

CHAPTER FOUR
THE DESTROYER OF MAN



The jungles were teeming with life, as countless birds and monkeys shrieked from the treetops and scurried about in the canopies. A thick mist poured through the foliage, and separated Gabriel from the rest of the team. He could only see the ground below him, and the several large jungle beetles that scurried under his feet. It had been quite a while since he had seen anything that even looked like a bug.

“Sound off,” he said.

Various voices rang out through the jungle.

“Jonathan.”

“Econ.”

“Torrick.”

“Lucius.”

Gabriel could not see any of them. He turned around, and suddenly the fog cleared.

“Whoa,” Jonathan said as he came into sight with Gabriel. They were only a few yards apart.

“That’s interesting that the fog picks up so quickly,” Gabriel said.

“It’s very unpredictable here,” Lucius stated as he came around the base of a very large tree that cascaded into the lush canopy, “which is good. It can hide us.”

Gabriel lifted a worn looking map and examined their location a little more closely.

“We’re two miles from the outpost. The other side of the island is literally right here,” he said.

The team slowly stepped forward as the mist now appeared and blocked their view.

The sound of waves could be heard but nothing could be seen.

At last, after a moment with the fog, a rocky coastline was visible a few yards ahead, with the jungle trees literally falling into the ocean. The water here was shallow and once they stepped to the shore, they could see a huge drop off into the water below.

It was crystal clear, and several large fish could be seen.

“What a strange place,” Lucius noted, as they disbanded and checked out their surroundings on the rocks. The main island was visible across the bay, and Gabriel noted that even the highest peak was still concealed in the clouds above.

These islands were quite bizarre to the crew, especially when the jungle led right into the ocean. Evidently the water was receding around this region, or the islands were getting larger.

He jumped over the large grey rocks that lined the shore line and looked out to the ocean, and that was when he noticed several large bamboo spikes with impaled corpses.

“Gabriel!” Lucius shouted.

The rest of the team scurried over, noticing the bodies.

“Wow,” Jonathan stammered, “I thought we were alone here.”

“Yeah, me too.” Gabriel added.

The corpses looked quite decayed, each one with bright tribal paintings and markings; a collection of random bones placed at the bottom of each spike.

“I suggest we get back to MacDonald and the gang and tell him we aren’t alone here,” Torrick suggested, but not before a loud metal twang echoed over the rocks and he was pinned to a large tree.

The rest of the crew turned to watch him fly through the air, unable to speak.

Torrick looked down to see what had caught him: a large metal spike about six feet long that had launched through the air and now pierced him up through the stomach and up against the tree. He looked down at it and then up at the rest of the team and began to spout blood from his lips.

“Help me!” he managed.

But it was quickly drowned out by the sound of yelling from dozens of darkly skinned natives who cascaded down the embankment and caught the crewmembers off guard. Other metal spears launched through the air, being fired by large makeshift crossbows that were carried by two or three of the natives. They barely missed the team members, each one either launching past and sticking into the dirt or clanging off a large rock.

Econ opened fire with his machine gun and started running. “C’mon!” he shouted. Gabriel and Jonathan followed behind as Lucius brought up the rear, firing shots with his handgun, taking down several of the natives.

But that was when a large makeshift net dropped from the canopy and he was soon swarming with tribesmen.

Gabriel and Jonathan turned with the sound of cries from Lucius, and instantly began firing in his direction, while still running for their lives.

“They got him!” Gabriel shouted, and he quickly turned back towards Lucius.

“Gabriel! You idiot!” Jonathan shouted as he ran the other direction.

Gabriel raised his pistol and fired at several of the armed men, taking down three of them, but not before he was snared from underneath by a vine woven rope.

He slid through the mud and soon found himself looking up into the jungle canopy as five or six faces now looked over him, blocking out the sunlight.

He was captured.

He managed to hear Lucius mumbling from a short distance away, but that was when the largest of the armed tribesman hit him square in the face with a large blunt club and the whole world went dark.

Jonathan Davies caught up with Econ, now several hundred yards into the jungle expanse. They were silent, except for their heavy breathing.

“What happened to Gabriel?” Econ asked.

