

The Colonies

Chapter sixteen

The two embarked on their journey, with Jakob closely trailing behind Gabriel's footsteps. They swiftly maneuvered along the edges of buildings, utilizing anything and everything available to them. Jakob was completely absorbed in the moment, as they effortlessly covered a significant portion of the city. Towards the end of their run Gabriel missed a step and Jakob grabbed his arm, saving him from falling off a building.

"I did that on purpose." Gabriel said pretending to shake his fear off, **"Just to see if I could trust you."** Together they both laughed and caught their breath, as they slowed to a walk.

"Look, if you wanna make it here, I've got some advice for you," Gabriel began, **"None of us chose to be stuck here in The Colonies. It's the life we were born into, and it's a messed-up one at that. But here's the thing, I've learned something that most people haven't."**

"What's that?" Jakob asked, intrigued by Gabriel's words.

"I've learned that even in this place, you still have a choice in who you become," Gabriel replied. **"You can either be a puppet, or you can be the puppet master. You can choose to be honest or a liar. It really only matters to you. I've seen all sorts of people here, some with money or without, men surrounded by women. I've seen hard-working family men. And even some people who leave this place and never come back while others stay here forever. So, I know it's possible to get what I want, and I'm on my way there. No one's gonna boss you or me around, but don't expect anyone to show you love here. Everyone wants your spot, which is why it's important to stick with a set. It's the only way real way**

survive. Every day is a challenge, and together, we fight to stay alive. And when the right opportunity presents itself, we'll escape to something better. We're just waiting for that moment."

Jakob was captivated by Gabriel's words. The possibility of choosing his own life is exactly what he wanted but there was still a hint of doubt.

"Why should I trust you?" he asked.

"You don't have to trust me," Gabriel replied confidently. **"I have no reason to lie. I don't need anything from you. But if you want a real chance of making it, stick with us."** Curiosity piqued, Jakob asked, **"What do you mean by 'us'?"**

"I'll introduce you to everyone," Gabriel finished, raising his hand to the side of his mouth and calling out, **"Hootie Hoo!"**

Descending to a lower rooftop, they encountered another boy who held a metallic canister, releasing a spray of paint as he spelled out something on a half-broken brick wall. Gabriel raised his voice, addressing the boy without anticipating a response,

"You're supposed to be observing the mark, not graphing."

"Who's yer man?" The kid came back with a thick accent.

"This is...uhm?" Gabriel turned around and asked Jakob, **"So what are we supposed to call you anyway?"** Jakob thought on his feet and went with what he knew best. What his mom nicknamed him.

"Call me Tato."

Gabriel and the new boy looked back and said together,

“Like a potato?”

“Exactly!” Jakob tried to sound confident.

“Is tis man thick?” The boy finished his artistry and looked back to them. In comparison to both Jakob and Gabriel, this boy appeared younger. His hair was a striking shade of orangish yellow and was slicked back.

“Well Tato this is Jeremey, but we call him Jerms. He’s mostly unpleasant but you get used to him after a while.”

“What are you guys doing?” Jakob asked.

“Shh get down!” Jerms said fiercely.

Gabriel and Jakob both quickly lowered next to Jerms, peaking their heads slightly over the edge to see down to the streets below. A short man exited a building with two men that closely followed behind. Despite his smaller stature in comparison to the other men, this man had undeniable authority, leaving no doubt that he was the one in charge. Dressed in a tailored suit he stood out from the crowd. The suit was unlike anything Jakob had ever seen before, intricate details and crafted from luxurious fabrics that hinted at his status and influence. His square jaw and sharply defined facial features seemed chiseled as if they could effortlessly slice through steel. It was clear that this man was not to be underestimated. The man rubbed his hands together like he was plotting something, just before another man approached him and handed him a small package, shaking his hand before he continued up the street in different direction.

“Who is that?” Jakob asked quietly.

Jerms looked back at Jakob with an expression of annoyance, like Jakob should have known the answer. Gabriel answered instead.

“That’s Andretti Gamboa, Foreman of The Families and it looks like he met with a local Wardman to grease his palm.”

By the look of it Jerms could tell Jakob didn’t understand what they were talking about.

“He gave him some currency you bleedin eejit.” Jerms scolded him.

“Yeah, yeah, I knew that. But why are you guys watching him?” Jakob pretended to know.

“That’s what we are paid to do. There are Seventeen Wards throughout The Colonies, every day we go to each Ward. We are paid to watch, to listen and feed the information to the most willing buyer, sometimes we get paid with food, sometimes we get currency. It’s how we earn our scratch. And by the looks of it Mr. Gamboa is either going to a wedding or a funeral.” Gabriel explained.

