



THE INVICTUS CHRONICLES

A SHORT STORY COLLECTION BY
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The Earth is crippled.

The governments have fallen.

The ocean is our only refuge.

We are the generation to make a difference.

As the world around us falls into despair,

We have begun a quest to find a new life on the horizon.

We pledge together to fight the fight for freedom,

To serve under our captain,

And to never abandon hope.

We are a band of brothers.

We are the crew of *Invictus*

CHAPTER ONE
TROUBLE IN CAPE TOWN



It was the Great War in the Middle East that had crippled the United States before it's eventual downfall in the year 2060. The world was in chaos as anti-war protestors formed the United Peace Movement that banned together in San Diego, California. It was a bitter scene on the West Coast, similar to the conflict of Vietnam nearly one hundred years before.

Yet as terror covered the North American continent, it was the European world that proved to be in greater disaster. The Middle East had turned into a nuclear wasteland, and American forces in the region retreated to the countries of Spain, France, and Italy. But it was a runaway naval commander named Davidson who fled to Greece where he met up with his family, made up of his wife and his two sons, Gabriel, the eldest, and a toddler named Michael.

Soon thereafter, American bombs hit the country killing Davidson and his wife. The two boys however, managed to escape aboard their father's forty-foot ship, named *Invictus*. She was an aged racing ship from the 1970s, and had been Davidson's pride and joy. She was from Naples, Italy, and belonged to a wealthy Italian family before Davidson took his prize in a high stakes poker game. The boys barely escaped into the Mediterranean aboard the vessel and started heading south to avoid any of the consequences of the nuclear bomb fall. Their journeys proved to be some of the most remarkable and adventurous excursions that had ever occurred on the high seas, and that is where the adventure begins...

The ship rocked to a slow rhythm as the waves washed up against the worn hull. It was sunrise aboard *Invictus*, the beautifully crafted sailing ship. Gabriel, eldest son of Commander Lawrence Davidson, now commandeered the vessel at the ripe age of 18. He was a strong boy, but easily intimidated by the laws of the sea. He prayed that he would one day outgrow that, and be more like his commanding father.

Michael, only eight years of age, sat at the front of the boat; his legs dangling over the side.

Gabriel muttered, "Keep them on this side of the rail, kid."

The boy quickly turned to Gabriel, as if he had been caught, and pulled his legs from the side of the boat. Gabriel shook his head, now getting tired of reminding the boy. Gabriel had heard stories from his father about the predators in this part of the sea. Once the bomb had been dropped off the Northern waters of the Pacific, the marine life had migrated east, apparently realizing the nuclear reactions to the water off the American coast. Sharks themselves had infiltrated these waters, and Davidson, the elder, had talked of how men had been pulled under while sitting on the sides of their boats.

Gabriel remembered those stories, the ones that told of life or death on the high seas.

"Are these parts dangerous too?" the little boy spat out.

"All parts are dangerous, Michael. No place is safe anymore."

The *Invictus* hit a wave, and the boy grabbed a hold of the railing. He looked back at Gabriel, to see if he had noticed.

"I told ya'." Gabriel raised an eyebrow.

The little boy felt embarrassed.

"Come back here," Gabriel requested.

The child looked down, as he crawled back towards the cockpit.

“Stay back on this part of the boat until I say it’s safe.” Gabriel leapt to his feet and headed down below towards the communications center. An aging pair of binoculars dangled on a shelf, and he quickly retrieved them; heading back up on deck.

Michael held on to the tiller, as Gabriel managed to climb up on deck despite the swells. Once he garnered his footing, he held up the binoculars to his eyes and scanned the passing horizon. His eyes settled on a swell in the distance where a dark grey shape had just darted by. Gabriel’s hair rose on the back of his neck.

The tip of the African continent had been known to be the only place on the planet where the Great White Shark had been known to breach. The creatures would lift out of the water and flop back onto the surface sending an explosion of surf into the air. Gabriel had never witnessed this occurrence before in real life. Until now.

“Whoa!” Michael exclaimed as the Great White shot into the air. “Was that a shark?”

“It was a Great White, Michael. You see why I told you to keep your legs in the boat?”

The boy was silent.

And then the boat made a loud cracking noise and Gabriel realized that they had just hit something.

Or perhaps, something had hit them. He looked to the port side of the ship and noticed a large dorsal fin passing them. It was another great white; this one almost twenty feet long. The creature leaned over onto its right side, allowing Gabriel to view the mass of the body. The thing could easily have sunk the ship if it had hit just right. Michael turned around to see it, and then he shouted at the top of his lungs. He ran below deck and quickly returned, holding an aging harpoon.

