

CHAPTER TWO
THE NORTH STAR REUNION



“What type is he?” Gabriel stood at the tiller of *Invictus* as Jonathan sat on the top deck with a pair of binoculars. Michael sat back in the cockpit examining their new furry passenger, the lone dog that Gabriel had rescued from the dock.

Jonathan turned from the binoculars back to the animal, “He’s one of those hunting dogs, the ones that hunt lions. They do that up north, the tribes do anyway, or used to.”

Gabriel nodded, “A ridgeback, yeah. I couldn’t really tell with how dirty he was.”

The dog tried to steady himself as the ship rocked back and forth in the waves.

Michael whistled for the dog as he made his way below deck, “Samson, come here.”

The dog jumped below deck; Jonathan uneasy by the sudden movement.

“You’re still afraid Kraxus and his men will find us,” Gabriel asked.

Jonathan tried to hide the fear in his voice, “I dunno. I guess I am.”

Gabriel shook his head, “I wouldn’t worry about all that. We’re hundreds of miles away, and those boats of his solely rely on fuel to get out this far. He’ll never be able to find us. He wouldn’t waste that much gas in trying to do so.”

Jonathan shook his head, “You never know. It’s all about ego to some of those guys.”

A beep below deck instantly interrupted their conversation.

“What’s that?” Jonathan asked quickly.

Gabriel relaxed him, “Our scanner. She’s picked up another ship in our area.”

“What type of ship?”

Gabriel moved below deck and viewed his computer monitor, “She’s about sixty feet long or so. She’s a good twenty feet longer than us.”

Jonathan was nervous, “Enemies?”

Gabriel shook his head, “I dunno. Everyone’s considered an enemy nowadays. She’s coming up on our starboard.”

Jonathan quickly looked off to the right and scanned with his binoculars. In the distance he saw a tall sailing ship... and on it’s mast, hoisted high was a black flag baring a skull and crossbones.

“She’s flying a Jolly Roger.”

Gabriel smiled a sigh of relief, “Not a need to worry then. That thing’s for show.”

Jonathan turned to him, “Isn’t that the international sign for piracy?”

Gabriel nodded, “Yeah, it is. But we’re related to these guys.”

The *North Star* made it’s way up to *Invictus*’ port side and slowed to a steady pace.

Gabriel tossed a line over to her side as the two ships nuzzled up closely. Torrick, one of *North Star*’s crew members supervised the other end of the line, and when Gabriel appeared on deck, he smiled.

Torrick shouted, “Gabriel! It’s been a long time, brother!”

He was a young man, about twenty years of age, that Gabriel had known from his early days. Torrick was a military brat; had rebelled against his father and had taken to Lucius like he would an older brother.

Gabriel smiled back, “Yes it has, my friend. How are you?”

“Never better. We’re heading home, I think.”

Gabriel was rather dumbfounded, “How did you know where we were?”

“Your cousin will tell you all about it,” the young crewmember responded.

And within only a second, Lucius Davidson, who was twenty-four, made his appearance on deck, and Gabriel remembered the days long before the war had ever happened.

The sun set in the distance as the two ships sat next to each other, like old friends once again reunited. That's what they were.

Lucius and Gabriel Davidson, two old cousins, were together again aboard the deck of the *North Star* for the first time in nearly two years. Gabriel was the younger of the two, and he looked up to his cousin like he had to his father before he was abruptly taken from him. Lucius, meanwhile, had done a lot of learning over the years, and he too had lost his father in the same great conflict. As a matter of fact, they had both been stationed on that base in Greece that had been destroyed in the Great War. Now these two orphans would look out for themselves, for each other, and nothing could separate that.

Gabriel grinned after eating a full meal of shark, "So how did you find us?"

Lucius sat drinking from a silver pitcher he had somehow obtained, "A warrant was sent out for your arrest. We heard it broadcast out of Cape Town and then we picked up your coordinates. You're the only other ship out this far so we thought we had a chance of actually finding you."

Gabriel shook his head and poured another glass of wine for he and Jonathan, "Well, you found us, by the powers."

