



CASTLES

OF

STEEL

BY

NICK WRAY

A PLAY FOR RADIO SET AGAINST

THE BATTLE OF JUTLAND 1916

# CASTLES OF STEEL

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A 60-minute radio drama set against the Battle of Jutland, 1916

BY NICK WRAY

“One man can lose WW1 in an afternoon...  
...but which man is it?”

Part 2 of 5 (Scenes 8 – 14)

The full text of ‘Castles of Steel’ by Nick Wray is now available  
on Amazon in print and e-book. [Click here.](#)

More information at: [www.castlesofsteel.com](http://www.castlesofsteel.com)

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## Biography

Nick Wray is a freelance writer who also works on 'Futures' projects. Nick has written for the *Independent*, *Screen Digest* and *Viewfinder*, as well as other publications and media. Nick has an MA in Interactive Media from the Royal College of Art and his polemic on the digital world, *The Living Garden*, won the ICL-Fujitsu prize for innovation in media. Nick's short play 'Heart of Glass', about Google Glass, was recently shortlisted by the Finsbury Theatre, London 'Little Pieces of Gold' competition.

Nick is currently working on '[Lunch with Jason King](#)' - a collection of short stories & bedtime tales from the past, present & future of the Digital Age.

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## CAST & FANTASY CASTING SUGGESTIONS

Gunner Armstrong (middle aged) - **Bernard Hill/Jerome Flyn/Robson Green**

Vice-Admiral David Beatty – Jellicoe’s second in command (the cruiser fleet) – **Matthew MacFadyen/ Peter Firth/ Michael Fassbender/Anthony Hopkins/Christian Bale**

Winston Churchill – Voice talent/doubling

Jack Cornwell (16 year old boy gunner from Leyton) – Voice talent

Lily Cornwell – Jack’s mother – **Julie Walters**

John ‘Jacky’ Fisher (Ex-First Sea Lord and naval driving force of the Dreadnought) – **Ian Holm**

Lieutenant Grant – Jellicoe’s gunnery officer – **David Tennant/Ewan McGregor**

Admiral John Jellicoe – Commander in Chief of the British Grand Fleet (the Battleship fleet) – **Ralph Fiennes/Jeremy Irons/Colin Firth/Ben Kingsley**

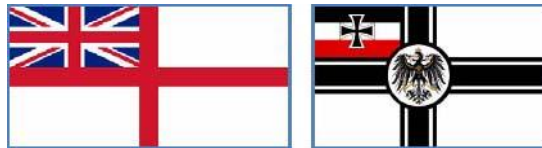
Lord Kitchener (Secretary of State for War) – Voice talent

Lieutenant Ralph Seymour (‘Flags’) – Beatty’s signal officer – **Kenneth Branagh/Rupert Everett**

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This work ‘Castles of Steel’, a play for radio, is a *fictional interpretation and re-telling* of the real events and characters in the contentious WW1 naval engagement of 1916 known as the Battle of Jutland, in which the British and German fleets met *en masse* for the first and only time during the course of the First World War...

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## Production notes

Lightest to heaviest ships have different acoustics to establish size:

*HMS Chester* (Jack) Lightest armoured scout: highest pitched engines, but harmonic.  
A happy ship.

*HMS Lion* (Beatty) a large cruiser: acoustic mid-range bass, but dissonant. HMS Lion's engines etc. always have a discordant quality (rising with the action)

*HMS Iron Duke* (Jellicoe) Largest battleship: deepest, most powerful, but also harmonic acoustic. Include theme of chess clock ticking (UNDER) each time scene opens

### “Der Tag!” Map of the Jutland/Skagerrak battle area

The ‘Jutland’ battle area (blue, below) where the British Fleets (commanded by Jellicoe & Beatty) Met the German Fleets (Hipper & Scheer) in 1916



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## SCENE 8.

EXT – HMS CHESTER. MEN ON DECK FOR SHIP’S PRAYERS.

FX HMS CHESTER STEAMING AT SEA.