“Ah, sure and we've got ourselves one more place to visit before we head back to the gaff. Mind you don't be lagging behind now, TATO.” Jerms said trying to make fun of his name.

While running south, Jakob asked about their destination. Gabriel told him that they were headed towards the Docks, which served as a gathering spot for the criminal underworld. Deep down, Jakob knew that's where Gary would likely be. However, he felt uncertain about what course of action he would take. He found himself drawn to these new companions, who seemed to lead an

adventurous life, free from constraints. Yet, he couldn't forget his primary objective of finding Gary.

“But what did that crazy old man really know.” Jakob lied to himself, battling with what he was going to do. As the sun began its descent, casting a glow over the docks, the trio of boys cautiously made their way towards their destination. They made their way through the narrow alley, next to a building that had a tattered sign proclaiming it as **“poison ‘āpala ”**.

Outside the pub, a row of roughly fifteen rovers were neatly arranged in a perfect line. However, these rovers differed from the sleek and polished ones Jakob had encountered before. Instead, they appeared to have been assembled from various discarded parts, giving them a gritty and makeshift appearance. Once in alley, they climbed up to the back side of the building to help lift each other up to the roof.

“Alright Tato, we are meeting up with a few of our friends, but remember we are trying to learn all the information we can to report back, don’t get distracted like this guy.” Gabriel said elbowing Jerms. Jakob followed the two boys in a small entrance on the roof, they crawled on their chests till they came out to another opening, it was a small attic like room that was built hidden behind rafters. There were several small holes that allowed the boys to see down into the room below.

“What are we listening for?” Jakob asked looking into the first peep hole.

“Ah, bloody hell, would ya quiet down now!” Jerms looked back, putting his finger over his mouth.

“My bad.” Jakob mouthed.

“Don’t listen to him, he’s just messing with you.” Gabriel chuckled and Jermis smiled.

"If we don't talk crap to, ya, that means we don't like ya. Simple as that, mate."
Jermis finished.

Jakob felt like he was beginning to fit in, maybe he found where he was supposed to be all along. The adventure gripped him. He looked down into the room below, there was an extended round table and man behind it handing out drinks to several men sitting around with a few women sitting on their laps, further out there were some individual tables and booths that people were sitting around eating and drinking. He was hoping he would see some pirates, but he couldn't really tell the difference between any of the people, and he couldn't really hear any conversations, it was so loud. At the back part of the room there was a crowd of men huddled up in circle yelling and screaming holding their hands up in the air, like some commotion was going on.

“Come this way you got to check this out.” Gabriel said as they headed through another passage. They exited to another room, with an opening where close to ten boys were standing looking down below where the commotion was coming from.

“GD!” A boy wearing a flat cap said with a huge smile, throwing his arms up with excitement.

“Rico!” Gabriel replied before he shook his hand and hugged him. The boy with the cap put his arm over Gabriel shoulder as they walked forward towards the edge. Jakob followed closely behind trying to hear what they were talking about.

“I just won three crowns off Smiffy on the last Roshambo, bets are going up today.” Rico said with enthusiasm.

“What’s Ro Sham Bo?” Jakob asked.

“Oh, Rico this is Tato, he’s rolling with us now.”

Rico looked at Jakob up and down, reluctant to shake his hand.

“You want to place a bet?”

“He’s new to the city, don’t get him hooked yet Rico.” Gabriel intervened, continuing to introduce Rico, **“This is Rico he’s our gambling man. Dice games, rat fights, Roshambo, basically he’s the man around the Wards, or should I say kid.”**

“Shut up fat boy. I just organize and collect.” Rico interrupted, rubbing his thumb and index finger together.

“He’s got his finger in absolutely everything, you name it he’s trying to throw some money in it. The big leagues keep kicking him out cause he’s too young.”

“One day ima take all their money and own all the ships in the port, you watch.” Rico said confidently.

“So, what’s Roshambo?” Jakob asked.

“Take a look.” Gabriel moved several kids out of the way, to make room for Jakob to look down. His face immediately lit up with excitement. Two men were locked in hand-to-hand combat in the middle of a circle ring that were surrounded by hay. Many people were standing around yelling as the two men were beating each other half to death. The men had wrappings from their hands to their elbows that were once white but now a deep red from the

blood. Pools of a mixture of sweat and blood dripped on the floor. It was captivating, it drew Jakob all the way in. Voices could be heard all around yelling, coaching the fighters.

“Beautiful shots, beautiful knee to the body!”

“Inside, get inside!”