Lucius stared at the two, "So you've commit murder."

The conversation abruptly ended.

Gabriel cleared his throat, "I wouldn't say that. We destroyed two ships that-

Lucius interrupted, "That's what that warrant said. It said three men were killed because of *Invictus* and her crew."

Jonathan seemed uneasy, "But they don't know our names."

Lucius reassured him, "Not yours, my friend. But Gabriel, you may not have gotten away so easily. Kraxus was quick to look up *Invictus* and she found you, and not only did she find you, she found who you happen to be related to, and that happened to be me."

Gabriel sighed, "I'm sorry."

Lucius smirked, "You're lucky we're related. A good friend wouldn't even go through this, buddy."

Gabriel thought for a moment, "So what do you suggest?"

"You best be on the look out for any unsuspected visitors," Lucius said as he raised his glass again.

Gabriel looked about the deck, "Where did you find all this?"

Lucius paused, "What?"

"The wine, these glasses. Lucius, you live like a king." Gabriel was now growing suspicious.

Lucius motioned above, as Jonathan and Gabriel looked up to see the skull and crossbones fluttering in the breeze. Lucius smiled, "It's for real now. It's not just a show."

Gabriel raised an eyebrow, "You really are... a pirate?"

“We,” Lucius emphasized, “we are all pirates.” He motioned to the deck. “That includes you two, you’re both wanted for murder and you destroyed two vessels owned and operated under the laws of the militia leader Kraxus. For that, they’ll put you up against a firing squad in South Africa.”

“Who’s they?” Gabriel asked, “Their government no longer exists.”

Lucius grinned. “Other pirates, of course.”

Jonathan swallowed, “It seemed like a good idea at the time.”

Gabriel shook his head, “We were just protecting ourselves.”

Lucius nodded, “Of course you were. And you still will have to.”

Jonathan looked at the front of the boat where Michael played with the dog Samson, feeding him some leftover meat from the meal. Two other of Lucius’ sailors tidied up the back of the boat. Jonathan turned back to Lucius.

“For how long?”

Lucius grinned, “All the time, my friend. But don’t worry, you won’t be alone. The *North Star* can handle quite a lot. And we’ve done fine in the past as you can tell,” he motioned to the table now littered with scraps from the meal and two empty bottles of red wine.

Gabriel nodded in agreement and then turned to Jonathan, who seemed intrigued by living a life of such luxury.

Jonathan grinned, “So we’re pirates, right?”

Gabriel nodded, “I guess so.”

“That means we get to drink like pirates.”

He raised another glass.

The sun had fallen on the waters of the Atlantic, and now the two pirate captains discussed what would occur over the days to come. Lucius walked about deck, contemplating their next move.

“We head west, no doubt.” He stated.

Jonathan and Gabriel turned to him and then Gabriel spoke up, “Will they follow us there?”

Lucius hesitated, “I’m not sure, but Kraxus has got dozens of hired assassins out in these waters. We’ve encountered quite a few of them. A couple of days ago we got into a skirmish with the *Houndstooth*, an old fishing trawler turned into a combat ship. We’re lucky we made it out of there.”

Jonathan seemed uneasy, “But what is west? South America?”

Lucius laughed at that, “Yeah, eventually. We might make it that far.”

Gabriel raised an eyebrow, “Might make it that far?”

Lucius nodded, “It’s a dangerous voyage kid, but we could manage. If we work together.”

The three men waited for a second and then Gabriel broke the silence, “What’s the situation in Panama?”

Lucius shook his head, “The canal was destroyed years back, kid. You want to head to the west coast you got to do that the old fashioned way.”

The two others exchanged glances.

Torricks made his way up to them, “Lucius, our scanner is picking up a rather large signal closing in about 20 miles to the east.”

Lucius quickly made his way below *North Star's* deck into the main cabin. Two large computer panels covered one wall and lit up the darkened room. Lucius leaned over the man scanning the monitors and then glared into the dimly lit device himself, "It's a fishing trawler."