VOICES: // The Power and the Glory, For Ever and Ever. Amen

FX CREW BREAK UP AND RETURN TO STATIONS CHATTING.  
SOUND OF WAVES BREAKING OVER SHIP.

JACK CORNWELL: What was the chaplain going on about, Gunner Armstrong?  
*‘Then they gathered the Kings together in the place they called  
Armageddon?’*

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: Talk about dumbing down, Jack. Don’t they teach you anything  
in schools, these day? *Revelations 16.16?* Good and evil? The  
final battle?

JACK CORNWELL: Like us versus the Kaiser?

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: Maybe

JACK CORNWELL: So, whose side is him up there on then?

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: We’ll find out, won’t we? If we ever get to fight! Back to your  
stations, lads.



FX SOUND OF BUCKET BEING KNOCKED

Watch out, Jack. We don't want you kicking the bucket, do we!

FX LAUGHS FROM GUN CREW

JACK CORNWELL: Why do we need buckets in a gun turret?

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: (LAUGHS) To piss in, Jack. We can't wander off to the heads in the middle of a battle now, can we?

JACK CORNWELL: And the one filled with sand?

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: Don't you worry about that.

JACK CORNWELL: Is it for fires?

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: No. Not fires.

JACK CORNWELL: What's it for then?

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: Blood, Jack. It's to soak up any blood.

FX BELLS RING, SHIP'S KLAXON. RUNNING FEET AS SAILORS MAN STATIONS.

V/O (DISTORTED OVER TANNOY) Gun crews. Man your stations.

JACK CORNWELL: (EXCITEDLY) What's happening Mr Armstrong?

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: Well I never. Action Stations! If you play your cards right you might even get to fire the gun, after all? And it's *Gunner* Armstrong, Jack!

FX SOUND OF GUN BREECH BEING CLOSED AND GUN TRAVERSED

## SCENE 9.

INT – BEATTY’S CABIN. HMS LION.

FX DISSONANT ENGINE SOUND OF HMS LION AT SEA. MIXED  
WITH GROANING SOUND OF SHIPS SINKING AND SEYMOUR’S  
APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS

BEATTY: (DREAMING) No, no, no! (WAKES) Seymour! It’s you.

SEYMOUR: Another dream, Commander Beatty?

BEATTY: Yes. Ships. Sinking all around me. Dozens of them.

SEYMOUR: It’s an Omen. A good one. Of what we’ll do to the Kaiser’s ducks. Here. The Steward’s cocoa. I’ve put your usual in it.

FX STIRS MUG

BEATTY: (DRINKS) That’s good. Anything?

SEYMOUR: Nothing much. Light cruiser. Um, *HMS Chester* signalled. She’s spotted a Danish fishing boat. Going to investigate. That’s about it.

BEATTY: Where are we?

SEYMOUR: West of Jutland. About 100 miles South East of our rendezvous with Jellicoe.

BEATTY: Any news of my wife before we left port?

SEYMOUR: (PAUSE) I'm sorry, Sir. I have been asking.

BEATTY: Discreetly I trust.

SEYMOUR: Of course.

BEATTY: If only she would return the favour sometime. (UNDER)  
Sometimes I feel I've paid a very heavy price for her millions.

SEYMOUR: Some letters arrived before we set sail. The postmark's a week old, but perhaps one's from her?

BEATTY: Only a week? Doesn't sound like one of hers.

FX BEATTY TAKES ENVELOP AND OPENS, UNFOLDING LETTER.

V/O (AS BEATTY'S BROTHER): "20th May 1916. My Dear David. Remember, when we were young? How we lived together, played together, and rode together. And resisted father together. What a great shame we can't fight together, now, too. We are "somewhere in France". I heard a new one doing the rounds today: 'the whole nine yards.' The length of the ammunition belt on a Vicker's machine gun. Nine yards: a third of a cricket pitch? And about as far as the front line has moved since I arrived in France. *C'est la vie?* Except there's not much life here. Trust the fleshpots of Edinburgh are keeping

you distracted, but try to leave a few mermaids for me, next time, will you?

