

CHAPTER THREE
THE LIFE OF A PIRATE



It was sunrise, two weeks later, when a cargo ship nearly 110 feet long slowly trudged itself up to *North Star's* port side. This was the *Apocalypse*, completely refit with gun turrets and a ramp at the water line to allow two small jet skis to transport from ship to ship.

She was a heavy looking vessel, well worn from years at sea, but she did have size on her side.

To Gabriel, currently aboard the *North Star*, she looked quite intimidating.

"I'm impressed. You could retire on that thing," said Lucius, who had just finished a discussion with his cousin over a meal of recently caught shark.

The two young men glanced out over the ocean towards the arriving ship.

"There she is!" shrieked the old man Jaxon, "and boy, does she look terrific!"

She did indeed to the crew of *North Star*, who was dwarfed by the imposing ship that towered next to them.

Gabriel looked to the starboard where *Invictus* now swung about to meet the new arrival.

Cain and Leyanna, both from the *Lucky Henry* wreck, stood aboard *Invictus'* deck while Jonathan operated the tiller.

A voice rang over a loudspeaker on the deck of *Apocalypse*, "Welcome home, Axle. We've missed you."

With that a boarding ramp slid down from *Apocalypse's* deck and onto the deck of the *North Star*. It landed with a wooden clunk, and a young man instantly headed down the gangway. He was in his late twenties from Gabriel's view point, had very little experience at sea.

"Dexter, my young friend," said Jaxon with a smile, "I'm so glad you're here."

Dexter grinned, "Glad you guys made it. We heard about the Boston incident.

Thanks for picking up this old guy."

Dexter stepped onto the *North Star* deck and turned to Lucius and Gabriel who were silent.

"Permission to come aboard," the young man asked to the two cousins.

Lucius smiled, "No need to request permission, friend. If you're friends with Lucky Jack here then you're friends with us. Your name again?"

Dexter stepped over to the two, "Call me Dex. From Kansas."

Kansas seemed like a world away to the young men and their faces relayed that perfectly to the young Dex.

"Yes, I know it's hard to imagine but here I am."

"I'm Gabriel Hawkins and this is my cousin Lucius Grey," said Gabriel, "and we're Americans too."

Dex nodded, "We've heard a lot about you even out this far. You're both wanted men."

"Yeah, we've heard," Lucius smiled.

"That's fine with us," Dex smiled back, "we don't mind the law out here. On from one place to another. Nobody's business but our own."

Lucky Jack spoke up, "I picked up Dexter back in Long Beach Harbor about two years ago. He was looking for work and I thought I needed a cook onboard our ship. We hired him on the spot in exchange for transport out of the States."

Dex nodded, "I've stayed on every since. And I'm not just a cook, I'm okay with a gun, too."

Jack chuckled, "Well, you ain't half bad. I'm sure these fellows can teach you a thing or two."

Lucius nodded, "We'll teach you some things."

And with that, Jaxon MacDonald boarded his own boat and welcomed the *North Star* crew aboard.

Later that evening, the *Apocalypse* trudged towards the sunset with *Invictus* and *North Star* tied to her port and starboard respectively. A large dinner had commenced in the captain's quarters on the top deck of the ship, and everyone was participating. A large rack of thresher shark meat was the main course along with a salad made up of tropical fruits that the *Boston* had given the *Invictus* crew.

Jaxon MacDonald stood at his helm, looking at the lengthy dining table set up behind him and drinking a rather large glass of rum. Makeshift plastic ware served as cups and saucers while carving knives and forks were each from random makes and styles.

Lucius Grey sat at one end of the table while his cousin Gabriel Hawkins was seated at the other end, chatting up Jonathan Davies and the only female companion Leyanna. Michael had found the luckiest seat in the house; on the girl's lap. Cain, the mechanic, had already partaken in too much rum and was now explaining to Dex how to fix the upper left carbine engine of an advanced AP-17 rotorcopter. Copernicus, the older communications officer lay hunched over the table while Econ and Torick told stories of women they had met in the Mediterranean. It was at this point when Lucky Jack MacDonald decided to share information about the mysterious island chain they were heading for.

