

# Tudors

## WESTWARD HO! BY NIGEL BRYANT

- FX*                      *Sea in the distance. Insects. Close we hear Agnes Wood, a woman in her 20s, gasping as she wearily digs in sandy ground. Then she drops her spade.*
- AGNES                      That's it, sir. I can't dig no more.
- JOHN WHITE              We can't leave the bodies out to rot, Agnes. They're a threat to us all.
- AGNES                      It's not the bodies that spread the sickness - it's these mosquitoes plaguin' us day after day!
- JOHN WHITE              Work on Agnes - and trust in God for rescue.
- FX*                      *The digging resumes. Over this:*
- AGNES [V/O]              **Roanoke Island...America...in the year of our Lord fifteen hundred and eighty eight. My name's Agnes - Agnes Wood - and I'm burying bodies, working side by side with John White, governor of our colony. Not that it's much of a colony now. There ain't ten of us can barely walk or even stand now. If I'd known what I was comin' to, here in America, I'd 'ave never left London. If you could've seen me - a year ago - about to board the ship, breathin' the air of London one last time...**
- FX*                      *Sounds of busy dockside in the background as she remembers:*
- Oh, the excitement! Going to America! The New World!**
- JOHN WHITE              *[On the dockside in the past, addressing a cluster of prospective emigrants]*  
We're off to the new land of Virginia. And any who make this voyage will have five hundred acres -
- AGNES [V/O]              **That's John White again. Speaking at the dockside before we set off...**
- JOHN WHITE              - and it's rich land, wondrous fertile, where crops grow high as your head! We sail at high tide on Sunday!  
The Lord's Day!
- FX*                      *Cheers in the background*





- AGNES [V/O]** I couldn't wait! But then...let me tell you how the voyage went - how I come to be here in Roanoke, planting bodies...instead o' seed.
- FX* *Crossfade to the sound of sea and creaking timbers*
- AGNES [V/O]** We had forty-four days of it: forty-four days of billowing sails, creaking timbers, raging seas and heaving guts. But at last we reached the tropics...
- HOWE** Land ho!
- AGNES [V/O]** And some days later we were off the shore of Virginia. But there were sandbanks everywhere...as far as the eye could see...ready to run any ship aground...
- JOHN WHITE** Haul in the sails! Prepare to drop anchor!
- RATCLIFFE** But we're miles from shore!
- JOHN WHITE** We can go no closer, Master Ratcliffe.
- RATCLIFFE** Then why land here?
- JOHN WHITE** It's not far to Roanoke where the last settlers landed. We'll join them.
- RATCLIFFE** If they've managed to survive.
- FX* *Cut to the shore: waves breaking on the beach some way behind.*
- AGNES [V/O]** So into the rowing-boats we climbed, with everything we'd brought... and in the very place where some years before another group of settlers from England had put ashore. And when we landed...well...it wasn't quite the Eden I expected... Dense, dark woods, completely silent. As we head through the trees, I imagine pairs of watching eyes everywhere I look. I'm glad our men are all armed.
- JOHN WHITE** The settlers who came last year were battle-hardened soldiers. They knew how to build a fort, and had muskets and cannon. They'll have fought the savages off. They'll have survived.
- SHORTRIDGE** Then surely they'd've seen our sails - watched us land -
- RATCLIFFE** Aye, Master Shortridge! And come down to meet us, cheerin' and hollerin'! I ain't even seen no smoke: where d'you reckon they made their camp?



- HOWE Sir! Over here! Look here!
- JOHN WHITE What is it?
- AGNES [V/O] We all hurried over. And there on the ground, half covered with dust, were the bones of a man with a shattered skull.**
- HOWE Well it ain't no savage - they go naked, and that there's a scrap of English cloth.
- RATCLIFFE What d'you reckon? Reckon they were all massacred?
- AGNES Reckon we should get back on board and sail on!
- JOHN WHITE No! Not till we find some certain signs! March on!
- FX Sea distant as the sounds of forest grow more intense.*
- AGNES [V/O] We must've walked two miles, maybe three, and every step I'm expectin' painted faces of screamin' savages burstin' from the trees. Then suddenly:**
- SHORTRIDGE What's that?
- AGNES [V/O] At the edge of a clearing we saw...**
- RATCLIFFE A stockade! That's a stockade!
- SHORTRIDGE It'll be the fort they built!
- HOWE Come on!
- AGNES [V/O] But there was no-one there. The wall was broken in places and inside we found the houses all overgrown...**
- FX Chopping wood and hammering. Over this:*
- The next days were busy. Governor White had decided...**
- JOHN WHITE Every man and woman here shall be employed in the mending of these houses, and to make other new cottages for such as need.