FX FADE UP SOUNDS OF WHISTLES AND TRENCHES IN BACKGROUND AS THOUGH WE ARE THERE.

Here we go. The whistles are blowing. The moaning minnies are reigning down again. Must dash. Your loving brother Charles.” (FADE F/X)

BEATTY: (SURPRISED) Another one?

FX SOUND OF TELEGRAM BEING OPENED.

V/O (AS KITCHENER): “24th May 1916. Dear Sir. I regret to inform you that your brother, Charles Beatty, died of wounds on the 21st May 1916. On behalf of Lord Kitchener the War Office expresses sympathy.

SEYMOUR: Top up, Sir?

FX SOUND OF TEA POT CHINKING

Sir? Shall I be mother?

## SCENE 10.

INT – ADMIRALTY WAR ROOM WHITEHALL.

FX HUBBUB OF WAR ROOM. PHONES ETC

KITCHENER: So this is how a sea battle unfolds, is it? A wide blank map, miles of open sea in which to manoeuvre. On the Western Front battles are fought across a few hundred yards.

FISHER: See the markers being moved across the map, K?

KITCHENER: It's like that game, Battleships.

FISHER: Quite. On the left, Jellicoe's battleships steaming South East from the Orkneys towards Denmark. Beatty, his right hand, extending Eastwards, from Rosyth, to join hands in a powerful clasp //

CHURCHILL: //and crush the unsuspecting German *cruiser* fleet patrolling off the Danish coast.

FISHER: Off the Jutland peninsula.

KITCHENER: What if the Kaiser shows his full hand. If he brings out the big guns, his battleships, too?

FISHER: Then we'd be on a sticky wicket. But they, thankfully, are still in port.

KITCHENER: How can you be sure?

CHURCHILL: Intelligence. Room 40. Very hush, hush. We've broken the Kaiser's naval ciphers.

KITCHENER: You can see their cards?

FISHER: (DELIGHTED) Yes, Lord Kitchener. We can read the Kaiser's hand. All Beatty has to do is find Wilhelm's cruisers, call in Jellicoe //

KITCHENER: // and *his* battleships //

FISHER: Precisely!

KITCHENER/FISHER/: //and we'll rap the Kaiser's knuckles.

CHURCHILL: And it's running like clockwork.

FISHER: Isn't it! Full steam ahead!

## SCENE 11.

EXT – HMS LION CLIMBING GUNNERY LOOKOUT TOWER

FX SOUNDS OF GRANT CLIMBING METAL LADDER INTO RANGING TOWERS HIGH ABOVE DECK OF FAST MOVING, VIBRATING SHIP. WIND & RAIN.

GRANT: (COUGHING, STRAINING). ...97, 98, 99 (KNOCKS ON FLOOR HATCH. LOUDLY AGAINST WIND) Anyone home?

FX SOUND OF HEAVY ARMoured HATCH BEING OPENED. GRANT ENTERS LOOKOUT TOWER

INT: LOOKOUT TOWER

SEYMOUR: Lieutenant Grant?!

GRANT: Seymour, old boy! Permission to join the crow's nest?

SEYMOUR: Permission granted. Welcome aboard *HMS Lion*, Grant. Come and join our all-seeing eye. (ASIDE) Take the watch, men, would you? (NORMAL). Sorry about the rain.

GRANT: Rain? What rain, Seymour?

SEYMOUR: It's pouring!



GRANT: Call this rain? We call this dew in Scapa! (PAUSE) Not exactly a hive of activity down there on deck, is it?

SEYMOUR: Understated, we prefer to call it

FX SOUND OF SHIP PITCHING VIOLENTLY AND RAIN INCREASING.  
MEN IN LOOK-OUT TOWER CAUGHT UNAWARES.

GRANT: Ohhh! (SEYMOUR GRABS GRANT AS SHIP PITCHES)

SEYMOUR: Careful, Grant. Up here we're thrown about like peas in a pod, or crows in a nest, I suppose.