Torrack was uneasy, "*Houndstooth?*"

Gabriel now leaned over his shoulder, "I think we should get the hell out of here."

Lucius nodded, "Good idea, cousin."

The *North Star* and *Invictus* both raised their sails and began to tack towards the west, attempting to evade the threat to their sterns. Both crews had returned to their respective ships and were now making their way towards the mid-Atlantic where they would come about from South America and return to the west coast of North America, returning Jonathan to a port in Southern California and safely escaping danger in the east.

But it was about a week later where their plans slowly began to change. The two ships had almost crossed a half of the distance across the Atlantic when they came across a distress signal being dispatched from a private ship nearly a days voyage away.

Gabriel contacted Lucius over the radio aboard *Invictus*, "What do you make of it?" Michael sat on the edge of the communications station, awaiting the reply. A crackle on the radio suddenly startled them as Lucius' voice came through, "It can't be *Houndstooth*. She couldn't have made it out this far, and she couldn't have made it before we go here."

Gabriel swallowed, "So whose ship is it?"

Lucius cut in and out, "We'll try and establish contact- see if we can find out what they're trouble is."

Gabriel nodded, "Good. Lemme know what you find out."

Aboard the *North Star*, Lucius ended his conversation with his cousin and then turned to his communications officer named Copernicus, a middle aged, one eyed sea rat, "Try and get in contact with that ship. Ask them what happened."

Copernicus nodded, and then scratched at his eye patch over his left eye, "Aye, cap'n. I'll try and raise 'em."

Copernicus adjusted the radio dials and then picked up the transmitter, "Ahoy there, this is the *North Star*, thirty five miles east of your present location. What's yer' status, eh?"

Static.

And then, barely audible through the aging radio's speakers, "This is the *Lucky Henry*- sustained serious damage to our hull- taking on water fast, we don't know how much longer we can make it, *North Star*."

Lucius turned to the other computer console, "Look up *Lucky Henry* in our database."

The other sailor, a young African named Deej scanned through the database, “We have two results for these waters. One is a ninety foot fishing vessel out of Madagascar, the other would be a fifty foot sailing ship out of the Florida Keys.” Lucius nodded, “That’s it. Radio *Lucky Henry*, and then let’s plot an intercept course.”

Deej nodded, “Working on it.” And then he picked up the radio, “*Lucky Henry*, this is the *North Star*. We’re on our way.”

It was around one in the morning when *Invictus* approached the sinking ship *Lucky Henry*. It’s stern had sunk into the water, and she was barely afloat. There were three of her crew standing on her bow, each of them waving in the night hoping to be caught in the path of the *North Star*’s searchlight nearly a hundred yards off. Gabriel scanned the horizon in the dark and then started shouting towards them, “Hey!”

A delayed response from an unseen voice, “Help! We need help!”

“We’re coming for you,” Gabriel turned the tiller to the left and the *Invictus* banked to her starboard.

Within minutes, the ship was on *Lucky Henry*’s bow and the three lone survivors managed to climb aboard. The survivors were greeted by Jonathan, who helped them with their remaining possessions as they boarded.

There were two young men, one dressed solely in black with a bandana around his neck, and the other wore a military type vest. The other was a girl, around Gabriel’s age, who was wrapped in a military blanket made of wool.

Jonathan grinned, “Welcome aboard, guys.”

The one in black turned to him, “Do you have a light?”

Jonathan was perplexed, “Uh-what?”

“A match, my friend.” His voice was gruff.

Gabriel came up to the bow, “There’s a light below, mate. Welcome aboard *Invictus*.”

Jonathan escorted the three below as the *North Star* came to *Invictus*’ port.

Lucius shouted from the helm of the other ship, “You all right?”

Gabriel nodded, “Yeah, we got ‘em.”

Lucius stared him down and then went below deck. Gabriel found him to be upset for some odd reason.

Below deck, the two male passengers stood while the young girl nestled herself into a blanket.

“I’m Cain. I was mechanic aboard *Lucky Henry*. My services belong to the *Invictus* now.” The one in black said, as he lit a hand rolled cigarette.

