

SERIAL: “THE ADVENTURES OF THE SKY PIRATE”

Episode One: “The Assassin of Patience Bay,” Part One

by Johne Cook

A shadow passed overhead as the two young men carrying baskets faced off against each other on the top of the hill high above a pristine South Seas island bay.

“I must pass,” said a tanned young man, his wavy black hair loosely tied with a cord at the nape of his neck. “You may as well step aside.”

“Hold on, Vennah! I do not yield the path,” said the other, whose formal mode of speech was somewhat diminished by his bare feet and untucked shirt.

The first copped as dramatic a pose as one can while carrying a basket. “I am older. Age goes before vitality.”

The second remained resolute. “Your creaking joints and snapping hips are no excuse to act the lout. Step aside yourself or face the wrath of my blade for your impudence!”

“You will rue the day...something something!”

“And likewise!”

As one, they threw their baskets to the ground, drew their weapons from rope tied at their waists, and saluted. They circled each other for a moment, and then the first leapt forward. They started slashing at each other, fighting back and forth over the little hilltop, showing more competence than you might expect for young men of their age.

The fight was proceeding vigorously when the second combatant drew up suddenly and stared past the shoulder of the other at the bay laid out before them. He started to point. “Hey, Flynn—look, we’ve OW!”

Halting his attack and joining his friend, Flynn said, “Sorry, Sandle,” and turned to look for himself where he was pointing. “The soaring bird?” he asked.

Sandle fixed Flynn with a droll look. “In the bay. Someone’s sailing in, and it looks like they’re alone! A stranger has come to Patience Bay!”

“Other than the packet ship that comes every six weeks, they’re *all* strangers who wind up here,” Flynn said, giving Sandle a good-natured elbow to the ribcage. He spied the greying man in a greying craft sail into the Abbey’s remote bay down below and watched the ragged little craft approach the dock.

“Doesn’t look like much of a boat,” commented Sandle, resting the stick he used as a sword lightly on one shoulder.

“What do you mean?” asked Flynn.

“What do you mean, ‘what do I mean’? The dingy sail, the weathered paint—I’ve seen better rowboats.”

Flynn took it all in, cupping his hands over his forehead to shield his eyes. “You just have to know what you’re looking for, my young friend,” he said.

“It looks pretty humble from here,” Sandle muttered, idly twirling his stick.

“It looks like *freedom* to me,” Flynn said, softly.

After tying up, the stranger climbed up on the dock, stretched, threw a rucksack over his shoulder, and started hiking up the gravel path toward the white stone buildings that comprised the Abbey proper.

“Come on,” said Flynn, clapping his friend on the shoulder. “The vintner will have our heads if we return empty-handed.”

They ‘sheathed’ their sticks, retrieved their baskets, and started walking toward the vines planted along the side of the hill, Flynn striding straight ahead and Sandle strolling behind.

Some time later, as they were picking grapes in the mid-afternoon sun, the visitor’s head poked above the horizon as he hiked up the rocky trail.

Sandle began to nod, but the moment passed and he pretended he’d dropped something in the soil. Flynn noticed the stranger’s piercing blue eyes flit over, sizing up the two as he strode toward them. Flynn frankly returned the stranger’s scrutiny without malice, without flinching.

“Welcome, stranger,” Flynn called. The stranger smiled, but Flynn pressed on. “Ven, what is your ship?”

“*The Lone Wolf*,” said the stranger, his voice clear, cultured, and firm, sounding more like he belonged in palace halls than on a backwater island. Then, sketching a quick salute, the stranger continued toward the buildings.

“You notice anything about the visitor?” Flynn asked Sandle, watching the man enter the Abbey’s courtyard.

“Other than he’s got a beggar’s boat?” said Sandle.

Flynn said “Something about that man’s bearing goes before him. His stature is different somehow. Almost...”

“Destitute?” suggested Sandle.

Flynn turned to his friend. “Regal,” he said. He then turned and looked at the courtyard. The Abbot trotted out of the building to receive the stranger, bowed deeply before the man, and then quickly ushered him into the cool of the shaded interior.