GRANT: They're getting soaked down there. So. Which one's Beatty?

SEYMOUR: Guess?

GRANT: Hand me your glasses. (PAUSE). Cap at an angle?

SEYMOUR: Direct hit with your first salvo. 'Jaunty' the press call it.

GRANT: Listing badly if you ask me. The Press?

SEYMOUR: Beatty's been entertaining all sorts of ghastly penny dreadful types. Don't you read the *Daily Mail*?

GRANT: Jellicoe gets the *Times*. The crossword, you know.

GRANT: Beatty's shorter than I thought he'd be.

SEYMOUR: Thin-skinned, too.

GRANT: Like your ship's armour?

SEYMOUR: What we lack in armour, we make up for in speed. And guns

GRANT: An egg-shell carrying a hammer?

SEYMOUR: I've heard that one before.

GRANT: So how *is* your gunnery?

SEYMOUR: Ah! That's why Jellicoe's sent you down to us!

GRANT: Bull's-eye.

SEYMOUR: Ruins the paintwork all that blasting away. Horrible! (SOUND OF MUTED LAUGHTER OF RECOGNITION FROM LOOK OUTS IN TOWER)

(PAUSE) Oh dear. That bad, is it? (NERVOUSLY ASIDE TO LOOK OUTS). Anything on the horizon?

WATCHMAN: Grey clouds and grey seas, Sir. (UNDER) Just miles and miles of bugger all.

GRANT: (QUIETLY) Jellicoe's got wind of your last gunnery exercise.

SEYMOUR: (QUIETLY) We didn't score many holes-in-one.

GRANT: (QUIETLY) You didn't score many holes-in-anything!

- SEYMOUR: (QUIETLY) Beatty's not going to like it. He has actually sunk a few of the Kaiser's ducks. Unlike Jellicoe.
- GRANT: (QUIETLY BUT IRKED) He may have game in his bag. But as you know better than most, Seymour, he's reckless. He nearly lost *Lion* and his other cruisers at Dogger Bank, last year. (HISSING ANGRILY) He had the chance to sink all the bloody German cruisers then. Not just *Blücher*. And here we are again, as a result. (QUIETER. APOLOGETICALLY) Sorry.
- SEYMOUR: (PAUSE) Beatty still blames all that on me. Smoke hid my signal flags to the other cruisers. Then a shell smashed the wireless and //
- GRANT: The heat of battle//
- SEYMOUR: //The smoke of battle. Scores of ships, burning coal and oil at full pelt. Hundreds of funnels. We couldn't, we just couldn't see a bloody thing! (BEAT) Look it's about to blow round on us (ALL START COUGHING)! When the wind's in the wrong direction, we *still* can't see anything.
- GRANT: The Fog of War?
- SEYMOUR: Anyway, we're only Jellicoe's cavalry. Even Beatty's learnt that he can't take them all on, on his own.
- GRANT: I hope so, Seymour. I really hope so.
- WATCHMAN: Storm clouds rising from the East.

SEYMOUR: Wind's changing. Smoke's clearing. Look outs. Keep your eyes peeled.

FX SHIPS KLAXON.

VOICES: 'Periscope off the starboard bow'

FX WARNING BELL RINGS IN LOOK OUT TOWER SOUNDS OF  
ACTIVITY

SEYMOUR: (BORED) There are no submarines out here. Look it's just another dolphin!

VOICES: (SIGHS OF DISAPPOINTMENT AND BOREDOM)

GRANT: But it gives your lives some porpoise? [SIC]

SEYMOUR: I've had crew shot for less, Lieutenant Grant. Now bugger off and leave us to hunt for snarks.

FX HATCH IN CROWS NEST OPENED. NOISE OF WIND & RAIN  
INCREASES. GRANT CLIMBS DOWN COUGHING

GRANT: (DESCENDING, COUGHING) Good luck spotting anything through all this.

SEYMOUR: (CALLING AFTER) And good luck telling Beatty what lousy shots we are!