Gabriel nodded, “Appreciated, friend. We could use you. I’m Gabriel, this is my brother Michael and our passenger Jonathan.”

The others nodded at them.

The girl spoke up, “Thanks for saving us. You and the *North Star* are the only friendly ships out this far.”

Gabriel seemed nervous, “Friendly ships? You guys ran into somebody else?”

The girl spoke up, "It was a submarine craft, some kind of military vehicle that came up underneath and crushed our hull."

Gabriel was now intrigued, "Was she military?"

The other crewmember, another African named Econ spoke up, "No. She was a hired ship, a bounty hunter named Shangar Mull operates her. Calls it the *Bloody Talon*."

Jonathan and Gabriel exchanged glances.

"He could have picked a more pleasing name," joked Jonathan.

"The name's pretty fitting," said Cain, "It's claimed hundreds of lives out here."

The girl spoke up again, "She can go under for days at a time."

The cabin drew quiet.

Michael softly imagined, "She could be under us right now."

Cain whispered, as if the *Talon* could hear them, "That she could be."

Gabriel turned to Cain, "Do you have everything you need off of *Lucky Henry*?"

Cain held up a leather pouch of tobacco and then nodded to Gabriel, "Yes, I do."

The *Invictus* turned away from the sinking wreckage of *Lucky Henry* as *North Star* sailed some two miles off to her port. The ships slid into the night and that's when Gabriel found out more about his newly acquired passengers.

He now sat on deck with the girl who had grown remarkably talkative.

"We were pirates, yeah, you could say that. We took out two smuggler's ships sailing from the Keys to Morocco and had got lots of weapons."

Gabriel nodded, "What does that get you out here?"

The girl turned to him, "There's no laws out here, City Boy. Guns end an argument pretty quick if you know how to use them."

Gabriel nodded, "Yeah, and if you don't?"

The girl nodded, "Exactly my point. I was raised in Texas, on a ranch, by two brothers and my daddy."

"You don't have an accent," Gabriel noted.

"Nope," she replied, "I lost it in Florida. Went down their spring break of my sophomore semester in college and then all that crap happened with the bombs and all. I never saw family again."

Gabriel grinned, "That's the case with everyone of us, I take it."

"I'm Leyanna. It's nice to meet you."

Gabriel nodded, "Welcome aboard. I'm sorry it's cramped on the ship but tomorrow you'll meet the others aboard *North Star*. She's captained by my cousin and we both are making our way towards the western coast. Where were you guys off too?"

The girl was reluctant, "Back to the Keys. *Lucky Henry* was running shipments from Columbia to South Africa."

Gabriel chuckled, "That's a long run. What was your cargo?"

She smiled, and did not tell him.

Gabriel nodded, "I see. Hey, it's all legal now, right?"

Leyana grinned, "Yeah, I guess."

She withdrew a flask from underneath her top and took a swig.

As the week drew to a close, the two ships rounded Cape Horn and came about into the waters of the Pacific. The winds caught up and proved to be hazardous for sailing, thus forcing both ships to rely strictly on motoring. It was a warmer climate down here than it had been some fifty years prior thanks to the global warming due to the use of nuclear arms in the Great War. Gabriel contemplated traveling on these seas. It was his first voyage, along with Lucius, in these southern of waters and he imagined what it would have been like for the trade ships centuries earlier.

It was two weeks later, now on the coast of Chile that the two ships finally reached another port, this time onboard an old American aircraft carrier named the *Boston*. She was a supercarrier out of San Diego originally, and now here she was some twenty years after her usage being served as an international port of call for wary sea travelers. *Invictus* and *North Star* met up some two miles off of her starboard and exchanged hands. The *Invictus*, the smaller of the two, would make it's way to dock alongside the crude docks manufactured along the carrier's side while *North Star* would wait some few miles off. Taxing for docking with the freighter proved to be expensive, and the two captains agreed that taking only one ship was necessary. Lucius and his navigator Copernicus joined Gabriel, Michael, Cain and Leyana for the excursion to the other vessel, and it would prove to be a unique experience.