"All right lads," the old man croaked through his glass of rum, and then his eyes settled on Leyanna, "and lass. Pardon me." The girl smiled at him, excusing him from his mistake.

"Now is the time to share with you the plans of this here ship."

The table slowly turned quiet as all they all looked to the front of the room where Jaxon held on to the helm with ease and his rum with severe caution.

"We be sailing for the Dark Horizon island chain in the South Pacific. It's about ten days sailing from this here point, and it be a dangerous trek from now till then.

Rumor has it that this newly established South Sea League will be patrolling the waters and they start out really friendly, but only if you pay them a cut of their loot."

"What if we don't want to deal with them?" asked Lucius. A loud growl of approval came from the rest of the table.

MacDonald shook his head, "They have a fleet, son. I'm talking seven of eight warships. Each more dangerous than the next. The *Intrepid*, the *Interceptor*, the *El Dorado*, the *Phoenix*, the something else; there is too many of them to name. They could blow our ship from here to kingdom come if they saw fit to do so."

Dex nodded, "That's why we set up a shop onboard Boston. The South Sea League doesn't operate in that region, and we can make a profit without paying them."

"But how do they know what you make in profit?" asked Gabriel, "especially if your privateers?"

Axle raised an eyebrow, “That’s exactly it, boy. I say we have three ships here. Give us time and we could rack up our own sizable fleet. You put down this Shangar Mull and his submarine and you can put a name for yourself in these here waters. Call the Dark Horizon our own. Give it a name that spreads terror from here to the Arctic Circle.”

“And how do you plan on doing this?” asked Deej, the gunner from *North Star*.

“I’ve set up a small workshop on one of the smaller islands in the Dark Horizon. It’s an old air hangar that the military set up. There’s a landing strip and a guard tower. The whole area is fenced in, but I don’t know who’s gotten into it since we’ve been gone. We took to the sea when the weather kept getting worse. Hurricane seasons set in hard a few months ago, although that didn’t seem to bother the locals.”

“Locals?” asked Jonathan.

“I didn’t mention the locals?” the old man cackled, “the island chain of the Dark Horizon was one of the last colonized places on the planet. About fifty years ago, our government set up shop out on these islands because they thought they were uninhabited. When they got there, they were simply mesmerized by what they found. No joke, but a whole lost colony of cannibals who had all along thought that the ocean was the end of the world. They thought their islands were all there was to their land. Never seen an airplane or a motor vehicle; not even a strip of metal. Well, you can imagine their surprise when the US Navy shows up, tears the place up to hell and back and starts docking submarines and flying in helicopters from overseas. Well, the military fired off rockets and all sorts of crazy ideas to scare off them poor islander folk, and that’s what happened. They’ve lived in a rocky sanctuary on the main island ever since, completely avoiding the outside except for every month or so. That’s when they make their sacrifice to the water gods who, they believe, made the military go away.”

The table all sat in silence, fascinated by the old man’s tale.

“So we are heading to an island filled with cannibals?” asked Lucius.

“I was just thinking that. I don’t know why I don’t feel afraid by this. I think I should be terrified,” Joanthan said, as he downed the remainder of his rum.

MacDonald snickered, “There’s eight or nine islands, boys.”

Leyanna forced a cough.

“And girl,” he continued, “My hangar is on one of the smaller ones. The main island is now a graveyard to lost ships and wartime vessels and each of the smaller islands have various military outposts. One has an underground hideaway, which opens up to a cave with water access. There’s no approaching it from land but from underwater we could reach it.”

“Except we don’t have underwater access,” Torick observed.

“Right you are boy, but if we get ourselves a hold of that submarine we might be able to make it down there,” MacDonald continued.

“How do you know about all of these places?” Gabriel asked.

“Dex and me, we went on an expedition for a few days into the jungle. We found the main base on that big island. There’s the main military stockade but we climbed the fence, went through the buildings and found a maintenance shed with floor plans to all of the military outposts on the islands. It also marked where the native encampments were located. There ain’t none on my island.”

“With each of those military outposts though, we could establish a headquarters on each island. We really could make this place the terror of the South Sea,” Lucius thought aloud to the table.

