

# **Man in the Mirror**

## Chapter 22

Seven Year's Later

In a dimly lit room, sunbeams filtered through the crevices of the windows. A man stirs from his slumber, stretching his limbs as he rises from the bed. Beside him, a woman lies peacefully, her naked form partially concealed beneath the sheets. Her long deep brown hair lay across her bare chest, offering a glimpse of her body. Her eyes reminded him of a girl he wished he could forget. The man, moved slowly towards a sink on the far side of the room, twisting the knob to release cold water. He washed his face, and a rejuvenating sensation awakened him, meeting his reflection in the mirror. A familiar face it seems. His features are chiseled, showing a rugged charm. A strong jawline frames his face, giving him an appearance of determination and defiance. His blonde hair falls just below his ears, as he brushes it back, two gold hoop earrings hang from his ears. He reached for a small glass filled with a fiery amber rum, swirling it around in his mouth before swallowing. A searing sensation burns his throat as it goes down. He looks back to the mirror, staring as if he no longer recognizes the person he sees. His brows are strong and well-defined, his nose is straight and masculine, it has likely seen its fair share of brawls, but his most striking feature, his piercing grey eyes. They are intense, with a hint of sadness and weariness, as if he has seen and experienced more than his fair share of hardships. Despite those hardships, there is still a glimmer of hope in his eyes. His reflection is of the man he has become, and the struggles he continues to face as he navigates his treacherous world. His thoughts flowed from his mother to his crew and back to his father.

**“Is this what the King of Legion, The Gaudian, Jakob Stryder has become?”** The voice inside his heart spoke but it only lasted for a second. Jakob could easily ignore the voice

inside. The passing years had toughened him, numbing his mind to any thoughts that didn't push him forward. He no longer questioned who he was. He had fully embraced the darkness within. Jakob walked towards a door that led outside. Beyond the door was a balcony, offering a view of a sprawling cityscape, The Frontier of the East it seemed, the Harbor of Hopewell in sight. Jakob stood tall over the edge, with a powerful presence that demanded respect. His muscular build spoke of strength, several tattoos and scars over his body told the stories of what happened to Jakob since the last time we saw him, a little more than seven years ago. His scars showed his experiences, losses, and triumphs that have shaped him into the man he has become. The pirate life changed him. This was no long Jakob Stryder but Tato, second in command, the War-Chief of The Men of Mayhem. As Jakob was about to light his cigar, loud banging came from the door within the room. Startled, the girl woke up and quickly covered herself with the sheets.

**"Lexi!"** a voice shouted from outside the door.

**"Lexi? Who's Lexi?"** Jakob asked, entering the room in confusion.

**"That's me!"** the girl replied with an attitude, sitting up with the blankets wrapped around her.

**"I thought your name was Macy,"** Jakob said, puzzled about how he ended up here.

**"You jerk!"** The girl threw a pillow at him. **"My brothers are here, and they'll kill you,"** she warned.

**"You sure about that?"** Jakob hastily gathered his belongings, managing to put on his boots just before the door was kicked down. Three men stood in the doorway, brandishing machetes.

**"How many brothers do you have?"** Jakob asked.

**"Seven."**

The first man approached fast, and Jakob landed a right hook that sent him to sleep. The other two men hesitated, debating whether they wanted to meet the same fate. They reached for their choppers in their waistbands. Realizing the situation had changed, Jakob bolted toward the balcony with only half his clothes on.

**"Send for me!"** Jakob heard the girl call out as he jumped off the balcony, landing on the stone gravel below and rolling to his feet. The chase began. The two men followed to the balcony, but they chose to take the stairs when they realized they were three stories high, giving Jakob a head start. He swiftly maneuvered through the bustling streets, filled with people going about their morning routines, scummy dice games in the alleys, and even passing by several moving Rovers. His free running skill had far surpassed what he once was, he moved like a shadow gliding, performing feats the average person couldn't. However, as he hit a corner, there were several Twelves Militiamen on patrol and he stepped back trying to cut to a different route, but then he unexpectedly collided with someone. The food the woman was carrying crashed to the ground, splattering them both. Jakob looked up, ready to defend himself, but he was taken aback by the breathtaking beauty of the woman before him. His demeanor quickly changed.

**"I apologize, miss. It was my fault,"** he tried to smile and make eye contact, but she reacted differently than he expected.