The eyes of a distant observer watched the watchers.

#

As they carried the fruits of their labor to the vintner's hut, Sandle said, "You've been awful quiet this afternoon. You can't be up to any good."

"Hm? Oh." Flynn smiled self-consciously. "Just thinking."

"That's never good," observed Sandle. "Let me guess—it's about the boat."

Flynn just grinned.

Sandle's eyebrows arched as an idea hit him. "Tell me that you're not concocting schemes to 'acquire' that boat and sail away somewhere."

Flynn resisted but broke out in a full-on smile.

Sandle's eyes narrowed. "But you know how much trouble you'd get in with the Abbot if you did, so you're already past the phase where you're considering that with any seriousness."

Flynn's smile became softer, an effect that seemed like an admission, if not a confession.

Sandle hitched his basket up. "Uh huh. And how many schemes did you consider before you thought better of it?"

"Just the three," he said, his eyes dancing.

Sandle placed a grape between his front teeth and popped it, squirting Flynn with the errant juice, prompting a good-natured shove from Flynn. "So you're sticking around for awhile, but that won't last forever. It's only a matter of time before you make your break and sail away from this rock at the ripe old age of, what, fifteen?"

Flynn chuckled but didn't confirm the statement. "Would you miss me if I left?"

Sandle snorted. "Hark, no! I'll get your bed and first shot at any girls who come here!"

Flynn laughed merrily, perhaps at the idea of girls visiting Patience Bay. Then, sobering slightly, Flynn said, "I bet *he* wouldn't miss me."

"The Abbot?" Sandle snickered. "That all depends on how difficult you are at evening meals!"

Flynn idly brushed at the grape seeds sticking to his chest. "I don't try to be difficult. I just can't explain how I'll be completely calm one moment and then he'll say something that will feel like a skewer sharpened and waiting just for me."

They were passing by the stone buildings. Instead of answering, Sandle just motioned with his stubby chin toward the topic of the conversation who was standing high on a balcony overlooking the courtyard. Seeing them look his way, the Abbot turned, clasped his hands behind his back, and strolled back through shadowed arches and into the Abbey.

The two young men exchanged a significant glance and kept walking toward the vintner's hut.

#

A second ship made port later the same day. The wiry little man with no personality accepted help tying up, and then stepped off his boat onto the dock, tipping the dockhand generously.

"Two in one day," said the dockhand. The little man smiled a smile that never reached his dead little eyes and was walking away from the dockhand when he heard, "Can't remember the last time we had two in one day."

The little man stopped, turned, and returned back to the dockhand. He said, "Is that right? Hey, look over here for a moment," and dropped a silvery cord in his right hand.

The dockhand drew close. "What is it?"

Moving faster than the eye could see, he wrapped the cord around the dockhand's neck and that was the last anyone heard from the dockhand.

It was twilight when the little man walked through the deserted huts toward the path up to the Abbey. He turned a corner and a young man with bare feet and a partially untucked shirt cruised past, bearing a fishing rod.

Sandle greeted him with a friendly wave. "Welcome, stranger!" He cruised past and spoke to himself, "Wow, two in one day." Then he turned the darkened corner.

The little man stopped and looked over his shoulder, a silvery cord dropping into his hand. He crept silently back to the corner to look around, but couldn't see where the young man went.

The little man waited for some time for some sign of where the other had gone, but there were any number of little huts around there. Finally, he started trotting quietly toward the Abbey, vanishing into the shadows of the jungle like a wraith. He moved like he thought he was unseen, unobserved by human eyes.

Half of that was true.

#

Flynn stopped by Sandle's room before dinner but he was nowhere to be found. His brows furrowed, and then he made his way to the great hall with its open curving arches at the front and three sides. The tables were set in the center with the master on an elevated dais that backed up to the kitchen on the other side of the West wall.