The room turned to him, now standing with his fist on the table.

“Look at us,” he continued, “we’re the beginning of something new. We have a power here. It’s like King Arthur and the round table. We establish our reign in the South Seas and the legends pass on from port to port. Eventually we live like kings in our own tropical paradise. Each of us gets our own island with our own fortress and we take what we want from the sea and give nothing back!”

The table roared with excitement, except for Gabriel and Leyanna at the other end. Michael sat on the girl’s lap, confused with his brother’s reaction.

“So who gets to be King Arthur in this role playing game of yours?” Gabriel asked. The room snickered when they noticed he was looking straight at Lucius.

Lucius stared right back, “It was an analogy, cousin. I wasn’t suggesting that I get to be the leader.”

Gabriel felt slightly awkward, so then he smiled, “I think you’d make a great King Arthur. But then I get to be Robin Hood.”

The table laughed as Lucius smiled at his cousin and raised his glass to him and took a drink.

“You’ve got a good plan, boys,” MacDonald stated, “and I think it can be done. With our mechanical expertise and my flying machines, we can set up a colony on these here islands and make a name for ourselves. Hell, I have maps of all the outlying trade routes and everything. I know these islands like the back of my hand so mark well my words, mates, this land is gonna be the greatest thing you ever wished for.”

The sun had set in the distance, and Gabriel stood with Michael on the bow of *Apocalypse*, looking out at the glimmering ocean.

“You ever wanted to be a pirate, Michael?” Gabriel asked.

“I read about ‘em in our books,” the little boy responded, “I didn’t know you could be a pirate though.”

Michael was referring to the small library of hardbound classics that Gabriel had acquired at a port in Morocco. He had won a game of cards with an old shopkeeper who didn’t want to part with the funds. Gabriel suggested he cough up something of value from his wares, and that’s when the boy set eyes on a vast collection of leather bound classics that he had recalled from his youth. There were Jules Verne masterpieces and the works of Rafael Sabatini. Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Conan Doyle made an appearance, as did Robert Lewis Stevenson and James Fenimore Cooper. The boy made off with nearly thirty books before the evening was done and the shopkeeper had grown angry. Each book had proven to be a learning tool for the Hawkins boys as Gabriel had never read any of them before. Michael shared in the excitement by learning to read from his brother when they went to bed at night. Gabriel would end the day by reading a chapter or so from the books and now they had read each one at least once.

“I could be a pirate,” Michael said proudly as he looked up at his brother.

“A good pirate,” Gabriel said. “Just take money from the bad guys, right?”

“But how will we know if they are bad?” the little boy asked.

“That’s a good question,” Gabriel thought about it for a moment.

Leyanna walked out onto the deck. She brushed her long brown hair out of her face and walked over to the brothers, now turned to meet her.

“Some dinner conversation, huh?” she asked.

Gabriel nodded and turned back out to sea, “I bet you didn’t think you were getting into this, did you?”

“Hell, I don’t have anything for me anywhere else. This at least puts on a tropical island with food and money and a company of men.”

He laughed at that, “You don’t want these guys. There pretty tough.”

“I like them tough,” she said, “I wouldn’t have them any other way. I love the sense of adventure.”

She ran her hand over Michael’s hair as he smiled up at her.

“Plus, I’m pretty damn good in a fight,” she added.

“I like that idea; girls with guns.” Gabriel added.

She smiled, “Daddy taught me. Man, I miss him sometimes.”

That quieted the conversation.

“We miss our daddy, too.” Michael added.

Gabriel nodded, “Yes sir, kid. We do.”

He pulled the little boy close to him and hugged him tight as the girl looked on and smiled.

“Thanks again for dragging me into this,” she joked.

“What do you mean?” Gabriel asked.

“This trip. These pirates. This is gonna be a fun life to live I think. Thank you for that.”

He smiled, “Well, I’ve got my own boat so whenever you get tired of it, we can just slip away.”

And then Gabriel realized that his phrase had come off as almost a flirt, but it was too late for him to correct it.

“You mean, like just the two of us?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

She had taken it that way, too, it seemed like.

