthlessness, but it was never wanton. Once one's reputation was established, the threat of violence often proved more effective than the thing itself. Wherever the crimson flag of Blackskull's Red Fleet was flown, it inspired dread and respect.

A globule of sticky brown saliva spattering against the visage of the black skull interrupted Vyne's recollections.

Vyne turned toward the expectorator.

The Last Necromancer

“Eh, Vyne, you look like you wanna crawl in there with ’im,” came the slurred words from a foul-smelling, yellow-toothed mouth, upon a cruel, scarred face.

Vyne didn’t recognize the man. Neither his current position as captain of *Maiden’s Prize* nor his former station as first mate afforded him any privileges or protections now that Blackskull was gone. Indeed, it made Vyne a target for those who couldn’t stand up to the man in life and thought the Saber a suitable alternative to assuage their pride.

Vyne drew a dagger from his belt and stuck it into the man’s belly, eliciting a startled grunt, then he followed with a sword thrust to the neck. Any other response and he’d not make it back to his ship, as any show of weakness attracted pirates like sharks to blood.

Within moments, two crews of hardened, intoxicated pirates drew daggers and rapiers, scimitars and cutlasses, and engaged in the time-honored tradition of a funereal melee. Among pirates, wakes were seldom solemn affairs, and the higher ranked the guest of honor the more raucous the event. And on the twilit shore of the Rock, the combatants took that ritual to heart.

As the old piratical aphorism went: It wasn’t a funeral unless you ended up with more dead than you started with.