“They both were captured. I saw them still alive. I don’t know how long that will last.” Jonathan said, his hands resting on each of his knees. He bowed his head between his legs and took huge gasps of air.

Econ turned back towards the jungle, “We need to follow them if their still alive. Can you run back to the outpost?”

Jonathan nodded, “Yeah. The outpost sounds terrific right about now. You sure you’re be okay?”

Econ shook his head, “They skewered Torrick alive. I don’t know exactly how safe I’m gonna be. At least I’ll blend in better with the native folk.” He chuckled.

Jonathan nodded but didn’t laugh, “Yeah. Sorry about Torrick, man. He seemed like a nice guy.”

Econ shook his head, “He owed me money, too.” And then he ran back into the jungle.

Jonathan was now squatting by himself in the middle of the foliage, “Nice to know you aren’t shaken up about it.” But Econ was long since gone. It was about this time when the fog came back, blocking Jonathan from seeing anything.

“I really hate this island,” he mumbled to himself as he slowly trudged through the fog and back to the outpost.

Jaxon MacDonald walked into the main hangar of the island outpost, which he had named like it was his own private paradise.

“Crystal Bend. That’s the name of our port,” he smiled to Leyanna who was admiring a large gyrocopter in the corner of the room.

“Sounds like a nice place,” she said to him.

“Well, it will be once we get it in shape,” he said, “I’ve got big plans for it. Lucius and Gabriel will take the base on the main island. They can call that whatever they want. I’ll hold up the fort here, and then we’ll designate the others as time comes along. It’ll take a while to refurbish each one, I s’pose.”

She nodded, “That should keep us busy for a while, I’d say.”

“Wow!” Michael shrieked from the other side of the room. Sampson, the dog scurried over to examine what the boy had uncovered.

It was a large wooden platform that served as the base for a custom crafted hot air balloon.

“Wow, is right,” MacDonald seemed impressed with himself, “made that all myself.”

A large amount of used sails had been stitched together and were neatly folded against the wall, each with a series of intricate lines that ran to the wooden platform.

“She can be up and running in a matter of moments,” MacDonald nodded.

“But how can she take off from inside here?” Leyanna asked.

MacDonald looked straight up and pointed to a large sliding panel that covered the ceiling.

“And how do you fly it so you don’t head out to sea?” she asked.

“I like you’re thinkin’” the man smiled, “cuz’ I thought that too. I’ve custom created an operating system. She has two propellers on her right and left, allowing us to maneuver her.”

Michael climbed aboard as the dog followed suit.

“Wow,” the little boy smiled, “I’d love to ride in it.”

MacDonald chuckled, “Me too, kid. I’ve never been up in it before. Hoping I never need to. She’s an escape craft if we ever suffer an outside attack. We can retreat inside this hangar and escape last minute. I’m hoping it never comes to that though.”

Michael’s smile faded.

At this point, a lot of commotion had begun outside, and Copernicus ran through the hangar doors and headed straight for MacDonald.

“Cannibals!” he shrieked, “right here on this island!”

No less than a minute later, Jaxon MacDonald opened an old dilapidated garage. The creaking sound of rusted metal forced several tropical lizards and even a few monkeys to leap from safety from her rickety structure.

Inside, a large off-road military vehicle sat, covered in vines.

"I've used her a few times. I didn't want to waste gasoline but here she is, completely refitted." MacDonald said.

Deej and Jonathan ran up to the garage, each carrying several large weapons and a plenty of extra ammunition. Jonathan dropped it all at his feet when he saw the vehicle.

"What the hell is that?" he asked.

"They called it a Homer, or a Hummer, somethin' like that," Deej said, "I saw them in a book on military history. They used 'em in the Middle East. One of the last military vehicles to use gasoline fuel before we switched to hybrid military craft."

The others stopped and stared.

"She's an antique, about seventy or eighty years old," MacDonald said, as he climbed over the vines in the garage to the driver's side door of the ancient vehicle, "but she still works like she's brand new."

He slammed the door and soon the vehicle roared to life, startling everyone else awaiting her exposure to the jungle floor.

Her wheels slipped on the cold concrete floor and then scurried out into the jungle daylight.