Flynn took his normal seat at one of the outlier tables. Sandle wasn't there, either. He was deep in thought when he noticed the Abbot wave for him to approach the master table.

He waited an insolent moment before pushing himself up from the table and presenting himself to the men seated at the master table up on the dais.

“This is the young man himself,” the Abbot said, a man of medium build and a deep, resonant voice.

“We’ve met,” said the stranger.

The Abbot continued. “Cooper Flynn, I’d like to introduce Tuy Meklanek, an old friend of mine just in from Borney Bay. He’ll be staying with us for a little while, a few weeks. I need to leave for a short trip and have asked Ven Meklanek if he would oversee your lessons in my absence.”

Flynn stood and crossed his arms. “Which is it,” he said, looking fiercely at the Abbot, “‘a little while,’ or ‘a few weeks?’”

A brittle silence settled over the table, but the newcomer’s quiet laugh broke the mood. “My dear Abbot, I see what you mean. This one has some spirit.”

Giving the Abbot a black look, Flynn strode forward, holding out his palm to the newcomer in greeting.

“Ven Meklanek, I am Cooper Flynn, at your service,” he said.

“Call me ‘Tuy’,” said the stranger as he rose to return the salutation. “It is a pleasure to meet any student of the Abbot’s.”

Meklanek kept the contact a moment longer than was usual, bringing Flynn’s attention back to him. “We start tomorrow afternoon,” noted Meklanek, and Flynn grudgingly nodded.

Flynn turned to go back to his seat. He missed seeing the Abbot mask a thoughtful grin behind his cup.

#

Flynn was awakened in the night by an urgent tug on his arm. He blinked in the light of a candle thrust far too close to his face. The flame stuttered eerily in the breeze from the open window.

“What is it,” rasped Flynn.

“Two in one day!” Sandle whispered loudly in his ear. “There is another ship come to harbor, and this one carried a great black bird of death!”

Flynn rolled over sleepily. “What are you saying? That the appearance of the... what was it again?”

“A great crow, or maybe a raven. It was really big, a Fowl Fatale!”

Flynn groaned. “You’ve been reading too many pulp tales from the mail ship.” Flynn sighed and tried rubbing sleep out of his eyes. “How big is ‘big?’” he said blearily.

Sandle paced around as he chattered, gesturing wildly with the candle, casting the craziest whirling shadows around the room. “When it hopped down from the cabin to the rail, it looked like its wingspan was better than six feet if it was an inch.”

Flynn looked impressed. “An albatross, then.”

Sandle stopped and whirled to face his friend. "A **black** albatross?"

Flynn yawned and lay his head back down. "It could be a big, black hummingbird for all I care. So tell me, what meaning do you read into the arrival of this winged harbinger?"

Sandle sighed dramatically and spoke in a sing-songy voice. "The great black bird is the manifestation of doom. That ship brings death of some sort."

Flynn cocked his head. "Like bad meatloaf?"

Sandle reached over and gripped Flynn's shoulder in his excitement. "Like an assassin perhaps, or even women!"

Flynn shot him a look, and then snorted. "Go back to bed, Sandle." With that, he rolled back over and pulled his thin pillow over his head.

"You'll see," said Sandle, pointing at Flynn. "Somebody's hours are marked, and I aim to be ready. I'm carrying a real sword until that bird leaves."

With his head buried under the pillow, Flynn waved his hand in dismissal. Sandle rolled his eyes, took his lamp, and his theories, and left.

Flynn lay in the dark for a few moments, and then pulled his head out from under the pillow. Looking carefully (and perhaps sheepishly) around the darkened room, he quietly got up and closed the window.

#

After a dawn breakfast, Flynn sparred with Sandle until he was taken aside by Thannon, the Weapons Master. They bantered while dueling, as was Thannon's custom.

Starting a classic Harki attack, Thannon said, "Did you get in some practice working out that inside corkscrew yesterday afternoon?"

Beating aside each attack, Flynn managed to say, "I was theoretically picking grapes...but we got in a couple of hours of sparring while waiting...for the visitor to make port and get up to the Abbey. Hah!"

