

Pirates

Chapter Twenty

"What in the bollocks are they making us do this fo? I mean, seriously, mate? This is a load of rubbish. I've got better things to do with my time than waste it on this nonsense."

Jerms complained loud enough for everyone to hear. Although the noise fell on deaf ears, the boys were used to his complaining by now. Jakob, Smiffy, Gabriel and Jerms were knee deep in filth. The floorboards of the entire ship looked timeworn, as if they carried the stories of countless voyages, each weathered plank with a sense of history and adventure. Hints of moss intertwined with the wood, seeming to embrace the seafaring spirit. As you make your way into the depths of the ship, an unpleasant odor hit your nostrils. The smell, like the most repulsive variety of rotten toe cheese, lingered like an unwelcome guest. The work was difficult, but Jakob thrived.

"The chance to become a pirate." He thought to himself.

Several days had passed on the journey to the Southern Islands, the true home of The Cree Nation. The Cree go by many names in the south, Privateers, Filthy Pirates, Brethren of the Islands, The True Cree, Sea Thieves, and some not so other nice words to add on to the list. On the mainland, The Cree Aristocrats, were essential to the development of The Republic and had large stake of power in The Colonies, but the brethren of the islands are those who have a long bloody history of violence told throughout Hyperion waters. Some great deeds and some terrible, depending on who was telling the story. Jakob loved every bit of that history. However, the journey so far aboard the pirate ship wasn't exactly what he was expecting. From the jump they were taught how to operate and live aboard a ship. Jakob picked it up the fastest and Gary kept

him close at hand allowing him in the captains quarters, which was the nicest part of the ship. On the other hand, Smiffy and Jerms had a tough time adjusting their sea legs, throwing up several times. As for Gabriel he fared decently alongside Jakob.

"I want to be a bloody pirate, fightin' to the death! Not cleanin' and pickin' up like some wench. I've got the heart of a warrior, not a maid. Give me a sword and a ship, and I'll show you what a true fighter can do on the high seas. I'll plunder and pillage like no other and make ma mark in history as the most feared pirate of all time." Jerms continued complaining.

"Quiet down cabin bo, or no grog for ya later." Jerms found himself on the receiving end of a scolding from a middle-aged man, whose round physique and lack of hair gave him a distinct appearance. Sporting a monocle that covered one eye, this man, named Danny made sure his disapproval was clearly known. He was the Carpenter of the ship. He was typically in charge of cleaning and maintenance. However, since the boys joined the crew Danny enthusiastically made them do all his work. For the most part Danny sat around drinking his grog, falling asleep only to wake up when he heard footsteps and proceeded to yell at the boys to make it look like he was doing something.

"Why are you wearing that stupid eye patch and earring Smiffy?" Gabriel asked, eyeing his new wardrobe. He had an old crusty brown eye patch on his left eye, and one small golden stud in his ear.

"This foo toll me, it supposed to help the eye get used to seein roun in the dark and the earrings will help with me with my balance, so I don't keep throwing up." Smiffy responded trying to sound like he knew what he was talking about. Jerms just gave a look of disgust

shaking his head. As much work as they had done, Jakob was still enjoying himself, he was used to being up early in the mornings and getting right to some kind of training back home. For the boys it was a change, back in The Colonies they never had a schedule, they were so used to being able to do what they wanted, and the transition was rough. The day would typically start with getting straight to scrubbing floorboards of any kind. The brig, the hold, the ammunition stores, the Rover stores, and the rum stores where they snuck a few sips. As much as the ship was magnificent, it was still old and mucky, and they had to clean it no matter if it truly ever got in better shape. Everyday Gary reminded them, **“Daily work builds character.”**

After spending a considerable amount of time scrubbing each day, Jakob was pulled aside by Gary and Tedrick, the navigator, who had a specific task for him. They needed him to help them chart maps of the various islands and waters of Hyperion. During this task, Jakob discovered that there were thirteen islands to the south that were controlled by the Cree. However, the main stronghold of the Cree was located on two major islands known as The Cree Quarter and Independence Island. It was interesting to learn that the True Cree were once the most prosperous nation in Hyperion, but due to internal conflicts and betrayals, their power had significantly diminished. Meanwhile, the other boys had their own assigned duties, with Jerms being responsible for cleaning the weapons aboard the ship. Jerms was naturally inclined to learn everything he could about fighting. He had a raw spirit for violence, he even let the men hit his stomach with the dull flat side of a blade to test his strength, and the crew loved it. Smiffy, a ladies man, of course took to the only women aboard the ship, Meena Flores the masterful Chef and Surgeon and whose unique talents had garnered attention from rival pirate factions, constantly fighting for her recruitment. Interestingly, Meena had a twin sister who served on a separate pirate crew. Smiffy thought he was going to razzle and dazzle her, but he quickly

learned that she was as tough as nails. To his disappointment Smiffy was put to work in her company, but he would come back every day talking about how he knew she wanted him. Jerms would of course make fun of him.