"So now we gotta go use this thing to save those nasty cousins of yours!"

MacDonald shouted to Michael.

Leyanna shook her head, "You're staying here, Michael. I want you to stay in the guard tower. Dex will stay with you."

Dex hurried up to the vehicle, carrying an AK47, "I'm staying here?"

MacDonald nodded, "Close up the gate and lock yourself in the main compound. If we ain't back before sundown turn on the security lamps on the premises and listen for us on the radio. We may be needing your help more than ever."

Jonathan jumped into the back of the vehicle, modified by MacDonald to carry a large machine gun turret. He helped Leyanna aboard when suddenly a loud engine roar happened from behind.

Cain, the mechanic, had just discovered an old military motorcycle and was riding it over towards them.

"I'm not letting some old man drive me around," he coughed through the smoke of the vehicle, "so I'll be driving this." He strapped his black goggles over his eyes and lit up a cigarette.

"Let's go," he said and revved the engine.

"I'm leadin' the way," MacDonald shouted as the military vehicle roared to life and headed off into the jungle carrying the heroic party of roughnecks. The motorcycle trailed behind, and Dex hurriedly closed the gate behind them.

Several miles away in a forgotten jungle landscape, Econ slowly crept over the rocky ledge and looked down below at the treacherous rocky, river bed, now a pathway for literally several hundred armed cannibals.

Econ, physically fit and well experienced in his military past, was quite uneasy in the given predicament, and decided that calling in again to Jonathan at this point was the best thing to do.

"Jonathan, do you copy?" he whispered into the radio.

The military vehicle cascaded down a cliff and into a lush field of tall grass when Jonathan Davies heard the radio crackle.

He lifted the handset and acknowledged, "This is Jonathan. Go ahead, man." Econ's voice came in hushed over the radio, "There's a few hundred guys. We're heading up the creek bed towards the center of the island. You know where I'm talking about?"

Jonathan kneeled down and shouted through the back window to MacDonald, "Creek bed. There is a few hundred of 'em. We're going to want to be quiet."

Then he clicked on the radio, "We're making it that way now, Econ. Can you hold on?"

Econ, sweating profusely, nestled in between two large rocks hoping it might hush his voice even more so, "Yeah. I can hold on. I don't know how much longer our boys can though."

In the riverbed below, several of the larger tribesmen had lashed Lucius and Gabriel to two large wooden spikes and were now carrying them like roasted pigs to an unknown destination.

"This ain't gonna be easy," Lucius said to Gabriel, who was being carried next to him.

"Nope, although I'm not sure if we're gonna get outta this one," Gabriel said back, looking at the rocky ground swaying back and forth from his awkward angle.

"The others got away," Lucius noted, "so we've got a chance. They'll come back for us."

"Yeah, well they left Torrick stuck to that tree back there," Gabriel winced as the ropes pulled at his hands.

"He was dead, kid. You didn't see it, but these guys pulled his body down. He's gonna be dinner tonight," Lucius whispered.

"That's disrespectful. He was a loyal friend to both of us." Gabriel shot back, but then he got to thinking, "What about us? Why didn't they kill us?"

Lucius shook his head, "Maybe their saving us for breakfast?"

The military vehicle and Cain's motorcycle now stopped at the edge of a rocky cliff. Jonathan jumped from his position at the machine gun turret and ran towards the edge to look below. There was no sign of Gabriel or Lucius.

"Econ, come in," he clicked on the radio.

Static for a moment.

And then, "Yeah. I'm here. They've taken 'em to a camp. There's more of 'em here with women and children and such. I've been tracking them nearly for three miles. We're about halfway up the tallest mountain, the big one. They got 'em in the center of camp and their dancing all around 'em. I just saw Torrick."

Jonathan began to smile, "He's okay then?"

More static.

"No man. They've tore him apart."

Jonathan felt like he was about to throw up, when MacDonald opened his door and walked over to the ledge.

“Where’d those bastards take ‘em?” he growled.

The radio clicked again, and Econ’s voice now seemed petrified, “Wait. They’re moving them again. It looks like they’re leaving the encampment.”

“Follow them, Econ. We’ll meet up.”