“It’s already gone, kid.” Gabriel turned back to the tiller.

“Have you ever seen one that big before?” the boy quickly asked.

“No,” Gabriel gulped. “No, I haven’t.”

It was near nightfall when *Invictus* arrived offshore of what had once been the populous city of Cape Town. Fifty years ago, the city had been the third largest populated city in all of South Africa and had been named a prime tourist attraction in all of the entire African continent. But today, the city had been ravaged by warfare and a civil uprising that had claimed some 600,000 lives due to chemical warfare. The city was now a resting place for refugees before they found some way to escape to a better life. They often didn’t.

The city had been plagued with a tremendous amount of biological waste meaning that their water was no longer safe to drink. Food was a scarcity, and only the social elite and those wealthy enough were able to survive. For a moment, Gabriel even wondered why they were here. And then he remembered.

From six miles off its coast, the town looked frightening with it’s huge fires lit for nighttime commuters. Large spotlights scanned the nearby mountains for insurgents

who might attack under the cover of nightfall, although none were expected for this week.

Gabriel let go of the main line as the sail fully expanded, harnessing the wind from the west allowing *Invictus* to make it's way into port.

The war-torn city hardly gave the lone ship a warm welcome upon its arrival. *Invictus* entered the shipping lane to discover a huge freighter weighted on its side that had sunk in the harbor. It was a forgotten American freighter; it's contents long since cascaded over the side and into the bay, forming a young coral reef still in its infancy. Gabriel pulled *Invictus* far away from the ship, not knowing how much danger lurked below, and then they made their way into a little channel where the sounds of distant gunshots echoed out onto the water. Michael seemed frightened by this, logically so, and made his way below deck. *Invictus* slowly drifted towards an available slip, as Gabriel scanned the local docks for any trouble. He looked below to his brother.

"You want to stay here?" he asked.

Michael reluctantly responded, "How long will you be?"

"I don't know. Not too long."

"I'll wait."

"Then close up this hatch, okay? And you know what to do if someone else comes onboard."

Michael looked at a cabinet on the wall and then turned back to Gabriel and nodded.

"Good, I'll be back soon."

Gabriel made his way onto the dock that was solely lit by torches. It reeked of garbage and rotting fish, and then he realized why. Countless larger fishing vessels and garbage ships were docked down the way, each aching for fuel to allow them to empty their cargo. But these ships would never reach their destination. Oil was scarce now, and these sailors could not afford energy for their ships let alone themselves. These ships would stay here and rot, along with their cargo.

A tall, cloaked man made his way up to Gabriel. The dockmaster, Gabriel assumed.

"And whatcha' be doin' in Cape Town, aye?" The darkly clothed figure asked.

"I've come for fuel and food." Gabriel responded dryly.

The dockmaster laughed at this and then turned serious, "There's nonna' that ere', mate. You best turn back around and sail outta port 'for they tax yer' ship."

"I'll do my best to see what your town has to offer. If you'll excuse me."

The dockmaster peeked out from under his cape and revealed a wrinkling face that lacked any teeth. Gabriel attempted to hide his face of disgust and then past the aging man who immediately hid his face under his dark cloak. Gabriel advanced up the gangplank and up onto the city streets of Cape Town.

The waterfront at Cape Town was alive and well, while the rest of the city slowly burned away in the wake of warfare. Dimly lit bars still operated during the night, and an occasional inn still had vacancy as advertised on makeshift cardboard signs. There were a few storefronts that now simply sold nautical ware and appliances, and Gabriel quickly made his entrance into one. The store smelled of copper and gasoline, and then Gabriel realized why. Two heavysset middle-aged men sat in the

corner hovering over a small makeshift table. Their game of cards had been interrupted by Gabriel's entrance. They exchanged looks as Gabriel slowly made his way to a counter that had, at one point, been a register. Gabriel assessed the room and noticed several well built men now entering from the rear, each one sporting unique tattoos over their faces. For a moment, Gabriel had wished he had never set foot on the dock in the first place.

"Hey there." He attempted.

"Hey yourself, mate." The larger of the two men nodded back. "What do you need?"

"How much you two charging for fuel in these parts?" Gabriel was hesitant.

"100 per case, boy. That's union credits that you don't got."

"I'm sorry, you said I don't have?"

The other man turned to him, "That's what he said boy, so get lost."

"Lemme take two cases." Gabriel held his head high.

The two men slowly turned to him. The others in the back were now intrigued.

"You got that kind of money?" the smaller one squinted in the hazy lamplight.

"I said, gimme the two cases."

The two men stood up, "Show us the credits first, kid."