“I meant like, we aren’t trapped in this lifestyle. We have the whole ocean ahead of us. We can get away from it all if anyone decided that it wasn’t for them. For me, I’m back again with my cousin and I’m here with old friends and new friends. I’m happy for now.”

She smiled, “New friends is right, buddy. I’m glad we’re in it together.” And she turned and walked away.

It was now a week later and the three ships were each on their own for the arrival into the waters of the Dark Horizon. The water had slowly turned lighter in this region of the world, and that’s because the water was now incredibly shallow. Copernicus, communication’s officer on *North Star* had completed an underwater survey using a scanning device aboard *Apocalypse*. He had pointed out to the crews of each ship that the underwater regions of this island chain would be incredibly dangerous. A reef surrounding the islands dropped off suddenly, reaching unfathomable depths, while on the other side of the reef, rocks would sometimes be

exposed from the surface. Many ships had occasionally ran aground in the region with survivors coming ashore, becoming victim to the island inhabitants or being seized as spies by military force. With military presence no longer applicable at this day in age, the only thing they would have to worry about would be avoiding running ashore in the first place, and keeping the islanders at ease.

“Land sighted!” Econ shouted from his post aboard *North Star*, looking through an old spyglass into the southwest direction.

Through a dense patch of warm haze, Lucius could see the islands now come into full view.

“By the powers,” he said, “It’s paradise.”

The crews of each ship came onto deck and watched with great enthusiasm as the main island sat right in front of them; it’s lush jungles and large sandy beaches welcoming them.

And then something caught Gabriel’s eye from under the water. Dozens of grey oval shapes darted from one side of the boat to the other side, rippling through the rough surface of the water.

Sharks.

Maybe a hundred of them.

Several large dorsal fins split through the water and came alongside *Invictus*’ bow.

Jonathan ran up the deck and looked over the bow to see the creatures part to allow the boat to pass.

“All this time I thought he was saying *Dark* Horizon. I guess he said *Shark* Horizon,” Jonathan turned to Gabriel who didn’t laugh.

“I know it wasn’t that funny but seriously. I ain’t swimmin’ in this,” Jonathan continued.

Leyanna came out on deck and watched as the dorsal fins now subsided and the creatures turned away and headed back out to sea.

“That’s strange,” Gabriel said, “I’ve never seen them do that. They followed us in and once we got to this area they left us.”

“Temperature maybe?” Leyanna thought about it.

“They were scared,” Michael added.

Gabriel went below deck and clicked the radio to Apocalypse, “Dex, any explanation as to why the sharks stopped following us so quickly?”

The radio crackled as Dex answered, “We’ve wondered that, too. No explanation so far. Funny thing is that it is constantly predictable. They’ve learned not to go in this area. I don’t know why but they turn at the exact same spot.”

Gabriel shrugged, “Roger that,” and then he clipped the radio back in it’s place and stepped back onto the deck.

The islands seemed to give off a noise once they got closer. Even from sea, Gabriel could hear the echoes of tropical birds and unique animals calling from the jungles and echoing across to the neighboring islands. And then suddenly the sound of birds ceased and were all drowned out by the sound of motors running and a sudden sound of rushing water.

Gabriel made a quizzical face and turned to Jonathan, “North Star running engines?”

Jonathan turned to the port to look at the other ships, "Apocalypse is still powering but North Star is still on sails."

Jonathan stared towards North Star, which suddenly banked to her port. He noticed Lucius running on the deck and everyone suddenly scurrying below deck.

"Something's going on, though." Jonathan added, and then he turned back to the bow and noticed the source of the mechanical sound.

Gabriel stopped in his tracks, as from around the point ahead of them about a mile away, two gun ships suddenly sped out at full speed headed right towards them.

"Oh damn," Jonathan shook his head, "bad timing."

It was then that the sound of rushing water was heard again and suddenly a loud metal crunch.

Gabriel, Leyanna and Jonathan quickly turned to Apocalypse and watched it tilt towards them and then smash back into a balanced position.

"Did it just hit something?" Jonathan asked.

"Something just hit it." Leyanna responded.

And then a very large grey oval shape dodged underneath the water and Gabriel knew then that it was not a shark.