## SCENE 12.

INT – BEATTY’S CABIN HMS LION. GRANT WAITING FOR BEATTY. BEATTY ENTERS

FX BACKGROUND DISONANT ENGINE NOISE OF HMS LION AT  
SEA.

BEATTY: Ah, um? //

GRANT: (STANDS) Grant, Sir.

BEATTY: Of course, of course. Apologies and all that. I was detained.  
Photographs. You know, for the war effort. You understand?

GRANT: I was just admiring the portrait, Sir.

BEATTY: Mine or Nelson’s? (LAUGHS)

GRANT: Admiral Jellicoe also asked me to give you these, Sir.

FX SOUND OF FOLDERS BEING HANDED OVER.

BEATTY: Not more bloody paperwork?

GRANT: (COUGHS AWKWARDLY) Admiral Jellicoe’s been working on  
some interesting new exercises and drills to deal with  
destroyer and U-boat attacks and//

BEATTY: Yes, yes, more of his 'opening moves'? Add them to that pile over there.

FX SOUND OF HEAVY FOLDER BEING PLACED DOWN

BEATTY: Not that one. The other one.

FX SOUND OF FOLDER BEING MOVED

I'll look at them later. If they don't sink us first. Cigarette, Grant?

GRANT: No, I don't, thank you, Sir. Ships magazines and all, in my line.

BEATTY: (IRRITATED) You won't mind if I do, I trust?

FX SOUND OF CIGARETTE BEING TAKEN FROM CASE AND LIT

GRANT: Beautiful case? Chinese? You and Admiral Jellicoe both served there didn't you?

BEATTY: Boxer Rebellion, yes. Left behind two of me bloody fingers. Look.

GRANT: Very Nelsonic, Sir.

BEATTY: Least the Chinkies won't be bothering us for another 100 years.

GRANT: Imagine our ships then!

BEATTY: I'd be more concerned thinking about next year, Grant. Mark my words: once we've thrashed the Hun, Asquith and his Liberal chums will be firing the torpedoes at the navy. Unless you fancy sailing a desk on half pay, you'll need to get blooded in this show.

GRANT: Yes Sir.

BEATTY: So. (BEAT). Jellicoe's sent you to try us? Do we pass muster, then? Lieutenant?

GRANT: With your permission, Sir, I'll inspect the ship's weapons.

BEATTY: Is that really necessary, Grant? I haven't offered you a drink?

GRANT: I'm acting under Admiral Jellicoe's orders, Sir.

BEATTY: But we're all at sea, now.

GRANT: Indeed, Sir.

BEATTY: (SUSPICIOUSLY) Are you laughing at me, Grant?

GRANT: No Sir.

BEATTY: (TEMPER FRAYING) Let me be clear, Grant. I did not ask for you to be posted as Gunnery Officer. You have, to be blunt, been foisted on me by Jellicoe.



GRANT: Admiral Jellicoe told me, Sir.

BEATTY: So we understand each other.

GRANT: Sir. Then with your permission, may I check the guns?

BEATTY: (BEAT) Very well, but don't rock the boat!

GRANT: (COUGHS AWKWARDLY) If that's all, Sir?

FX SOUND OF GRANT PREPARING TO LEAVE, DOOR OPENS.

BEATTY: (ANGRILY) Did I give you permission to leave?

GRANT: (STIFFLY, STANDS TO ATTENTION) No, Sir

BEATTY: (PAUSE) Just remember, Grant, who's in charge.

GRANT: Yes, Sir

BEATTY: Now, you may go.

FX SOUND OF GRANT LEAVING CABIN, DOOR OPENS AND  
CLOSES.

## SCENE 13.

EXT – HMS CHESTER. FORWARD OPEN GUN TURRET.

FX SOUND OF SHIP AT SEA. WAVES CRASHING

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: Whoah! (SINGS) ‘A life on the ocean waves, a home on the rolling deep’, (NORMAL) eh, Jack?

JACK CORNWELL: I’ve never seen a proper broadside.