“Damn straight, you are. I’m not doing this alone.” The radio clicked.

MacDonald headed back to the vehicle.

Cain, from the motorcycle, looked back at Jonathan, “So where are they going? What’s gonna happen?”

Jonathan muttered, “Like I have the cannibal forecast for this afternoon.”

MacDonald shouted back, “It’s a ceremony.”

The others stopped.

“They’re taking them to the point; the Eye of the Storm. They’re gonna do a sacrifice and we’re gonna have to stop it.”

Jonathan could barely get the words out, “A sacrifice?”

“The Eye of the Storm?” Cain managed.

MacDonald nodded, “Yeah. At sundown. It’s on the main island. I’ve watched it. They usually use their own women or kids. They’re gonna use an outsider for this one apparently.”

Jonathan jumped back up onto the gun turret, “Then there is no time to loose. Let’s get them the hell outta there.”

Cain nodded, “We’re gonna need a boat.”

It was nearing sundown, and the cannibals had now taken Gabriel and Lucius to a small bay on the island where nearly two-dozen dugout canoes waited on the beach to transport the tribe to a particular location on the main island.

Gabriel had no idea where this place might be.

The islanders placed their two captives in each of their own canoes and then six or eight men instantly boarded to guard them.

A chant soon began as the men began paddling and looked into the water, as if they were afraid of it. The remaining canoes instantly took off as a hundred or so of the islanders waited on the beach; their hands raised in some unique ritual.

“I have a bad feeling about this,” Lucius said from his canoe.

“They’re going to drop us in the drink,” Gabriel said, nervously peering into the water.

Nearly twenty minutes had passed and the canoes were now approaching the other shore of the neighboring island. It was a smooth sand beach, and thankfully to Gabriel, it looked like these cannibal tribesman were taking them straight for it instead of throwing them into the waters below.

“Hey,” Lucius said, “this is that same channel where the sharks left. Remember?”

Gabriel carefully looked out over the water. “You’re right. It is the same one.”

He noticed the waters had been incredibly calm, and that’s when he noticed something else dart underneath the water. It was dark and nearly forty feet long.

“Whoa!” Lucius said, as he noticed it too, “What was that?”

The tribesmen in the canoes started murmuring amongst themselves and paddled quicker. Some raised their hands towards the heavens and began to chant at the top of their lungs.

“They saw it too! Was it the *Talon*?” Gabriel shouted, over the cries of the men. Lucius shook his head, “No bubbles coming to the surface. Looked like a whale or something.”

Gabriel nodded, “Yeah, that’s what it looked like. Moved pretty fast for a whale though.”

A few moments later the canoes were approaching the sandy shore on the neighboring island. The tribesmen jumped out of each of the canoes and soon pushed them ashore.

Gabriel and Lucius were each lifted on their wooden spikes and were soon being carried into a dense jungle unaware of the horrors that awaited them.

Jaxon MacDonald slammed on the brakes to the military vehicle and it slid to a halt on the wooden docks of the riverbank. Econ stood on the deck of the *El Dorado*, holding his large machine gun and hurriedly motioning to the members inside the vehicle.

“C’mon!” he shouted, “They don’t have much time!”

Cain’s motorcycle crashed through some trees and landed with a loud thud on the wooden dock. He quickly jumped off and ran towards the boat, followed by Jonathan, MacDonald, Deej, Copernicus and Leyanna.

Econ was already in the main cabin of the ship, starting the engines and within a flash the ship accelerated and headed out to open sea.

On the neighboring island, the cannibal tribesman had now carried Lucius and Gabriel up a rocky cliff. The tribesmen all gathered around the edge of the face and were now looking nearly 60 feet below at a circular grotto where a large dark circle indicated a tremendous depth of water.

“What is that?” Gabriel asked.

“It looks like some sort of underground cave,” Lucius responded.

Several cannibals shook the wooden spike that he was attached to and Lucius quickly silenced himself.

“It looks like they are gonna throw us down there,” Gabriel added.

The sun slowly descended on the horizon and the tribesmen grew hushed.

Moments later they slowly began a soft chanting that soon began to escalate as the moments went on.