It was the phantom submarine, the *Bloody Talon*, which sped from *Invictus* port side to starboard within the blink of an eye and then splashed onto the surface.

She was nearly fifty feet long, only a few longer than *Invictus* but ten times as deadly. Her metal hull bore two incredibly long obtrusive bumps, which served as multiple spikes to pierce a ships' hull, and her top carried two more. To Gabriel, she looked like some sort of metallic narwhal creature; a terror come to life. The vehicle had several large panels made up of metal plating that suddenly slid away to reveal large windows.

Gabriel could actually see someone inside.

And then, within a flash it dove again and aimed towards the *Apocalypse*. Jonathan could make out Dex, who was quickly taking controls of the gun turret. The metal chair on *Apocalypse's* deck swiveled around to face the attacker and the turret began firing loud shots into the water. Each shot was followed by a large splash of water, and then echoed with a loud metal thud.

They were actually hitting the *Talon*.

But then another crash occurred, and the *Apocalypse* now teetered towards the port.

The *Talon* had rammed her, and once the sub reversed and submerged again, the interior of the large ship was revealed. Water instantly began to pour inside and Dex lost his placement in the turret, falling from the seat onto the deck. He ran towards the bow as suddenly a small explosion took place beneath the deck of *Apocalypse*.

Jaxon MacDonald ran from the captain's quarters, following Dex, as suddenly the entire bow of the ship collapsed upon itself with another large explosion. *Invictus* swerved left, aiming towards the wreckage of the ship, where Jaxon and Dex now waved their hands for rescue.

It was at this point that the two gunboats had now grown incredibly close, and an entourage of masked gunmen in blue trench coats suddenly scrambled across the decks. They had not yet opened fire, but Gabriel thought that at any moment they might do exactly that.

The *Invictus* came within feet of the stern of Apocalypse and slowed only for a moment as Dex and MacDonald slid down a mooring line to *Invictus*' deck.

"They sunk my baby!" MacDonald shouted as the *Invictus* sped away and the *Apocalypse* crumpled behind them.

The submarine was nowhere to be seen but unfortunately for the *Invictus*, the gunboats were.

Now on either side of her, a gunboat sat with armed guards on each side.

The *North Star* was nowhere to be seen.

A blast from a loudspeaker finally acknowledged their presence.

"Invictus, lower your weapons. We are the South Sea League of Pirates and Freedom Fighters. You are trespassing into South Sea League Territory without permission from the South Sea League commanders. Please await the boarding of one of our officials who will discuss terms with you. Any sign of hostility and we will not hesitate to destroy your ship and crew."

As the transmission ended, the crew raised their hands and one of the gun ships pulled closer alongside. The gunmen aboard lowered their weapons as a similarly dressed man stepped out onto the deck of the first ship and looked out towards *Invictus*.

"So you're *Invictus*, huh?" the man pulled off his facemask, "I'm sorry to that other ship. It was that damned submarine. That's Shangar Mull."

Gabriel, hands still raised over his head shouted back, "Yes, we know. You guys chasing it?"

The man nodded, "Yes. He's not a part of our fleet. Although neither are you so we couldn't protect you. Sorry about that. We can change that if you're willing to pay a fee."

MacDonald swore under his breath.

"I'm Mallory. James Mallory. I'm captain of the *El Dorado*, a member of the South Sea League," the man shouted back.

"Nice to meet you," Gabriel shouted back, in a smartass tone of voice, his hands still above his head.

"Why don't you strike a deal with the South Sea League. If not, I'll be forced to take your two ships here as prisoner. Your crew will be at my disposal."

Gabriel looked around and noticed the *North Star* had evaded the two gunboats. In fact, he could not even see the *North Star*, "Well, it looks like the other ship isn't an issue."

Mallory grinned, "We'll get her. What's your name, stranger?"

"Gabriel Hawkins."

James Mallory stammered, "Ca- Captain of *Invictus*? What are you doing in these waters? You're supposed to be up North."

Gabriel, complimented by the fact that this man had heard of him, smiled and looked to his crew and then back to the gunboat, "So you gonna kill us?"