- AGNES [V/O]**      **We worked well, and soon a right village was taking shape. But there were a lot o' mouths to feed, and we wouldn't have fresh food till our seed was sown and harvested, and that'd be many months. So we had to go and hunt for berries - and for shellfish...and that's when the first horror came. Governor White sent George Howe and me to catch crabs in the shallows just off shore...**
- JOHN WHITE      Bring back enough for a hearty feast! We need to raise some spirits!
- HOWE      Yes, sir!
- AGNES [V/O]**      **So we went down to where a river met the bay. George was a good man and went at it heart and soul.**
- HOWE      There are dozens here, Agnes - oysters, too!
- AGNES      I can't keep up!
- HOWE      Wait there in the shade, then - keep out of the sun. I'll have a ton in no time!
- AGNES [V/O]**      **I saw 'im pluckin' crabs and oysters from the mud. He had no weapon - only a small forked stick for catching crab. And suddenly 'e spun round like 'e'd 'eard something...an' I saw 'em jump out o' the reeds...**
- HOWE      No!
- AGNES [V/O]**      **Four savages, daubed in paint, heads shaved 'cept for a crest on top like cockerels, and their bows were up and takin' aim...**
- FX      *A shriek from Howe then chilling whoops.*
- I heard the arrows hitting 'im, an' I saw 'im fall back in the water...and they leapt on 'im with clubs...and knives. I sank down in the reeds and prayed they hadn't seen me.**
- AGNES      Let God arise, let all His enemies be scattered...
- FX      *A musket shot rings out, and there's a loud cry of:*
- RATCLIFFE      Savages!
- FX      *More shouts, and two more musket shots.*



**AGNES [V/O]**      **Praise God, John Ratcliffe and others of our party had chanced to come that way, hunting birds in the reed-beds, and they blasted their muskets at the savages and they fled away into the trees...**

*FX*                      *Crossfade to crackling campfire.*

**That night, after we'd buried poor George Howe, we gathered round a fire to decide what we should do. The men were all for hunting the savages down.**

**RATCLIFFE**              Those cursed heathens'll pay dearly!

**AGNES [V/O]**              **But Governor White wasn't so sure.**

**JOHN WHITE**              There's no hope for us unless we make peace with the natives here, and show them we mean no harm. If we start a war we'll live in fear for evermore.

**SHORTRIDGE**              It's they have started the battle!

**RATCLIFFE**              Aye!

**JOHN WHITE**              We may be dependent on them for food. We may need to trade.

**RATCLIFFE**              Trade? With murdering heathens?

**JOHN WHITE**              Our supplies will be exhausted long before our corn can grow.

**RATCLIFFE**              A supply ship'll come from England soon enough.

**JOHN WHITE**              You know that cannot be guaranteed.

**AGNES [V/O]**              **The argument wore on. Master Ratcliffe would not be satisfied without revenge, and he took a band of like-minded men and set off into the forest, armed and ready.**

*FX*                      *Shouts...muskets...confusion.*

**But only one of them - Shortridge - returned to tell the tale...**

**SHORTRIDGE**              Those savages...they're part of the woods themselves...they appeared from nowhere...slaughtered...everyone...



- AGNES [V/O]**      **After that we just wanted to sail away, sail back to England and be done with Virginia. But our ship had been wrecked while it lay at anchor, torn apart by a hurricane. So we built up the defences round our stockade and rationed such provisions as we had.**
- JOHN WHITE      Half a pint of barley boiled with water for each of us a day.
- AGNES [V/O]**      **But it wasn't long before we began to go hungry and fall sick...**
- FX      *Sounds of mosquitoes and digging. We're back with Agnes, digging graves as at the start.*
- That was ten days ago. And now here we are, diggin' graves. The sixth of August, John Ashby died of the bloody flux. On the ninth George Flower died of the swelling. I wonder who'll be next. Maybe me...**
- SHORTRIDGE      I'm so thirsty.
- AGNES [V/O]**      **Each day we send an armed band to fetch water from the river, but at high tide it's very salty and at low tide full of slime and filth - I fear it'll be the death of many.**
- SHORTRIDGE      Agnes! What're they?
- AGNES      Where? What's the matter?
- JOHN WHITE      There - look... Painted faces, in the trees...
- AGNES      Sweet Jesus...