The crude dockings alongside the *Boston* had been constructed of worn away parts from sunken ships, retired oil rigs, and an occasional jetliner. This intricate woven mass of metal would have proved to have been a remarkable feat of engineering for the hundreds of mercenary citizens that occupied the ship. *Invictus* tied up at a dock next to fishing ship that had just started traveling south from the former States, and it wasn't even before Lucius and Gabriel's party had disembarked from *Invictus* that they overheard tales of the ongoing destruction to America's west coast.

But the pirates remained optimistic about the homes, and set foot aboard the docks, instantly overwhelmed with exotic foods, articles of clothing, and unique metal wear that none of them had encountered before.

They were escorted by Spanish speaking sailors, none of which they could understand, to a series of large skeletal structures that towered from the dock up onto the *Boston's* massive deck. Gabriel soon realized that they were man-powered elevators, and within an instant, they were all aboard a large sheet metal surface that instantly elevated them into the air. Gabriel looked below and noticed probably a dozen strong men using ropes and pulleys to lift the contraption into the air. He was startled when he heard the crack of a leather whip and realized that all of these men had been sold into slavery. He turned to Lucius who was paying no attention to the suffering below, but had rested his eye on something far more intriguing.

The deck of the *Boston* had once held and launched hundreds of fighters planes in combat some years earlier and now it was home to an international marketplace. The party, now led by Lucius, made it's way down a walkway through countless storefronts. Hundreds of sailors and weary travelers scoured the surface of the vessel looking for trade goods, bargains, and some for just a decent meal.

They stopped at the large hollowed out body of a small jet plane that had at one point made a crash landing on *Boston's* deck. But now instead of aisles of grey leather seats for passengers, hundreds of firearms and munitions, that had once been declared illegal, were up for sale to the highest bidder.

Gabriel turned to Jonathan, "I think it's fair that we talk about that payment you owe us for your passage."

Jonathan grinned at him, "Yeah?"

Gabriel motioned to him, "Where's your cash, friend? We're not crossing the Pacific without the right accessories."

Jonathan raised an eyebrow, "I understand your point."

He pulled out a wad of Union Credits and threw them down onto a table where the shopkeeper was sitting.

The Korean man looked up at him and grinned, "We have a deal."

Gabriel turned to Lucius, "Whatever you need."

Jonathan turned away with Leyanna and Gabriel, leaving the others in the hollowed out jetliner.

Leyanna looked at them, "You're saying it's dangerous out on the Pacific?"

Gabriel nodded, "I heard several sailors talking about the conflicts in the South West territory. San Diego's become an international resting place for refugees. Not just American, I'm talking international."

Leyana looked to the sea, "I wonder if anyone we know is there."

"That's where we were originally planning on going, before we met up with you guys." Gabriel noted.

"Will you stay with your plans then?" she asked.

Gabriel grinned, "I plan to. I hope nothing changes that."

A few moments later, the shopkeeper had sent several of his own men to carry several loads of weaponry that had just been purchased by Lucius and their party. Cain and Copernicus walked with them, as Michael now came up to join his brother. Gabriel looked down at his brother, "And shouldn't your cousin be looking out for you?"

Michael squinted into the sun, "He told me to come back here and get you. He found someone that he wants you to meet."

Gabriel raised an eyebrow, "And who might that be?"

"The name's MacDonald." a grey-bearded man introduced himself to Gabriel and company,

"Jaxon MacDonald."

The crew now sat under a huge canvas ten that leaned up against the ship's old control tower. It belonged to the aging adventurer who had a head of thinning white hair and a lengthy beard that was quite untrimmed. He wore an old fisherman's bucket hat that was stained from working as a mechanic and his utility vest proved to be home for countless oddball contraptions.

Lucius continued, "MacDonald has an old tug boat from the Keys that floats out our way sometimes."

MacDonald cut him off, "Not any more. No siree. We traded it in and have an old cargo freighter; turned it into our workshop and flight hanger."