"There's a large price on your head, kid. That poses as a problem for you. Your worth more alive to me if I turn you in, but I heard you're pretty good with what you do. Maybe we can strike a deal here."

A few moments later, James Mallory was below deck of *Invictus*, sitting opposite Gabriel Hawkins, Leyanna and a very nervous Jonathan Davies. Michael Hawkins had long since gone into hiding in the back cabin and would not be seen for some time.

“It’s quite simple,” Mallory said, “you’re a straight shooter and your good at the tiller. Problem is, you’re wanted for murder and there is a price on your head in the Atlantic. The South Sea League can’t ignore that. What if you turned on us, right? So here’s the thing, we let you take what you want in these waters if the ship is not a member of our League. In order for that to happen, you have to join our league.” Gabriel nodded, “And by joining, you mean pay you?”

Mallory sneered, “Exactly, kid. There’s a price for everything in the world now. Either that or we take you in. You give us trouble, and we kill you.”

Jonathan raised an eyebrow, “Seeing the options, I’d go with the whole joining the Union thing.”

Mallory turned to him, “And what’s *your* name?”

“I’m Jonathan Davies. Passenger of *Invictus*,” he said proudly.

“You’re in this too kid,” Mallory continued, “Kraxus has it out for both of you, and that audacious cousin of yours. Where is Lucius Grey?”

Gabriel didn’t know what to say to that, which was fine, because only a few short seconds later a voice was heard up on deck over a loudspeaker.

“I’m right here.”

Gabriel’s heart pounded. That was Lucius, all right.

“Come out here,” Lucius continued.

At this point, Mallory barged up the steps to *Invictus*’ deck, and was completely surprised at what he saw.

Both gunboats, tied to *Invictus*, now had all of their gunmen unmasked with their arms raised over their heads. The North Star was now perfectly in between the two boats and directly behind *Invictus*. Deej and Torrick were aboard *El Dorado* with machine guns aimed at the guards, while Econ, Dex and Copernicus, stood on the other deck of the opposing ship, guns trained at their guards. Mallory stood, flabbergasted, and that was when Jaxon MacDonald aimed his own handgun right at the Union pirate captain.

“The tides have turned, James Mallory,” Lucius continued over the loudspeaker from the *El Dorado*, “You’re in our waters now. We’ll strike a deal with you right here and now. You leave these waters and never return to the Dark Horizon, and we’ll let you and your men free and clear. The *El Dorado* is ours now, however.”

Mallory began to steam and turned back to Gabriel who stood behind him, “What is the meaning of this, Captain? I could have shot you down from a mile away. But I didn’t!”

Gabriel was still perplexed by what was going on around him, “I didn’t plan this, honestly. You can blame my cousin for this.”

Mallory turned back to the other ships, “Okay, Lucius! Come out here so we can talk!” He spat out at the sea.

Lucius Grey emerged from the cabin aboard *El Dorado* and pointed a large assault rifle towards *Invictus* where Mallory was standing.

“This isn’t a good start at forming an alliance with the South Sea League Union,” Mallory said.

Lucius chuckled, “We’re not forming an alliance with you. You are forming one with us. We let you go in exchange for your promise to never set foot on the islands in the Dark Horizon. You better not even sail through this here 60-mile stretch of water. You do that, and you better pray that we aren’t out there to find you. That’s the agreement. You go tell your Union that.”

Mallory swallowed hard, although still attempting to look like he was control of the situation, “And for payment? How do we collect?”

Lucius shook his head, “You don’t collect. This agreement starts now. Hand over all weapons and extra fuel you are carrying aboard your vessels and then board your ship here and leave us. *El Dorado* is ours however, in exchange for *Apocalypse*.”

“But the *Talon* isn’t apart of the *Union*. We aren’t responsible for her, let alone what ships she has sunk.”

Lucius grinned, “You should have taken her out sooner. A shame you couldn’t catch her before she got us. Now you have to pay for it with one of your ships.”

Mallory gritted his teeth, “No, Lucius. And I won’t concede to any forced agreement!”

Lucius Grey turned to one of the nearest masked guards who had his hands up and then quickly aimed his assault rifle and fired, blowing a hole through the man’s chest as he propelled into the water below.