"En garde!" yelled Thannon, and stamped his way towards Flynn, who parried and stepped out of the way. "Who was the stranger?"

"Weren't you at dinner?"

"I was looking for Feldt. He went missing yesterday late afternoon just before dinner."

Flynn ducked one swing and hopped over another before launching a counter, their practice sticks going click-click-click in the quiet of the early morning. "Some functionary from the distant mainland..." he said. "He's going to be conducting my afternoon lessons in the Abbot's absence."

Thannon darted in and tried to slap Flynn's stick out of his hands but Flynn's grip was unyielding. Flynn pushed him back and launched a fiery counterattack. "The Abbot's going away?" said Thannon. "Did he say where?"

"I was too relieved that I would be given a reprieve from the old wind-bag that I didn't...OW!" Flynn held his arm where Thannon had rapped it.

"There is a reason that form is 'proper'," observed Thannon sternly. "You are free to do whatever you can accomplish in this world, but I tell you that you ignore propriety at your peril." Thannon fixed Flynn with a significant look. "And by that, I mean respect for your elders as well as how you present a blade. The principle is the same in both cases."

Flynn's eyes flashed but he composed himself. "I apologize, Master Thannon. Sandle woke me during the night trying to tell me something about the arrival of another ship."

Thannon's eyes narrowed briefly, and then he gestured with his hand. "Proper form prevails in the face of carelessness or fatigue. That's why I ingrain it so early. Again!"

After a fiery exchange, Flynn managed to flick his stick inside and rap the Master's 'sword' out of his hand. Thannon smiled a humorless smile and came back in the next few exchanges to expose no fewer than four weaknesses in Flynn's form. Flynn held up his hand in surrender and half-bowed to the Weapons Master. After that, the remainder of the session proceeded along a more typical track.

They went back and forth for another half hour and then stopped for a mug of water in the mid-morning sun.

"You are progressing quickly," acknowledged Thannon. "Despite the Abbot's misgivings concerning you, you clearly have potential with a blade if you so desire. Have you given any further thought with regard to a trade?"

Flynn had a faraway look in his eyes. Then he blinked and looked at Thannon, who waited patiently. "Hm? No, I have no desires other than leaving this island."

"You don't like it here?"

"It's a pleasant enough prison, I guess," said Flynn as he gestured around at the island around them, "but I want to get out into the world and follow in the wake of my father. I have a feeling there is something unfinished about his death. Who knows? After that... Perhaps Ven Meklanek can suggest something when he instructs me this afternoon."

On hearing that name, Thannon's head snapped around, and his indolent focus suddenly came to bear entirely on Flynn.

"Is that who arrived on the sailboat yesterday?"

"The first one, yes," Flynn said, carefully.

Thannon looked at him for a long moment. "Time for lunch," the Weapons Master said abruptly, dismissing Flynn, who left Thannon deep in thought.

#

After a light lunch in the coolness of the great hall, Flynn made his way outside and up the stone stairs to the balcony and then down to the intimate library where the Abbot typically attempted training, one of many little havens of knowledge scattered around the Abbey. Flynn found Meklanek there, paging through dusty tomes.

Flynn rapped lightly on the doorjamb. "Ven Meklanek, I am here."

Meklanek turned around holding a leather-bound volume with parchment pages; light from the open window spilled across the page as he stroked his salt-and-pepper bearded chin.

"Tuy," he said, introducing himself again and gesturing toward a chair. "May I call you Cooper?"

Flynn stood his ground. "'Cooper' is a barrel-maker. Most people just call me 'Flynn.' Some here call me...other things."

Tuy laughed to himself. "Flynn it is, then." He replaced the book and then walked around the desk. "You know, I like books as well as any man and better than most, but what do you say we take this outside for now. Maybe you can show me a little of the island."

Flynn raised his eyebrows in boredom but sketched a courtesy bow and gestured toward the door.