“I don’t like the sound of this at all,” Lucius murmured.

He looked below and slowly analyzed how an escape might possibly work. There was nothing but sheer rocks surrounding this large, circular pool. The only source of escape seemed to be at the very bottom of this underwater quarry. Light was shining from the underneath the water and Lucius concluded that it was some sort of underwater passage out to sea. The sunlight was slowly growing dimmer from under the water.

“Well, good luck to you, man. It looks like you’re going first.” Gabriel said, as three armed tribesmen slowly cut the ropes binding Lucius’ fists and pushed him towards the edge of the cliff.

The chanting slowly died down again, but now another sound was echoing across the ocean.

It was a boat engine.

“There they are!” Jonathan shouted on the bow of the *El Dorado*.

The gunboat slowly rounded the point to the island and entered a large, rocky bay.

“The Eye of the Storm!” MacDonald cried from inside the cabin.

“What’s the Eye of the Storm?” Leyanna asked, at his side.

“It’s the sacrificial altar to their water god, the Destroyer of Man!” he responded.

“None of those things sound good,” Cain said.

“What do we do?” Jonathan asked, running back to the door of the cabin.

“I say we fire,” Copernicus said, as he lifted a large mounted shotgun off its place on the wall of the cabin.

“They’ll just kill ‘em then,” MacDonald said, “We won’t have a chance. Then again, if they drop them into that water they don’t have a great chance either.”

“Why,” Leyanna managed, “what’s in the water?”

The tribesmen had clearly seen the *El Dorado* now off of the coast of shore. The rocky cove of the Eye of the Storm was clearly isolated from them thanks to a twenty-foot tall wall of rock, but escape was still a possibility, if Lucius could manage to swim to the murky depths of the Eye and swim out of the small opening in the bottom. He feared that would not be as easy as it sounded. That was a long way down, and a long way back up in a short amount of time. To make matters worse, Lucius could not even tell how deep the quarry was.

“Here goes nothing, kid,” Lucius said to Gabriel, as the tribesmen led him to the edge of the cliff and now held him at spear point. The chanting grew louder and suddenly they reared their spears back and thrust them towards Lucius, who had already jumped over the side.

The cannibals gasped in surprise and watched as Lucius formed the perfect dive into the water some sixty feet below. He broke the surface with a subtle splash and soon was nowhere to be seen.

Lucius opened his eyes under the water and looked about him, noticing another forty feet or so of rock walls surrounding him below the surface. There was no escape except for the small opening that lead out to the bay. This was going to be a chore to get out.

He quickly surfaced again and looked up at the rocky cliff face above him where the tribesmen were now untying Gabriel and pushing him towards the edge. Instantly a barrage of spears were thrown down towards Lucius and he soon realized that under the water was a safer place to be. He drew a huge breath and then submerged again. He pushed himself farther and farther, now nearly ten feet deep when he noticed the floor of this rocky grotto.

It was littered in skeletons.

Hundreds, maybe thousands, of mangled bodies.

It was a graveyard.

He was going to die here.

Lucius, horrified by what he now saw, shot back up to the surface and gasped for air. He looked up just in time to see someone jumping down towards him.

It was Gabriel who was now shouting at the top of his lungs.

He splashed into the water nearly five feet from Lucius, not nearly as gracefully and sent a huge splash into the air.

"Mine was better," Lucius said, as Gabriel came back to the surface.

"They almost knocked me out before they threw me in," Gabriel said. "I had to push a few guys off me before I jumped. I wasn't going for style."

A few more spears were thrown down towards them and, once they missed, the tribesmen atop the cliff shouted even louder.

"We gotta get outta here!" Gabriel spat out, spitting saltwater from his mouth.

"Not as easy as it sounds, kid." Lucius said, "We're only halfway to the bottom of this grotto."

The two cousins submerged again as Gabriel looked at the treacherous garden of bodies below.

They both came back to the surface.

"We aren't ending here, cousin," Gabriel said. "We're gonna dive down to that entryway!"

Lucius shook his head, "I'm gonna go. You stay here, and I'll climb out the other side, and help you up the rock wall."

Gabriel raised his eyebrows, "I don't think that's going to work."