Gabriel was shocked, "A flight hangar?"

MacDonald grinned, "You bet, son."

"Do you need a flight hangar?" Lucius asked.

"Aye, that we do. We've got a couple of gyrocopters and an old seaplane to name a few. Hell, we even got ourselves an old fashioned hot air balloon!"

The crew laughed at that as MacDonald scurried about in his tent.

"I set up a shop here cause we're lookin' for business to take south to Australia.

We're trying to get out of these waters cause all the business has been headin' south."

Gabriel's smile faded, "Why south?"

MacDonald stopped and turned to him, "Cause there's nothin' left up north, son."

The tent went quiet.

"Word came through yesterday that bombing on ol' Unlce Sam's west coast had taken out nearly every port from Seattle to San Diego. Millions are dead and millions more will suffer from the radiation."

Gabriel turned away as Jonathan looked in horror at the old sailor.

MacDonald had lost all his energy, "I'm sorry, kids. I thought you would have known."

Lucius scanned the tent with all of it's ancient contraptions littering the floor, "No. We've been on the other side of the world."

Gabriel fought back frustration, "So what are our options?"

MacDonald slowly exhaled, and then picked through some metal rubbish on his old wooden desk, "Wish I could tell you. Headin' south; that's pretty much what everyone else is doin. Even the *Boston* plans to head that way by the time the week is up. There are plenty of threats comin' from both the former U.S. and a new batch of idiots out of Mexico. Some... South Sea Union or... I forget what they call 'em."

It was as this conversation was ending that out of the distance from the east came an unfamiliar sound. It was a metallic humming sound that was growing closer and closer by the second and nearly everyone on the deck of the *Boston* stopped to listen. And then an aging alarm sounded from the *Boston's* loudspeakers and everyone took to cover as Gabriel suddenly realized what the sound was.

Biplanes.

Swooping down low and coming in for a flyby came three dark black biplanes, each emblazoned with a red triangle on their side. The planes swooped low at first, not posing much as a threat, but within seconds everyone on the deck was running as the sound of machine guns pierced the air.

MacDonald grabbed a few things from his desk, "*Get down to the docks! They be a-comin'!*"

The party of outlaws and refugees led by Lucius and Gabriel ran through the open market place on the *Boston's* deck and within seconds they watched as small grenades dropped from the biplanes underneath landed on the old hollowed jet liner that housed the ammunition. The plane instantly exploded with metal shrapnel slicing through the air and taking out civilians. Lucius lifted Michael into his arms and Gabriel and Leyanna raced to the edge of the nearest platform elevator. Hundreds of others attempted to do the same. On one platform, too many civilians had boarded

the elevator and it instantly began to crumple over into the ocean below. Hundreds of people instantly fell to their deaths falling from that high of an elevation to the hard water below.

Lucius and Gabriel and the others had successfully found a half empty platform that instantly started lowering people to the docks and that's when Gabriel started to fear.

Econ and Torick fought to cast off the lines as dozens of civilians attempted to climb onto *Invictus's* deck. Everyone was looking to get away from the supercarrier, now on fire on her main deck.

Even once they had actually cast off from the metallic dock, they still had to prod away with their harpoons those brave enough to swim.

"What about the others?" Econ asked.

Torick shook his head, "They'll see us. We'd have sunk if we stayed on the dock."

They looked up to the nearest elevator on the *Boston's* starboard side and saw it begin to crumble from underneath.

"Quick!" Torick jumped for the tiller, "That tower is gonna crumble right on top of us!"

The *Invictus* steered away from the site as another metal tower cascaded into the water below sending up a huge eruption of water into the air, showering back down onto the deck of the sailboat.

Torick shouted in horror, "We have to look for Lucius and the others! There's too many people out there to identify!"

The far elevator platform on the *Boston's* starboard side successfully came to a stop on the docking level. The three or four dozen people who had all managed to climb onto it quickly pushed their way onto the dock and attempted to find a ship that could take them out to sea away from the burning carrier. Cain had darted through the crowd to find *Invictus* but once he discovered the slip empty he became nervous. In a matter of time the others had come up behind him. Lucius threw Michael onto his back and the child wrapped his arms around his neck.