Gabriel shook his head back and forth, "Shouldn't you trust your customer?"

"Not in these parts of the world, boy." The larger one shot out.

"Sounds like good advice." Gabriel rested his right hand on his large belt, exposing the handle to a large hand-cannon harnessed to a holster.

"Shit, boy. You can handle that thing?"

"It can punch a hole through your fat gut, my friend. Now gimme the damn fuel and I'll give you these credits."

The skinnier one quickly made his way behind the counter and revealed two large canisters of gasoline. He set them down in front of Gabriel who quickly opened them and smelled the inside.

"Okay, now the fuel." Gabriel commanded. "Don't try to pull something over on me."

The skinnier one turned to the larger one who nodded.

The man came around the corner again and set another two canisters down in front of Gabriel. He did the same with these two, and when they smelled of gasoline he nodded in approval.

He opened his jacket pocket and revealed a plastic device, only a few inches long.

"Do you guys have a computer?"

The fat guy grinned, "This building's been without electricity for the past three years, kid. No, it don't got a computer."

Gabriel rolled his eyes, "Do you take cash?"

The two men chuckled and nodded, while Gabriel revealed 200 Union Credits from a zippered pouch. He threw them onto the counter, "And now the name of a good bar."

"You're a little too young to be drinking here, kid."

"I thought the drinking age was abolished? Just like your government?"

The two men's faces turned to a look of disgust as Gabriel grabbed the two canisters of fuel and made his way out into the dark street.

Gabriel made his way down a different alleyway after he had returned to the *Invictus* to check on his brother and refuel the ship. This alleyway was much more alive than the other part of town he had visited. Gabriel wasn't sure what he was doing, he just wanted to stretch his sea legs before departing on God knows how long of a voyage. In fact, he had no idea where he would be heading yet, and that frightened him a little.

He turned a street corner that kept leading him away from the waterfront as he noticed more civilians out in the streets. Two young girls stood entertaining a crowd of easy to please sailors, and that was attracting a lot of mayhem, but it was something else that proved to seize his interest. Gabriel heard barking from down the street as a lone dog made it's way around the corner; it's light hair smudged with dirt and grime.

Gabriel hadn't seen a dog in years.

The poor thing was running so quickly and then Gabriel noticed three or four small children chasing after it. They each were carrying small wooden sticks and one wielded a large knife.

Gabriel turned to an aging bum on the side of the street, "What was that about?"

"Can you blame 'em? They're hungry."

Gabriel grimaced, "The kids were hungry?"

The bum grumbled, "Sure, those kids depend on killin' that thing in order for them to eat tonight."

Gabriel backed up from the bum and quickly made his way into the nearest tavern.

Gabriel entered The CorkWedge, an aging tavern that seemed to be stealing all the business from all the local establishments. He was instantly engulfed in clouds of smoke, mostly marijuana and tobacco that burnt his eyes to the point of near tears. He made his way to the counter after being tugged on by two very exposed young hookers, each one fighting to be his for the evening. Gabriel just kept walking to the bar, where he sat down next to a young man about his age.

The two hookers shrugged him off and then played their act to another man who entered the establishment. Gabriel meanwhile turned to the barkeep, who was making his way over. The balding man gave a wide smile at Gabriel.

"Hiya, kid. What will it be?"

"Whatever you have, I'll take it."

"Not much, just some recycled motor oil and a shot of Irish whiskey."

"He's not kidding you either," the guy next to him slurred to Gabriel.

Gabriel turned to him, and then back to the barkeep, "Make it so."

The barkeep nodded and went back to the cabinet.

Gabriel kept quiet for a minute and then turned back to the guy on the stool next to his.

His hair was disheveled and his face looked baked from the sun. The young man turned to Gabriel.

"A nice move back there," he could barely get the words out.

Gabriel grinned, "Excuse me?"

"She practically took all my money, that brunette. I blacked out before she was done... I think, I can't remember..."