Lucius shouted back, "I'm not gonna have you drown here! The *El Dorado* is on the other side of this wall! They'll help me throw over a cable or something."

More spears splashed down around them, and much more frequently. The screams from the cannibal tribesmen atop the cliff now became incredibly loud.

"We're both gonna die if we don't go for it now," Lucius shrieked.

Gabriel, now unwilling to argue, and realizing that their chances of survival were now incredibly decreasing, took a huge breath and dove below the water.

Lucius followed suit.

The two cousins noticed a rain of spears slowly dropping towards the ocean floor below, where the countless bodies lay.

It was at this point that Lucius dove even farther below, now looking at the top of the passageway out to the bay.

The light in the passageway seemed like a glimmer of hope, and that's when Lucius realized that the glimmer was actually an opened chest of gold treasure that was gleaming the sunlight into the quarry.

Sunken treasure.

Around the treasure were littered remnants of an old wooden ship, probably two or three hundred years old.

If they could get their hands on that, then Lucius would be a real pirate indeed!

But the sunlight glinting off of the treasure was suddenly blocked by an unidentified shape.

And that's when Lucius' darkest nightmares suddenly became a matter of life and death.

It was a rock or something that was now blocking the entrance to the passageway.

Had the cannibals just slid the pathway closed by some underwater gate? No sounds were heard, and that's when Lucius thought that the blockage was not something manmade, but something natural.

And then it moved, and the coloring slowly began to change from black to dark purple.

It was a creature.

Something had literally swam in their path.

The passageway was now completely dark.

Lucius swam closer, and that's when an army of tentacles reached out towards him, each nearly thirty to forty feet long.

It was a *giant* squid.

And within a matter of seconds, it had seized a hold of Lucius and was crushing the life out of him. He felt the pressure of hundreds of plate sized suction cups cover his entire body as one large tentacle wrapped around him in a snakelike fashion. It dropped low towards the old remnants of the wooden ship, and Lucius found himself brushing up against the old wooden hull.

Gabriel floated at a distance, and could not believe the spectacle that now took place in front of his eyes. He hurriedly swam closer to the cave, and soon noticed a chance for freedom as it floated past him.

It was a native spear that had been tossed from the surface. He quickly grabbed hold of it and rushed it over towards the passageway where the creature was now moving out into the quarry.

For Lucius, still in the grasp of the mighty sea creature, time seemed to stand still as he momentarily felt relief of the pressure as the creature slowly began to reach for Gabriel.

The body itself was nearly fifteen or twenty feet long, which made the creature easily sixty feet as it withdrew from the cave below.

It recoiled, and withdrew it's tentacles towards the surface, allowing a brief moment for Lucius to breathe.

He gasped for air, as the tentacle held him high in the air.

The tribesmen above cried out at the spectacle.

Lucius now wrestled with the tentacle, slowly pulling himself away as he quickly swam free towards Gabriel below who was holding tight onto one of the native spears that he had impaled into one large tentacle.

It did nothing to stop the struggle. Lucius dove further as Gabriel darted in the opposite direction, breaking the surface and soon getting caught up in another tentacle.

Lucius, at the bottom of the cove now found something else that peaked his interest. It was an old skeleton, fully decayed, with a large cutlass jabbed into its ribcage and another clasped in its two hundred year old grasp.

Lucius grabbed a hold of the blade in the body's ribcage, and the skeleton crumpled under the sudden movement, freeing the other blade from its position.

Lucius now headed back towards the surface, a cutlass in each hand, to attack the creature that now was grasping his cousin.

Lucius broke the surface again, seizing a huge breath, just quickly enough to see Gabriel be pulled under again.

He slashed at the water, cutting anything that came in his path.

A tentacle was dashed in two and the creature soon realized it was vulnerable, now turning its focus towards Lucius.

Lucius dove again and saw Gabriel fighting for his life in the grasp of the squid.

It slowly was pulling him towards its giant beak, which eagerly anticipated the meal that was only feet away.

But now its large eye shifted towards Lucius who was approaching with the two cutlasses.