#

They passed the vintner's hut and Flynn stopped long enough to grab a broad vegetation blade which he holstered at his waist. "Where do you want to go?"

Tuy walked to the rocky outcropping overlooking the jungle below, then turned and waved his hand negligently. "Around," he said.

Flynn snickered dryly. "That won't take long," he said.

Flynn led the way along the rocky, windswept hilltop, through orchards and small garden plots, finally clearing a path and leading the way down through lush hillsides.

Tuy asked, "So how did you come to live on this island?"

Flynn didn't answer, but Tuy waited patiently. They came to a shallow, fast-running stream. Flynn spoke over his shoulder, "The water here is clear and drinkable," proceeding to demonstrate the point. Tuy followed suit. "I've read it's because the volcanic substrata acts as a filter. Or, it could be because Cyl loves his people and cares for them. I've heard that, too." Flynn looked at Tuy to see his reaction, but the older man's expression was patient and neutral. "All I know is that this water is good," said Flynn, defensively.

Tuy said, "I noticed that the Abbey has an unusually extensive library of rare and esoteric books."

Flynn grunted and nodded, then hopped across the stream and started hacking at greenery again.

Keeping up, Tuy tried again. “Do you read any of them?”

Flynn stopped and wiped his brow with his arm. “I do,” he said. “It is one of the only things that keeps me here. I learned about them almost by accident. When I was a boy, I received frequent light whippings for what they called my ‘lack of faith’ and what I called ‘being a boy’—I hadn’t actually done anything wrong, just asked questions. Of course, those were the days when they whipped themselves for their own thoughts, and I just thought they liked to hit things. It didn’t do much for my opinion of almighty Cyl but it toughened me up. Then one day I deliberately stole something—mostly because I could—and wound up in the Abbot’s library. Half a dozen of them chased me into the room, but when the door finally opened, it was the Abbot who came in, and by himself. I’d picked the Jodkins out at random and was sitting reading it at his desk and in his chair when he came in. He walked slowly to the table and saw what I was doing and whom I was reading.

“‘Do you understand that?’, he’d asked. ‘I just started it,’ I replied, ‘but, yes, I understand it so far.’ He nodded once to himself. He looked at the desk where the item I’d stolen was resting. He gestured toward it. “Are you done with that?” I thought a moment, and then grunted. He picked it up, turned, and returned to the door. On the way out, he stopped and said, ‘If you ever have any questions about the Jodkins, feel free to ask me.’ I nodded, and he left again, closing the door behind him. The libraries became my sanctuary after that, and they never struck me again.”

Tuy smiled. “And do you understand the Jodkins now?”

Flynn turned and looked at him. “He’s very wise but is too impressed with his own wisdom. He would have been more impressive if he’d had it dictated instead of writing it in his own ornate hand, but I suppose that’s why the volume is so precious.”

Tuy said, “It was my great honor to spend time in the libraries in New Briton. I know of a Jodkins there where he did just that, and it is, by all accounts, a more accessible work, but I think you may have the more scholarly volume here, if my sources are accurate.”

Flynn looked at him. “If I’m ever there, I’ll be sure to look it up, not that I think it would answer my ultimate questions.”

“And those are?”

Flynn just smiled.

Flynn resumed his trek and hacked his way clear until they came to an established path heading gradually down the slope. They followed it in silence until they suddenly came out of the shadows of the trees and found themselves on a spectacular expanse of white sand and crystal blue water. The shoreline meandered sedately back to the left and right, revealing a broad, curving beach.

“Behold, the pristine beaches of Patience Bay!” he exclaimed, and then added, “not that the monks ever make it down here to enjoy them.”

They walked out onto the sand where Tuy removed his shoes and stockings, and they waded along in the shallows of the ocean. Flynn pointed out various fish in the shallow water, then removed his loose cotton shirt and ran toward the waves, diving headlong into the surf. He started swimming with ease out toward a tiny island a couple of hundred yards off shore.