Everyone screamed.

“Don’t,” Mallory cried out to the neighboring ship.

Gabriel turned to Leyanna, both of them nervous.

“Who’s next, Mallory?” Lucius turned back to him, “Every time you argue with me further, we are gonna execute a member of your crew. Eventually I’m gonna get to you.”

Mallory swore and then turned back to Gabriel, “You’ll pay for this one day, kid. I swear you’ll pay.” And then he stepped up onto the railing of *Invictus* and shook his fist at Lucius.

“We’ll leave you alone for now, that is our agreement. The South Sea League won’t touch you and your ships, Lucius, but once you leave these islands and venture out into the big pond you’re gonna wish you’d never been born!”

Within a few moments, the *El Dorado* was fully stocked with an arsenal of weapons and several hundred gallons of extra gasoline. *Invictus* and *North Star* were on either side of her, and the disarmed crew of Union guards now stood on the deck of the neighboring gunboat entitled the *Intrepid*. Lucius had already taken precaution by permanently disarming the radios aboard and removing any radar and sonar scanning equipment.

The *Intrepid* quickly cast off as James Mallory stood at her stern, cursing at the pirate crews he left behind.

Gabriel, aboard *Invictus*, turned to the *North Star* and looked at Lucius.

“We need to talk about this, Lucius. I’m afraid they’re going to be coming right back for us.”

Lucius shook his head, “No, they won’t be coming back for a while.”

“But that phantom submarine might,” MacDonald said, uneasily, “We better get to shore before we lose anything else.”

Gabriel nodded, “You’re right.” He turned to the *El Dorado* and shouted up at Econ who stood in the main cabin, “Econ, let’s head to shore. Follow our lead!”

The man nodded, and the three ships quickly headed back towards the islands and followed to where MacDonald was leading them.

It was a smaller island, across the main island where Jaxon MacDonald had established his base. The three ships rounded a large point, which opened up into a large bay on the other side. The waters were incredibly calm, and here was where they noticed a large inlet and a old rustic wooden dock jetting out into the ocean. The two sailing ships lowered their sails and switched to engines while the gunboat slowed to allow *Invictus* to pass. A towering canopy of lush jungle covered them as they entered the inlet and passed down the wooden dock. They were now on a large river that was leading them to a small fortress up ahead. The sounds of a thousand tropical creatures stirred the air and Gabriel grew uneasy.

“This is a totally lost world,” he said to Jonathan who had been standing next to him this entire time.

“I don’t like the looks of it at all,” he whispered back, under his breath.

“There she is!” MacDonald squealed as the military fortress began to come into full view. The long wooden dock, which had been running up the entire shoreline of the river, now dead-ended at the base of the outpost where a metal chain-link fence barred the jungle elements from attacking. It had not prevented them as vines and lush vegetation poured over them and onto the concrete ground on the other side. The guard tower was fairly disguised thanks to tropical moss that now grew over it.

Within a few moments, *Invictus* and *North Star* tied up to the dock and the crew was scurrying about, examining their new surroundings.

“So this is it, huh?” Gabriel turned to Lucius who now stood on the embankment looking at the river below.

“This is it,” he nodded, “I think it’s going to be fine.”

Gabriel admired the large outpost behind them, “Yeah. I think we’ll be quite hidden when the South Sea League comes to find us.”

“They aren’t coming back,” he shot back.

“I didn’t know what you were doing,” Gabriel said, “and I certainly didn’t know that you were going to kill one of them.”

“They would not have hesitated to kill us, Gabriel. And I’m certainly not going to pay them for being a part of their stupid Union. It’s just us now. We’ll form our own union. These islands are our home. We’re going to make this place something new and exciting.”

Gabriel turned, “I hope your right.”

Lucius nodded, “I am right. Come on, a lost fortress in the jungle and outlaws on the ocean: that’s what the life of a pirate is all about.”

Gabriel smiled, “I didn’t sign up to be a pirate.”

“Nope, but you got it. And you’re going to be good at it, too,” he said.

The two cousins shook hands and walked down the embankment towards the dock, oblivious to the dozens of watchful eyes that watched from deep in the dark jungle.

To be continued...