

48 Hours 211

Chapter 211: Celebration

Black Prince Sam assigned a dozen pirates that could swim well to dive to the spot where the Spanish treasure ship sank. Soon, the divers managed to discover where they stored the gold bars. The next problem that needed solving was how they could salvage the ingots from the bottom of the sea. The crates were located half a nautical mile from the coastline at a depth of about 20 meters.

Such depths were close to the limits a human could dive. It wasn't just the oxygen starvation, but the water pressure would increase every ten meters. If they continued venturing deeper, the pressure would cause them to suffer from nitrogen narcosis and oxygen poisoning, which could be fatal.

Zhang Heng vaguely remembered that the deepest a human ever attempted to dive without the assistance of equipment was about 40 meters. He was puzzled as to how the person managed to achieve such a superhuman feat. People like Black Prince Sam and his allies all grew up right next to the sea. Most of them were sons of fishermen, and from a young age, they were already natural swimmers and divers.

Having said that, the divers were forced to resurface the moment they laid their eyes on the crates that contained the gold bars. Only one person amongst them managed to dive to where the boxes were and retrieved a dislodged gold bar.

"It appears that we're going to be on this island for some time," said Black Prince Sam.

Despite the losses the pirates sustained, their hunting trip was considered an enormous success. A total of 5,000 pounds of gold divided among six ships would see every single pirate returning to Nassau with a tremendous amount of wealth.

Apart from the gold, the Spanish ship was hauling a shipment of tobacco as well. Unfortunately, the dried leaves became useless the moment they hit the water. Despite Brook suffering the most damage in this battle, he was happy with the results. The extra 50% of the loot he would receive meant he could fix his ship and even compensate those who were wounded during the battle. And even after everything was settled, he would still walk away pocketing a large sum of money.

Everyone was envious of Zhang Heng and the Jackdaw's luck. Although he and Brook were both chosen as bait, the enemies, unfortunately, decided to focus fire on the Swordfish instead of the Jackdaw. It was all because the Swordfish looked to be the weaker of the two. After two rounds of bombardment, the Jackdaw received no further damage. When the Spanish convoy of three fell into their trap, Zhang Heng waited until the four pirate ships attacked them before joining the battle. Amid the cacophony of artillery, the three Spanish vessels weren't bothered to deal with the Jackdaw anymore.

When the Jackdaw played the bait, Zhang Heng made the right decision by taking every random opportunity that came to avoid taking as much damage as possible. Not only did he manage to confuse the enemies, but it also allowed the Swordfish to retreat. If Zhang Heng didn't stall the Spanish, Brook and his men would have ended up at the bottom of the ocean.

Brook was extremely grateful for Zhang Heng's assistance, going up to him and thanking him personally when they were all on Parrot Island. Before this, Zhang Heng had spoken little to Brook, though, having

heard of his name before. Other than his notorious reputation in Nassau, he was one of the captains that vouched for Zhang Heng to join the meeting. To Zhang Heng's surprise, he discovered that Brook wasn't as aloof as he seemed to be after talking to him. He was actually quite talkative.

During the meeting for the battle, Brook barely said a word. Zhang Heng thought that it must be Brook's nature to stay quiet, but as it turned out, he was wrong about him.

"I'm sorry. I'm not trying to offend anyone here, but I have some beef with Dynamite Jarvis."

Dynamite Jarvis, captain of the Warrior, was also one of the captains that vouched for Zhang Heng. Sam had once told him about wanting to utilize this trip to solve a longstanding conflict between his two friends. It was now apparent that Sam referred to Brook and Jarvis. None would have thought that they would both clash again amid a critical operation.

"I have been friends with Jarvis for decades. I knew him long before I knew Sam. About two months ago, I received a precious lead. A slave-trading ship departed Africa and was heading towards Boston, carrying a decent amount of cargo. Most of the slaves on board were teenagers no older than 18 or 19. They were of good health and had all their teeth intact. I brought someone with me to check on the route this ship would take.

"Just as I was close to my target, a group of unknown people came out of nowhere and disrupted my plan! So, I sent someone to talk to them. Unfortunately, they were in no mood to talk. In the end, they killed the people I sent to negotiate with them! As if that weren't enough, they wanted to attack my ship as well! Luckily, we were fast enough to flee.

"When I think about it again, I believe the group of people had been waiting to ambush me. That was how I knew that it was no coincidence. Someone wasn't happy with me. However, I only talked to Jarvis before I set sail. So, I confronted him when I returned to Nassau. Unsurprisingly, he strongly denied all my accusations. He was furious, and he told me that I should never doubt him. At that time, I felt guilty that perhaps, I could have wronged him. After that, I assigned someone to dig deeper into this matter, and I found out that he had secretly left Nassau the night before I set sail! He also didn't leave with his own ship."

"So, this is the conflict, huh?"