Gabriel's day would look different every day, he was in a new part of the ship regularly looking for things to pick up on. He tried to learn as much as he could to keep up with Jakob. Gabriel was great at finding new information, just like how he lived in The Colonies. Every night when the boys would go back to their quarters to sleep, he would come back with a new discovery. Throughout his day, Gabriel diligently gathered as much information as possible about the crew, his keen eye picking up on subtle details. He discovered valuable insights, such as the fact that Gary Cornegay held the esteemed position of Captain for the notorious Men of Mayhem, a title that had been passed down through the ages. Tedrick Simko, the Navigator, hailed from a proud lineage of Cree ancestry, tracing back to a time long before the formation of the five nations. Art Markez, known as the Enforcer, served as Gary's unwavering bodyguard. The man whom Jerms admired above all others, the Master Gunner Larry Cleghorne, had once been an esteemed Marshal in the eastern territories, until his life was saved by Gary during a treacherous encounter with outlaws. Other notable members included two younger men Darrel Chamberlain, Gary's trusted first mate and the resident musician aboard the ship, Bobby Amaya, the meticulous Treasurer responsible for managing the crew's financial affairs, and the oldest man on the crew, Dukes, the skilled trail gunner who worked closely with Larry and hired any skeleton crew needed to man the ship. However, one position remained vacant, that of the War-Chief. Formerly held by David Chavo, the crew fell silent whenever his name was mentioned, refusing to divulge any information despite Gabriels persistent attempts to uncover the truth. Several other crew members awaited their return at their home saloon.

After the end of the workday or night depending on how long they would work, Gary would call the whole crew to the table and have dinner prepared for the whole crew to sit down together and eat. As everyone walked in Gary held a piece of bread that each man and women would tear a small piece off before they sat down. The food wasn't all that great, they had bone soup, made from sea turtles, pickled eggs, black beans, and salted beef. It wasn't a kings feast, but everyone had their filling. At dinner is where Jakobs' thoughts on pirates changed the most. Jakob had immersed himself in his youth in the tales of pirates found within the pages of history books. The stories were filled with excitement and adventure, but they often painted pirates in a negative light. According to popular assumptions and even historical accounts, pirates were depicted as wicked, improper, unclean, and foul-smelling individuals. However, as Jakob got to know the crew better, he realized that these labels didn't hold true for the Men of Mayhem. Yes, each member had their unique quirks, some even bordering on crazy, and it couldn't be denied that a few of them had an unpleasant odor about them. Nevertheless, Gary, the captain, commanded a level of respect and upheld a certain standard among his crew. He even slapped Jerm's hand when tried to grab some food before everyone sat down. After dinner was done most of the men would retire to their quarters, but Jakob and Gabriel would sneak up to the main deck where a few of the crew would sit around and tell stories of their adventures and even some essentials of the life of the pirates. They even let them have a sip of the grog, a drink made of old rum, cinnamon, and lemon juice.

Darrel, Bobby, and Dukes gathered on the ship's deck, engaging in a night of gambling that would stretch until the break of dawn. Tonight, they had new companions in Gabriel and Jakob, who were eager to learn the ropes. The men decided to introduce them to a game called Bones, which involved small tiles with numbers. After several rounds of the game, they moved

on to a daring display of skill known as five finger fillets, where a knife was expertly maneuvered between splayed fingers on a table. Remarkably, no one had lost a finger yet, according to the seasoned gamblers. Dukes, a master storyteller, entertained the group with tales of their adventures on the high seas. He would always begin with the phrase,

"We sailed under the banner of king death." His stories often involved gruesome acts of violence, such as cutting out an enemy's heart and devouring it or dragging a cheating man behind the ship by a rope. Darrel interjected, reminding everyone of the circumstances that led Dukes to their crew.

"Lord have mercy on his soul," Darrel exclaimed, **"This man ended up here because he squandered all his currency on women and cheap ale."**

The men reveled in laughter, their hearts overflowing with the joy of the present moment. Dukes would occasionally share nuggets of wisdom with the children, even if they couldn't fully comprehend it.

"In the wild, Sharks don't prey on the unlucky fish. They target the weak ones," he would say, imparting his half-chewed advice. The banter continued throughout the night, with Bobby chiming in to remind them all of the importance of piracy in history.

"Piracy was once a respectable profession," Bobby declared. **"The world wouldn't have been discovered without us, and they must never forget it. The mainland was built on pirate money. They need us."**

Bobby went on to explain the various lucrative activities that the Men of Mayhem engaged in, from the booming tech trade to the profitable businesses of women trade, food trade, bootlegging, commercial transportation, protection rackets, gambling rackets, and theft rackets.

He made it clear, however, that there were certain activities the crew opposed, such as kidnapping, distributing calcite dust, or cooperating with the Twelves or Convent. Jakob and Gabriel listened intently, their eyes wide and their ears open, absorbing every bit of wisdom the experienced pirates had to offer. What Jakob appreciated the most was the fact that they were treated as equals, not mere children. The harsh realities of life were not sugar-coated or hidden from them, only the truth was told. Though they had their daily duties and responsibilities, they were respected as men, as equals, despite their youth.

“You can’t be a child and adult at the same time.” Dukes continued his advice.

Finally, after the drink was gone and the stories were done, Gabriel and Jakob went down to the crew quarters where they slept in hammocks hanging from the ceiling. Smiffy and Jerms were still awake.

"Yo, you think it's gon be like this once we hit them Southern Islands? I mean, like damn, all we been doin is grindin' and hustlin'. I thought bein pirates meant livin the lavish life, swimmin in doubloons and surrounded by baddies. But so far, they ain't even spillin' the beans on what's goin' down when we finally reach land." Smiffy complained.

“I really don’t know, but it’s better than being back in the Hoods getting taken in by Twelves.” Gabriel and Smiffy went back and forth. Jakob remained quiet. He knew that tomorrow was the last day of sailing, they would arrive in the south by nightfall. He was eager to get there just like the boys, however he didn’t say anything, he remained inside his head. Jakob always wanted to live a pirate life, and this was his real shot to make his own choices and chart his own course. He fell asleep carving the board just above where he slept. Thoughts of sword fighting, and Rover riding swirled in his mind’s eye till he faded to black.

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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