Gabriel nodded and turned to his drink that had just arrived.
“She’s a hooker.” The drunk guy stated, dryly.
“No joke, bud. She’s not wearing anything. You sound like an American.”
“I’m a drunk American.” He emphasized his current status.
Gabriel grinned, “Again, stating the obvious. You a sailor?”
The guy chuckled, “Me? A sailor? I hate the water. I fly. Or, flew. Once that all went down with the airplanes not being able to go anywhere, all of us from out of the country were kinda’ stuck, ya’ know?”
Gabriel seemed interested, “I know. I was one of ‘em. What are you doing in Cape Town?”
“Partying...” The drunk guy went back to his drink, finishing it off.
Gabriel laughed, “I can see that, my friend.”
The man turned back to him, “I’ve been looking for a transport back to the states, if I ever I could find someone with the abilities.”
Gabriel started to think, “As luck would have it, that’s what I do.”
The drunkard was now intrigued, “Oh yeah? You skipperin’ a boat?”
“My own. I think we’re taking her back to the states... or what’s left of them.”
“Yeah, that’s the thing, mate. What’s left to go back to, ya know? The whole country bombed to hell. Maybe it’s a good thing I was studying over here, ya know?”
Gabriel raised an eyebrow, “You were studying?”
The drunk guy grimaced, “I was in college. I dropped out first semester of my first year and I’ve been messin’ around here all this time.”
Gabriel nodded, “Well, if you hate the water then I don’t think this is for you.”
The guy turned back to him, “It would get me out of Cape Town, right?”
Gabriel nodded, taking his shot.
He sat down the empty glass, “That it would.”
“Then I’m all for it. I think I can manage.”
Gabriel smiled, “You got money?”
“I still have my tuition from my second year. That’s about 24,000 union credits. How far will that get me?”
Gabriel raised an eyebrow, “Probably to Australia and back... a couple times.”
The other guy nodded, “Good. Let’s get the hell outta here. What’s yer name, friend?”
“They call me, Gabriel. And you?”
The drunk got up from the barstool, “They call me Jonathan. Whoever ‘they’ is.”

Jonathan leaned up against Gabriel as he managed to stumble down the gangplank.
Gabriel then started to shout for his brother, “Michael!”
Jonathan frowned, “No yelling, please. Mind the inebriated.”
From the *Invictus*, a few slips over, the wooden entryway slowly slid open as Michael revealed his face lit by a large flashlight.
Gabriel shouted, “Start up that engine, kid. We’re heading out of here.”
Michael eagerly responded, “Yessir!”
Jonathan assessed the situation, “You got a toddler for your cabin boy?”
“He’s my brother. And I trust him very much.”
Jonathan smiled, “Then I guess I have to, too.”

As they slowly made their way onto the deck of *Invictus*, not one of them had become aware of a large mob of roughnecks who had started to make their way down the gangplank. Led by the two large shop owners that Gabriel had nearly threatened earlier in the evening, the mob made their way down onto the dock.

The larger one, called Kraxus, raised a large blade in the torchlight, "That's it gents. That's the one who came in to my place."

Invictus had slowly started backing out into the bay, as Gabriel became suddenly aware of the

lurking mass of people on the dock.

It was at this point that the aging dockmaster appeared from under his weather-torn hut near the end of the dock, to assess the situation.

"What's all this, about, eh?" he shouted in a high voice from under his cloak.

Kraxus shouted down to him, "That ship didn't pay a docking tax, did it?"

The dockmaster shook his head, "They were only here but for a few hours. No ship is required - "

But he was abruptly cut off as Kraxus dropped his blade down onto the dockmaster's head spilling warm blood down onto the dock.

It happened so fast that Gabriel was still able to see it as the ship sailed out into the middle of the bay. Kraxus meanwhile motioned to his crew of thugs, "To the boats, boys. That ship has a very wealthy captain."

The *Invictus* sped away from the site as Jonathan now hurled the undigested contents of his stomach over the side of the boat.

Gabriel smirked, "I think that really was motor oil."

Jonathan nodded, "Yeah. I think it was."

Gabriel turned back around to the stern of the ship to see two small speedboats make their way out into *Invictus*'s small wake.

"I have a bad feeling about this," Gabriel stated under his breath.

Jonathan turned back to them, "They're following us, you think?"

"I don't know. Michael, go wait in the front cabin and wait for me to tell you to come out."

The little boy followed suit as *Invictus* rounded another set of docks.

Gabriel couldn't help but notice the dog he had seen earlier out on the edge of the dock, as if waiting for a boat to come by.

The creature barked at Gabriel who looked over as they passed. He then looked back at the two oncoming ships that approached from behind. He swiveled the tiller as *Invictus* turned hard starboard towards the dock. The dog continued to bark as Gabriel whistled loudly. The dog yelped and then, once the ship was close enough, leapt onto the deck. *Invictus*' hull smacked hard against the dock and then bounced back into the open water.

The dog turned back to face the dock where three or four young children ran down, just in time to notice the starving creature now sitting on the deck of the ship.

Gabriel, meanwhile turned back to the oncoming speedboats as one took to *Invictus*'s starboard and the other, its port.

"We've got some company." Gabriel muttered. The dog whimpered on deck, now perplexed by the loudness of the two speedboat's engines on either side of the ship.