"I just don't understand why he would do something like this to me. We have been friends for a long time. It doesn't matter anymore... I'm done thinking about it. I promised Sam that I won't harm him in any way. It's just that... from today onward; he is just another stranger to me."

"Ah. You guys are here. Our luck just gets better! Ball found some wild goat, rabbits, and other animals on the island. I think we are going to have a feast tonight! There's quite a bit of rum left on the ship as well. Sam suggested that we should start a bonfire to celebrate our success. We are now the first pirates to rob a Spanish treasure ship!" Eric exclaimed with enthusiasm.

"Celebrate? Now? The gold bars are still at the bottom of the sea," Zhang Heng replied.

"Yes, but it's not like they'll run away, eh? Don't worry. We will find a way to bring them all up. Do you have any food on your ship? You can contribute to the celebration as well," said Eric while patting Zhang Heng's shoulder.

"I can provide 30 barrels of rum and some fresh lemons."

"Great. I will ask someone to go fishing. We can use your lemons for the garnish. Sinks the stench, I say."

"All of you can see that I have nothing left on the ship," said Brook.

"It's ok. Captain Sam has solved the problem. Maybe you can thank Jarvis later. I heard that he's willing to give you a third of his supplies."

"Did he volunteer, or did Captain Sam make him?"

"Would there be a difference? Be the bigger man here, Brook. That incident is ancient history! Are you still going to dwell on it? You'll recoup all your losses the moment we get our hands on the gold."

Brook harrumphed and didn't say a word after that.

Chapter 212: Missing Harry

"Just great! I hid with a pile of potatoes during my very first sea battle. All I heard was a couple of cannons being fired, and everything was over before I knew it. Now that everyone is celebrating the victory by having a feast, I have to stay here to cook for them."

Harry complained while roasting the skewered whole goat over a flame.

"Didn't you just eat two pieces of baked fish to stop your hunger?" said Ramsay while rubbing spices onto the roasting lamb.

"That's different. Eating alone and celebrating with them are two different things. Damn it! I want to celebrate the victory with them too."

Harry watched the pirates having fun, and he became envious of them. He heard Ramsay's reminder when he turned around.

"Turn it over!"

Harry snapped out of it and turned the lamb around. Beside him, Ramsay was taking his time, dutifully sprinkling spices all over the meat.

"Mr. Ramsay, did you hear that the gold bars are at the bottom of the sea now? I think it's not too far away from us."

"So what?"

"Don't you want to check it out? I have never seen so many gold bars in my entire life! It would be nice if I can get at least two of them."

"Better scrap that idea, mate. There are patrols around the area all the time. The captains have agreed that they would assign someone to guard the spot every two hours to prevent the gold bars from being stolen. Didn't you wish to stay on and become an official pirate? IF you are serious about that, there are tough rules aboard every pirate ship. Stealing and hiding loot is strictly prohibited. Grab its leg; I want to apply some honey."

“I don’t think it matters anymore. That woman wants me off the ship the moment we are back in Nassau! I know that for a fact. She assigned me to wash the toilet and to help out in the kitchen, knowing that I hate these things. She is trying to force me to leave the ship. I’ve been calling her boss for a very long time. I have always been on her side when she got into fights,” Harry grumbled, his lips pursed while glaring at Anne.

“I think she is doing this for your own good. Okay. Turn it over. I’ll need the other leg.”

“Yea... yea. Everyone says that.”

Harry was distracted. Suddenly, he rolled his eyes and pressed on his stomach.

“Ah, shit! I think I ate something wrong. My stomach is going crazy on me. I don’t think I can hold on any longer. I have to go and clear it out first.”

Immediately, Harry let go of the goat and ran away. He did not wait for Ramsay’s permission. This had Ramsay in a fit. However, he also knew that Harry was distraught tonight. The hearty laughter from afar probably triggered him, probably why he wanted to run as far as possible from the area. Understanding the young boy, Ramsay decided he would leave Harry alone for now.

Harry wasn’t heading towards the Spanish shipwreck. It was out of anger that he told Ramsay about stealing those gold bars. In fact, he had no intention to do something like this. Even without pirates guarding the place, Harry figured he couldn’t possibly dive that deep to pick up those gold bars. Besides, there was no place for him to hide on the open beach as well. If he attempted to steal the gold bars, everyone would be able to see him even from a distance.

Having no heading in mind, Harry walked on, just wanting to get away from the crowd. Before he knew it, he had no idea where he was and how far he’d wandered away. There were tall trees on Parrot Island, and every path he took looked precisely the same. At that moment, Harry began worrying that he might be lost. So, he randomly chose a heading and continued walking along with it. An hour later, he finally saw the sea. He sighed, breathing deeply, taking in the smell of the salty sea. It appeared his mood was finally getting better. Without him even realizing it, he had gotten to the other side of Parrot Island.