Flynn was over halfway there when Tuy powered by him, startling him. Flynn put on a burst of speed, catching up, and kept a ferocious pace until they reached the island. They staggered ashore at the same time, dripping wet, and both started laughing. Tuy was a little winded, but recovered his breath quickly enough.

“You *are* full of surprises, aren’t you,” said Flynn, breathing heavily, and then he broke out into a grin.

Tuy said, “That’s to my advantage in my line of work,” and then mock-bowed.

“You’ll have to tell me what you do sometime,” said Flynn, thoughtfully.

Tuy just smiled.

#

On their way back, Flynn and Tuy walked through a courtyard through a flock of chickens. Flynn started running around, wielding his wood switch, and chasing the chickens hither and yon with great glee. Tuy leaned against a stone wall and watched Flynn running and ducking, dueling with the chickens.

Flynn rapped one solidly on the back, causing it to stumble and squawk. “Aha! You’re dead!” he said, face flushed and grinning.

Tuy coaxed the nervous bird over with feed and picked it up, stroking it to calm it.

“You think that killing is exciting business, eh?” said Tuy, casually.

Flynn struck a pose. “Only when necessary, of course, but a man must do what a man must do.”

Stroking the chicken in his lap and looking Flynn in the eye, Tuy twisted its neck, the thick, rubbery snap echoing in the courtyard. The chicken flopped over and shuddered. Flynn’s eyes went wide.

Tuy stood and gave it to Flynn, who dropped his switch in the transfer and held the twitching chicken in stiff, trembling hands.

“Killing is never glamorous,” said Tuy, softly, “even when it is necessary.” He picked up the switch and gave it to Flynn, who held it in one hand like it was alive. “Now, if you’ll take that bird to Cook, we can have chicken for dinner.” He clapped Flynn on the shoulder and left him there with a switch held awkwardly in one hand and a dead chicken still twitching in the other.

#

The following day, it was late afternoon when they made their way around the far east side of the little island and approached the docks.

“You must be a decent sailor to make it all the way here in that little boat,” commented Flynn as they walked.

“*The Lone Wolf*? It’s small, but very sea-worthy. It’s been in my family for the longest time. I’ve been on much grander ships of course, but never on any better.”

“My friend thought that it looked weathered. How did he put it? ‘I’ve seen better rowboats’.”

Tuy laughed. “There’s more to that little boat than meets the eye. It’s weathered because it’s ridden out many a swell, many a storm. And while it is, indeed, somewhat modest, it has one primary advantage over a rowboat.”

“What’s that?”

“No need for oars,” said Tuy, winking, and Flynn laughed.

As they approached the docks, Flynn started squinting at something there. “Well, I’ll be,” he muttered.

“What’s that?”

Flynn pointed. “My friend thought that another ship docked during the night the day after you arrived. He’s under the impression that it brought ‘blackest Death’ to the island as its passenger.”

Tuy took a moment before he answered. “Death is so busy that he doesn’t have time to wait on mere ships, but I’ve seen some that seemed to have closer relations with Death than others, that much is sure.”

Tuy grew quiet as they came up to it. It was another smallish ship capable of being piloted by one or two. It was much more ornate than Tuy’s, with polished wood, gleaming brass fixtures, and studiously furled sails.

Tuy turned to Flynn and casually said, “You’ve mentioned that you practice your swordsmanship in the mornings. Perhaps we can spar sometime.”

Flynn bowed, puzzled. “I’d be honored?” he said.

Tuy slapped his leg suddenly. “In that case, I’ll stop by my boat and retrieve my sword.”

Flynn furrowed for the barest moment, and then he nodded.

It was fully twilight by the time they climbed the long hill back up the Abbey. Flynn had sheathed his ever-present machete and picked up his sword from the armorer to show to Tuy. Tuy was carrying his sword in his left hand as they entered the modest front courtyard and skirted along the east side of the building towards the back of the buildings.

That’s when they heard Sandle yell and heard the clatter of a swordfight around the corner.

#

Tuy and Flynn looked at each other, drew their weapons, and ran to the battle.