**"What the heck, man!"** the fiery girl demanded, pushing Jakob back. **"Hey, I said I was sorry, girl. Who woke up on the wrong side of the deck?"**

**"What did you say?"** The girl raised her hand to slap him. Despite his intention not to react, Jakob's instincts kicked in, and he blocked the slap.

**"Oh, really?"** The girl attempted other moves, but Jakob effortlessly countered and evaded each one until he grabbed her from behind to restrain her.

**"Calm down, miss. You're absolutely beautiful, and I'd love to stay here and chat, but I can't."** Jakob glanced up and noticed the brothers finally catching up and taking notice of him. The girl continued to struggle to break free.

**"If you ever want to see me again, I'll be in the Quarter,"** Jakob said, kissing the girl on the cheek and pushing her toward the men chasing him before taking off again. Just as he started running, a thought struck him.

**"No, it can't be. That would be impossible."** The girl's presence reminded him of someone, and he felt a flicker where his heart used to be, but he pushed the feelings aside. Knowing the rooftops would be his best escape route, Jakob swiftly maneuvered through the alleys, drawing the three men behind him. With a series of agile movements, he jumped from wall to ledge, effortlessly pulling himself up. The men were left behind, unable to follow his path. Turning around to taunt them, Jakob said with a mischievous smile,

**"I told your sister I was heading west, and she wanted to give me something to remember her by."**

**"We'll get you!"** they shouted in response.

Jakob laughed and suddenly two more of the girl's brothers appeared. Jakob narrowly dodged a blow, but stumbled and fell to the ground, causing one of the men to trip over him. Quickly

getting back on his feet, Jakob sprinted away with the remaining brother close on his heels. Jakob's agility and skills allowed him to perform daring feats, but his pursuer persisted. Eventually, Jakob reached a gap between two buildings that no ordinary person could jump. He decided to stop and bait his follower. Making the jump, Jakob landed smoothly, but his pursuer attempted the same leap and fell to his fate. As Jakob descended to the ground, the brothers were relentless in their pursuit. Their determination was admirable, but Jakob knew he had the upper hand. He darted through the streets; his pirate crew was waiting just around the way. It was time to have a little fun. With a playful grin, Jakob turned a corner and vanished from sight. The brothers came to an abrupt halt, momentarily puzzled. The youngest brother peeked around cautiously, only to be met with Jakob charging towards him on Stang, smacking him on the head with a bag of flour that exploded everywhere, causing him to collapse to the ground. Jakob chuckled to himself,

**"Now there's only two brothers left."** He had more tricks up his sleeve. He approached a large crowd gathered around what appeared to be a race, forcing him to jump from the Stang. Jakob maneuvered through the people, with the two remaining brothers catching up to him, but he was prepared. Today was the annual bull race. Jakob leaped over the barrier, skillfully dodging the charging bulls. Unaware of their surroundings, the brothers closed in and found themselves in a dangerous situation. One of the men was charged directly by a bull, catapulting him into a fruit stand, causing apples to fly in all directions. The remaining brother, now a bit more cautious due to the absurd circumstances, pressed on, determined to catch Jakob. However, Jakob had reached his destination. Seven of his crew members sat on their Rovers at the edge of the docks, with an empty Rover in the middle. Jakob slowed down.

**"Are ya done, mate?"** Jerms asked, still as annoyed with Jakob as ever.

His pirate crew had witnessed his antics throughout the streets and were thoroughly entertained. They met him, ready to ride out. Bobby Amaya, the crew's treasurer, handed Jakob his Cut. It was no longer battered and stale, it was now a thick, crisp black leather cut. The bold emblems of the Men of Mayhem gleamed on the back as he draped it over his bare chest. Jakob turned to face the brothers chasing him who had finally regrouped.

**"Wait, wait,"** one of the brothers held them back, finally realizing who they had been chasing.

**"That's Tato, of the Men of Mayhem. We should leave this alone."** Jakob looked back at them with a playful smile, Jakob tilted his head.

**"It seems like the chase has come to an end, my friends,"** he said, a mischievous sparkle in his eyes. **"But don't worry, I'll be sure to send you a postcard from my next adventure."** With a final wave, Jakob revved his Rover with a loud rumble and led his crew away.

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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*Cover Design By – Castillo Collective Inc.*

*Published by – The Art of Reign Productions Inc.*

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