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: Careful what you wish for, Jack. Powerful things, them guns. The Chaplain got his cassock ripped off from the blast during target practice other day. Bollock naked on the quarter deck he was! Finished the Lord’s Prayer, mind you! (LAUGHS)

JACK CORNWELL: (SOAKED BY WAVE) Wha! Is it always like this?

FX SOUND WAVE CRASHING ON DECK

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: Think this is bad? Wait till we’re going full-pelt. Flying at 30 knots into a Sou’wester. The only thing you’ll be able to see above the waves and the smoke will be the top of those funnels glowing red hot. 90-foot flames leaping out. It’ll be like Dante’s Inferno.

JACK CORNWELL: (COUGHS) How are we going to hit Fritz, then?

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: We ain’t.

JACK CORNWELL: But, see here. My ciggie cards says a one of Beatty's cruisers can lob a half-ton shell seven miles!

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: Seven miles! (LAUGHS) A shell from seven miles will take, what? Half-a-minute to reach its target, Jack. Reckon the sauerkrauts will oblige us by dropping anchor and hanging around in that time? Just to help us out with our target practice, like? If we can even see 'em in the first place. And that's Beatty's big guns. How far do you reckon our little cannon can reach?

JACK CORNWELL: Far enough!

GUNNER ARMSTRONG: (LAUGHS) Watch out Kaiser Bill. Young Jack's got his sights set on you.

FX (FADE UP) ENGINES HUMMING STRONGLY. BACKGROUND  
NOISE OF SHIP AT SEA. SEA SPRAY HITTING ENCLOSED BRIDGE  
(FADE DOWN)

## SCENE 14.

INT – BEATTY’S CABIN HMS LION.

FX ENGINES HUMMING STRONGLY. BACKGROUND NOISE OF  
SHIP AT SEA. GRANT KNOCKS AND ENTERS

BEATTY: Grant? I thought we were done?

GRANT: No Sir.

BEATTY: I beg your pardon?

GRANT: I’m not willing to take command of the ship’s weapons systems, Sir. Cordite rounds are being stacked *inside* all *Lion’s* gun turrets.

BEATTY: Yes. To speed up our rate of fire.

GRANT: The flash screens between your ship’s guns and the magazines have been stripped away, too.

BEATTY: Fire-walls slow our shooting.

GRANT: (INCREDULOUSLY) You knew about it!?

BEATTY: Of course. I’ve ordered all the cruisers to strip down to basics. You’re a gunnery man. Hit first. Hit hard. And keep on hitting!

- GRANT: It's madness. One spark, one turret hit, and there's a trail of gunpowder all the way down to the ships' magazines. There are over 1,000 men on every cruiser. It's suicidal.
- BEATTY: Suicidal? What's suicidal is letting the Germans strike us first! What's suicidal, Grant, is sitting around doing nothing! You've been rusting with your battleships for too long. Our job, Grant, is to go in fast, go in hard and kill the Hun!
- GRANT: Is it? Sir. We won't win the war, by losing cruisers. That's just what the Germans want. To blind us, then to whittle us down, until they can come out and meet us on even numbers.
- BEATTY: How dare you lecture me! I am your senior officer.
- GRANT: And we both report to Admiral Jellicoe. Sir! Either the firewalls are put back, on all your ships, or I will have to radio Jellicoe that the Cruiser squadron is unfit for combat. Sir!
- BEATTY: Oh will you? And break radio silence? There isn't time for all this! We're on the hunt. There's a chance to catch a few of their cruisers with their pants down.
- GRANT: Sir! It's my duty //
- BEATTY: Duty, duty? What skin have you really in this game, Grant?
- GRANT: (STARTS TO SPEAK THEN CUT OFF)

BEATTY:                               Enough! Very well. But if you slow down our gunnery by God  
I'll see you burn in hell. Now go!

FX                                       SOUND OF GRANT LEAVING CABIN, DOOR OPENS AND  
CLOSES. FADE UP DISSONANT SOUND OF HMS LION'S  
ENGINES ETC.

\*

The full text of 'Castles of Steel' by Nick Wray is now available  
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