“Fake the kick. Lean off the angle, Hit him with a counter!”

“Back up, back up, get in a pattern!”

The two men traded kicks and punches.

“Fake the overhand right and follow with the left hook!”

“Let me see another elbow!”

“That’s what it’s about, put leather on him, keep putting that leather on him!”

Jakob followed every movement with his eyes, several rounds went by, and he was fixated. If only he had some currency, he wanted to join Rico in taking bets. Finally, one of the men won the fight and Jakob was tapped on the shoulder by Gabriel, motioning him to come over. Once Jakob got close, Gabriel leaned into his ear whispering.

“Don’t get distracted by the entertainment, the real information is with these people.”

Gabriel pointed over the two men in booths having secret conversations, just as he began to tune into the conversations, a hooded man walked in the pub. No one seemed to notice at first but once he threw his hood back, everyone stopped, and the room went quiet. Several men if not all the men stood up, fuming with rage.

“F*ck Twelve!

“Get out of here Twelve!”

“You don’t belong here Twelve.” Was heard all around from different voices. The man who entered the room, donned a long-sleeved coat resembling councilmen Angel Espina. However, his attire differed as it was a deep burgundy. Notably, he sported the same sturdy black boots that grazed just below his knees, suggesting a uniformity among those who held sway over the city. GD briefly explained that the Twelves Militia men as they were known were the policing force of The Colonies. Jakob couldn’t shake the memory of the guards who had pursued him just three days earlier. However, this man opted for a long black trench coat, complete with hood, seemingly shrouding his true identity from prying eyes. It didn’t work well here.

“Dead man walking. You need to leave here Twelve.” One man stepped out in front of him and put his hand out.

“My name is not Twelve, you know who I am. I’m David Chavo. And last time I checked a man has a right to LUXORY.” The man finished loudly, looking all around, continuing, **“The LUXORY of land, the LUXORY of the sea and the LUXORY of women. I am here to enjoy my LUXORY FRIEND!”**

More men begin to walk towards him, pulling out knives, holding their waistbands where they were strapped with choppers and cutlasses. Suddenly there were two large bangs from a cup slamming on a table. All eyes fixed on the solitary figure situated in the dimly lit booth causing a momentary pause. Gradually emerging from the shadows, the man strode purposefully, commanding attention with imposing presence. Clad in a leather coat, accompanied by a matching black leather tunic and a crisp white shirt beneath. Adding a touch of flair, a

vibrant blue handkerchief decked his neck. Yet, it was the glint of a gold hoop earring and a sizeable gold ring adorning his index finger that captured Jakobs attention.

“It’s him!” Jakob said to himself.

“Those words are only for the true brethren of the south. You are no longer that.” The man said to David as he got closer.

“Let me at him Gar, I’ll take him out.” A shaved headed guy yelled out, as a few others held him back.

“Gary!” Jakob found the man he was looking for, and he was impressed so far.

“Calm down Art. This man knows he switched to the other side. He’s more worthless than a five-cut jezebel.” Gary finished and the whole room burst into laughter, even some of the kids that Jakob stood next to were dying of laughter. The two men stood face to face.

“I did my time Gar. I went to The Pin. I am here to help now.” David pleaded his case, but Gary wasn’t hearing any of it.

“What do we say boys.” Gary lifted his arms.

“The only good Twelve is a dead one!” Everyone yelled in one accord.

“You’re the one who told me, that you can’t influence a table you don’t sit at. This was my only way out, I didn’t rat. I did my time, and this was my freedom. Now I can make changes for all of us.”

“Take your freedoms, but you have no right to LUXORY in our company.” Gary turned to walk away.

“I came to warn you, The Convent plans to destabilize everyone, the Syndicate, the Pirates, the Street-Gangs, and the Outlaws. Everyone that’s connected will be put down.” David confessed.

“They’ve tried it before, and they’ll try it again. We survive. Leave.” Gary said unfazed, taking a drink as he sat down back at his booth. David turned to walk out the door, unfortunately someone threw a bottle, and it cracked against his back.

“You want your luxury Chavez. I’ll give it to you. I challenge you to Roshambo.” The shaved head man yelled, and the place went wild, all except Gary, he didn’t pay any attention.

“Fellas, I’ve got the info that we came here for, let’s get back now.” Gabriel said to all the boys.

"Dude, I really want place a bet on this fight," Rico exclaimed

“You can stay if you want but we are taking the new recruit to the gaff.”

Gabriel and Rico shared a secret handshake, and then Jerms and Smiffy joined them as they swiftly made their way out through the same passages they had come from.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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