The creature let go of Gabriel, and Lucius pushed the extra cutlass towards his cousin, who grabbed it in the water and then turned back towards the creature, who opened his tentacles into an attack position, fully baring its large beak.

The two cousins now attacked the creature at full speed, each slicing away at its tentacles.

Gabriel soon found himself entangled again and soon felt the pressure build around his body.

That's when Lucius dealt the final blow, plunging the cutlass into the creature's right eye.

The squid wriggled in pain, and released Gabriel who instantly swam to the surface to regain his breath. Lucius withdrew the weapon and gashed again at the creature's body as it slowly began to die.

He pulled the cutlass out from the creature's side and then swam towards the surface to join Gabriel; gasping for breath the instant he broke the surface.

The natives were silent as they saw the two now swimming freely down below.

Gabriel could only imagine their view, as they watched this epic underwater battle from their standpoint sixty feet above them.

The two cousins dove again, and watched as this giant leviathan of the deep slowly drifted to the bottom of the rocky cove. It landed amongst the dead bodies, sending a cloud of dirt and bone into the water. Slashed tentacles floated amongst the carcass, and Gabriel and Lucius got a perfect glimpse of the sunken treasure chest below.

They slowed only for a second to admire the wealth below, and then quickly made their way to the other side, racing through the passageway to freedom.

The two cousins broke the surface, gasping for air.

Lucius turned to his cousin, his nose bleeding from the severe pressure.

"Let's get the hell outta here," he managed, still taking in all the air he could.

The *El Dorado* had cast out a safety line and the two quickly grabbed hold, looking back at the rocky cliff where the natives were now chanting and lowering their spears.

"Why don't they attack?" Gabriel asked, as he quickly climbed aboard the ship.

Leyanna raced towards him, embracing him.

"We thought you were dead, kid." MacDonald said as he wrapped the exhausted teenager in a blanket.

"We were. Lucius killed the thing." Gabriel said, as he flopped onto the deck, spitting up salt water from deep within his lungs. He pressed his face into the blanket and sat, exhausted.

Everyone was silent as the boat sped away from the cove. Lucius lay down on the warm metal deck next to his cousin, breathing heavy and enjoying the fact that they both were alive. He wiped the blood from his nose and looked at MacDonald. The old man stammered, "The Destroyer of Man. You killed the Destroyer of Man?"

Lucius vomited sea water onto the deck, "It was a squid. At least fifty feet long." He got to his feet, and picked up one of the cutlasses he had obtained from the watery graves below. Everyone gasped in amazement.

"He was in the passageway we used to escape. I got the impression we weren't the first one's down there," Lucius said.

"There were hundreds of skeletons, maybe thousands," Gabriel said.

"More importantly," Lucius added, "there's a treasure chest. And more important than a chest, I saw gold."

Everyone grew closer.

"Like pirate treasure?" Econ asked.

"I'm talking millions in loot," Lucius said, "spilled out onto the sea floor. We just need to go down and get it, and now that the creature is dead we can go down and get it. It's an old pirate treasure trove. There's more blades like this I'm sure."

MacDonald nodded, "The *Iron Maiden*."

Gabriel and Lucius turned to him.

"She was an old pirate ship that ran aground at the Eye of the Storm. She's been down there ever since, being guarded by that sea demon," MacDonald said.

"Well, the demon's dead." Lucius grinned, "I killed the bastard."

Everyone smiled and nodded.

"I'm proud of you," Gabriel said, getting to his feet and hugging his cousin, "and thanks for saving my life."

Lucius grinned back, "Just remember you owe me one, kid."

Gabriel nodded, "And I'll make it up to you, too. What do you say we go down and get that treasure chest?"

Jonathan beamed like a young child, "Really?"

Gabriel nodded, "Why not? We're pirates!"

The crew began to laugh as Leyanna smiled and wrapped her arms around Gabriel. To them this was a moment to celebrate, but times were only going to become more tough, especially now with their relationship with the South Sea League. And times would continue to change, they all feared, especially with a phantom submarine in their midst.

But those battles would all be fought another day. For now the *El Dorado* sped across the channel and into the river bend as night began to fall, leaving the terrors of the Eyes of the Storm and the Destroyer of Man far behind them.

To be continued...