Sandle was backed up against the far wall, barely parrying his opponent's fierce attack. Tuy roared something wordless and a wiry little man with dead eyes spun around. Something about him caused Tuy to take an involuntary step backward, and then he gritted his teeth and joined the attack. The swordsman backed up to assess the new threat.

The swordsman engaged the three of them. He seemed to ignore Flynn and Tuy and concentrated specifically on Sandle. Tuy stepped in front of Sandle and Flynn stepped nimbly to his side.

The swordsman tried two frontal attacks that were beaten back, and then took two running steps straight at them and Flynn fell back a step. The swordsman bounced and flipped right over their heads, landing gracefully behind them.

Sandle shrieked and wildly parried a wicked chest cut. The assailant rolled to his side as Tuy and Flynn whirled and assisted with Sandle's defense. Tuy roared again and together, the three of them advanced on the swordsman, pushing him back toward the corner.

The swordsman surprised them all, moving so fast that they could barely see, engaging all three in a virtuoso display of swordsmanship and sheer determination, pushing the three of them back by himself. While he was crossing swords with all three, his style was very unorthodox, using only defensive moves with Tuy and Flynn, but only offensive moves with Sandle. Between the three of them, they managed to parry the quick thrusts at Sandle, but the single-minded attacks toward him in particular were clearly unsettling Sandle, as evidenced by how he continued to inch backward.

The attacker lunged at Sandle, and Flynn and Tuy converged to beat him back, but Sandle retreated too fast and tripped over a flagstone, falling roughly on his seat. Seeing this opportunity, the swordsman tensed as if in preparation to pounce.

At that moment, another shadow appeared in the courtyard off to their right.

"It's him!" yelled Sandle from his seat on the ground. "It's the assassin, Master Thannon!"

At that, Thannon drew his sheathed sword out of his waistband and flicked the sheathe straight at the little killer. As fast as the projectile was, the killer was faster still, blocking it and sending it toward the three. Tuy and Flynn split to avoid it and then reformed in front of Sandle.

Thannon entered the courtyard without his normal banter, quietly engaging the killer with blistering speed. Thannon's sword danced in and out with three probing attacks and then he bounced right at the little man and ran him clean through, pinning him to the wall.

The killer's sword fell from his hand and he said one obscene, guttural word, the only word he ever spoke during the battle.

Thannon pressed him right back up to the wall and bent towards him, speaking to him in low tones. Then he suddenly stepped back and, with a flourish, plucked his sword free of the assassin's chest. Then the man with dead little eyes simply became a dead little man.

Weapons Master Thannon turned to the three and took in the scene. He wasn't slightly winded, in stark contrast to Tuy and Flynn, who were both gasping for breath. They turned to see to the welfare of Sandle, and saw that Sandle wasn't breathing at all, the sharp sword sheathe buried halfway through his throat.

Thannon finally spoke. "Perhaps somebody can tell me what's going on here," he said.

The Adventures of the Sky Pirate continues next month.

*Stay tuned for the conclusion of
"The Assassin of Patience Bay"*

JOHNE COOK

Johne Cook is a founder of Ray Gun Revival, and is a veteran author of online articles, reviews, and short stories. He was a 2004 winner of NaNoWriMo, the National Novel Writing Month.

Johne has tried his hand at any number of icky jobs but found his career in 2000 when he wasn't pretty enough to work as a Desk Clerk (true story). He is a Technical Writer and Help Author by day and creative writer / magazine editor by night.

Johne got his start reading space opera in his Dad's extensive collection of classic paperbacks. He traces his writing roots to Miss Kinane's fourth grade English class, where he learned he could capture people's imagination with the written word.

His penchant for writing about himself in the third person came much later.

In addition to reading, he also has a fascination for quirky movies, progressive rock, PC-based video games, and racquetball.

Johne lives in south-central Wisconsin with his (longsuffering) wife of 20 years and the rest of his quirky family. Johne blames Paul Christian Glenn for spurring his renewed interest in creative writing four summers ago, but that's another story.