The boat on the right banked hard to port and came up right alongside *Invictus*'s starboard side. Kraxus, the fat slob, now stood as if waiting to board *Invictus*. Gabriel held the hand-canon low and raised his head, "Something I can do for you?" Kraxus laughed out loud, "It seems the dockmaster forgot to collect your docking tax so we thought we might best be taking that." Gabriel shouted over from *Invictus*, "I'm afraid you need to brush up on your local laws. Times have changed since the bomb dropped here, my friend. I already gave you what I owed you for the fuel. I'm not giving you anything more." Kraxus smiled, "We thought you'd be saying that." He held up a large pistol and shot it onto the deck of *Invictus*. The dog jumped and quickly made it's way to the other side of the ship. Gabriel stared at the smoking hole in the hull. "You'll be wishing you hadn't done that." Gabriel grimaced. Kraxus smiled, "Oh yeah? Why's that?" Without hesitation, a barrage of machinegun fire erupted from the left side of *Invictus*, sending the port side speedboat up in flames. Gabriel was blown to his feet as Kraxus' speedboat veered right. The explosion echoed through the harbor as Gabriel looked up to see Jonathan's upper body protruding from the hatch of the main cabin. He was holding a smoldering machine gun. Jonathan shook his head, "Imagine what I'd be doing if I was sober." Gabriel smiled, "You did fine, now watch out for this other one!"

Kraxus' speedboat made it's way around the bow of *Invictus*' firing several large weapons near the *Invictus*. Gabriel knew they wouldn't fire directly onto the ship, since they clearly had made this effort to take their valuables as a prize. Another shot rang out, slicing through their sail. Jonathan quipped, "They want to kill us?" Gabriel nodded, coming below deck with the dog, "They didn't hesitate with that dock master. I think they just want our stuff. They know we're carrying some large amounts of money. Have you come in contact with that guy before?" Jonathan looked up, "Kraxus? That big fat guy?" Gabriel nodded. Jonathan waited, "He's got a couple girls around town." Gabriel was quick, "Was does that mean, Jonathan?" "It means he has a couple of girls around town, and I know them all extremely well." Gabriel frowned and went to a cabinet near the main cabin of the ship. Jonathan followed suit, "What's in there?" The cabinet opened to reveal several unique contraptions, the most intriguing being a large flamethrower. Jonathan raised his eyebrows, "You serious?" Gabriel shrugged, "I've never used half this stuff before in my life." Jonathan nodded, "Now seems like a good time to start." *Invictus* swung far to port while Kraxus' speedboat came up along the stern of the ship. Two armed thugs stood at the bow waiting to board. Gabriel hoped they wouldn't get an opportunity.

But it was too late, the men jumped aboard withdrawing two large blades, but not before flames burst out of *Invictus*' cabin onto the deck, sending the two men over the side of the boat. Jonathan and Gabriel jumped to the deck firing the weapon again towards the speedboat. The two boats collided, bumping two additional crewmembers over the side into the water. Kraxus raised his pistol and fired into the *Invictus*' cockpit, missing both Jonathan and Gabriel. The two young men quickly leapt to *Invictus*' port shooting flames towards the speedboat's hull. It quickly caught ablaze.

Kraxus jumped from his now abandoned vessel as the *Invictus* made it's way out of the channel and into open water. The man now floated between the two smoking remnants of what had once been his ships. He cursed at the young men who had just done this to him, but he vowed he would exact revenge on them both.

Now miles out at sea, the *Invictus* assessed its damage. Michael scoured the ship for any signs of leakage, "The cabin smells a little smoky and you've got a huge hole near the waterline."

Gabriel nodded, "We'll fix it. With our newly acquired funds from our first passenger, I think we'll be able to get this thing fixed up in no time."

Jonathan now reclined on one of the padded seats in the cabin, "Don't forget you're now a wanted man in South Africa. Hell, I think I am too. And it's one of the only organized ports that you as a former American can get into. Aside from all of that, and the fact that we might be wanted to murder for blowing up those boat back there, I think we're in good shape."

The dog quickly made it's way up to Jonathan's side.

"A stowaway?" Jonathan grinned, and then turned to Gabriel, "You saved this guy's life."

Michael smiled at the dog as Gabriel turned back towards the cockpit, "Just luck, my friend. He was in the right place at the right time."

Jonathan nodded, "So now where we off to, outlaw?"

Gabriel looked out to sea, and pointed in a random direction, "That way."

Jonathan turned to Michael, and then stared at his captain, "Any reason in particular?"

Gabriel shook his head, "None at all."

Jonathan turned to Michael, "It sounds like I'm in for quite a ride."

Michael shot back, "You have no idea."

To be continued...