MacDonald quickly pointed out the obvious, "We're gonna have to swim fer' it!"

The crew all lunged into the water and quickly did so, evading the mob of civilians all struggling for protection on the docks.

The *North Star* pulled up alongside the *Invictus* as the pirates all successfully climbed aboard the two ships.

As they all began to dry off, they turned back to the smoldering supercarrier. The top deck was littered with small fires but the tower remained intact. From a distance, both ships could hear the screams of people on the top deck and the occasional blast of another explosion. And then, without warning, the three biplanes swirled around in the sky and dropped low to skim by the two sailboats.

Lucius stumbled below deck to the newly arrived weapons as he found a large submachine gun.

"Everyone duck for cover!" he shouted as he came up on deck. Onboard *Invictus*, Michael moved the dock Sampson below deck before he too hid underneath a

mound of unused sail. On deck, Econ and Cain hid underneath the ship's canopy, each holding handguns each waiting for the opportunity to use them. Gabriel, meanwhile raised his hand-cannon as the planes rounded them.

The first plane opened fire; shots slicing through the water off their starboard. The plane missed completely and started to circle around while the next plane came in, this time lower than the first. It opened fire, sending shots through the ship's sail. An occasional shot hit the metal mast, sending out an agonizing metal clang that echoed across the ocean. The crew opened fire on the plane but it was Lucius' submachine gun that crumpled it's left wing. The plane spiraled in surprise before diving too low and loosing it's wings from a large swell that soon engulfed the entire plane. Dozens of civilians on the docks and in the water cheered as the plane went down. Gabriel soon realized they had an audience.

The third plane circled around back towards the *Boston*, opening fire on the docks below. Once it had made it's pass, it circled about towards the *Invictus* and the *North Star*, approaching from their bows. Gabriel risked missing and opened fire with his hand cannon, sending a blast under the ships cockpit. The plane swung low and opened fire on *Invictus*, sending several shots through her hull. Gabriel fired again, this time hitting the old biplane near the center of it's propeller. The blades quickly flew off into the air, slicing through the water and one getting lodged in *Invictus's* mast. The plane quickly nosedived and splashed into the water nearly ten yards off her bow. Gabriel was sure it would hit them from underneath but he watched as the plane gracefully slid through the water, underneath the *Invictus* and then exploded underwater from their aft. Bubbles from the explosion instantly rose from the surface, as did nearly twenty feet of surf. It was miracle that the explosion taken out their keel. But the calmness in the air was instantly silenced as the last plane circled about. Cain, aboard the *Invictus* fired his handgun from underneath the ship's canopy hitting the gas tank near the rear of the plane. It exploded instantly and the crowd aboard the *Boston* burst into applause.

The heroes of the "Boston massacre" were what they were called after that. *North Star* and *Invictus* were both completely refitted aboard the supercarrier courtesy of the ship's captain Antoninus and his crew. The ships left after having their hulls refit and being completely restocked with fresh supplies. They reluctantly headed west towards Hawaii now knowing that there was no place safe in the northern waters off the coast of western America. Now joined by Jaxon MacDonald, they found themselves heading towards his own outpost aboard his refitted oil tanker the *Apocalypse* which was currently moving towards Australia. Copernicus radioed ahead asking them to slow their course so they could reunite with their employer. MacDonald enjoyed his time aboard the ships as they crisscrossed paths all the way from South America to the mid Pacific. But now that their entire journey up to this point had been completely unnecessary since they were not able to return home, both Gabriel and Lucius thought of where they could now live, where they themselves could set up a headquarters, a hideaway, a place they themselves could call home. Jaxon MacDonald told them the perfect place, located on a mysterious island chain

in the South Pacific that the local mariners called “Dark Horizon.” The *Invictus* and the *North Star* both plotted courses towards the mysterious island chain. Little did they know that by doing so they were altering their lives forever.

To be continued...