Following the coastline, he walked for at least two hours before he got back to where he started. It would be midnight by the time he rejoined the Jackdaw’s crew. His own hastiness had led him to go for wool and come home shorn. The more he thought about it, the angrier he felt. The pirates were feasting on the barbequed lamb and chugging rum as if it was seawater. No one even noticed that he was gone. Harry was at the age where he yearned for recognition, unhappy that he was being treated like an insignificant little man. In angst, he kicked a stone, watching as it flew away from him.

That was when he saw something shocking.

It was a little boat. Harry rubbed his eyes to make sure it wasn’t an illusion. There were about seven people on it, and they were rowing towards the beach as fast as they could. Harry instantly realized that something wasn’t right. Other than the pirates patrolling the sea in their small boat, the rest were celebrating on the beach. This wasn’t the area where the Spanish treasure ship sank, and it didn’t make sense for the patrols to come all the way here. Where did they come from? Were there other people on this island? Why were they in a mighty rush?

Logic told him that he should inform Anne about what he saw. Just when he was about to go get a better look, someone pushed him from behind! Harry fell down the cliff he was on, screaming for dear life.

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On the other side of things, Anne was drunk, and someone wanted to challenge her. As she turned around, she saw that Harry was not with Ramsay. Immediately, she quickly walked to him and asked him where the boy was.

Ramsay was extremely busy, having just finished roasting two whole goats. Now he needed to cook a dozen rabbits.

“Why are you alone? Where is Harry? Is he getting lazy again?”

“He told me that his stomach was acting up earlier. I think he went to relieve himself. Speaking of which, he’s been gone for some time. Now I’m starting to worry.”

“There’s nothing to worry. I’m pretty sure the lazy thing was just looking for an excuse and slacked off somewhere. I asked my men just now. They told me the island is free from ferocious beasts. He should be safe.”

“You’re right, but night has fallen. What if he’s lost?”

“Hmm. At his level of intelligence, that might actually happen to him.”

“What happened?” asked Zhang Heng who was walking toward them.

“Harry is missing. I’m planning to go into the woods to look for him.”

Anne cracked her knuckles loudly as she talked, garnering stares from everyone around her.

“He better pray he doesn’t cross paths with me!”

“I will go with you. After all, he is a pirate of the Jackdaw,” said Zhang Heng.

“This is exactly why I refused to bring him on our voyages. He gives me nothing but a shitload of trouble.”

Not wasting any time, Zhang Heng and Anne began looking for Billy. At the same time, a dozen sober pirates were also commissioned to search the entire island.

Chapter 213: Incoming Threat

Zhang Heng and Anne led the group, searching almost half the island. Still, they couldn’t locate Harry.

“How could I not know how good Harry was at running?!”

Anne was surprised by the search result. It left her perplexed, knowing that it would only be logical for someone lost to stay as close as possible to the beach. The further away they were, the smaller the chance they’d be rescued.

“It seems he’s lost his way.”

After hearing what happened to Harry, Dufresne joined the search party as well. Staying at least two meters apart from each other, the search party called out for Harry as they scouted around the island. However, it yielded no result.

Suddenly, Zhang Heng’s team on the left found something. It was a barrel and two liquor bottles on the ground.

“Did the watchers leave all these stuff behind?” Zhang Heng asked as he lifted the barrel’s lid with his saber.

“When we asked our men to observe the Spanish treasure ship, we set up three observation posts on this island. From what I remember, I don’t think this area is one of it.”

“Maybe Ball’s men left these during their hunting trip,” said Dufresne.

“Ball and his men hunted at the west side of this island. That’s where the wild goats are. Besides, they wouldn’t have carried a barrel with them,” replied Zhang Heng.

Immediately, everyone looked at Dufresne, who simply shrugged.

“I asked them about it earlier because I want to bring back a few roasted goats to the ship.”

“Maybe it was left by whoever that was here previously,” Said Anne.

Though Parrot Island wasn’t known to have been occupied before, it was still on the nautical chart. It shouldn’t come as a surprise that people did live here.

Zhang Heng agreed as well, as he squatted down, tipped the water with his thumb, and tasted it.

“The water inside the barrel is clean and safe to drink. It doesn’t seem like it’s been here long.”

Next, he went on to check the two liquor bottles.

“Are you trying to say that there are others on this island? That’s not possible. We combed the island thoroughly the moment we set foot on its sands! There is no one here except for us.”

“How would you explain this barrel of drinking water then?”

“Maybe they left right before we got on this island...”

Dufresne paused before he could finish. If that were the case, they would have found the barrel of water when they were searching the entire island.

“It’s our people,” Zhang Heng replied while passing one of the liquor bottles to Anne.

“The rum that we drank came from a brewery in North Carolina. Their bottle’s design is unique. Usually, they would send a shipment to Nassau. Even though their rum is sold in other colonies as well, the probability of us finding it here on this island is extremely small.”

“Hold on, why would our people come here? Captain Sam’s orders?” asked Anne.

“Highly unlikely. This is a bad location. The Spanish treasure ship didn’t even pass this area. Setting up an observation point here would be a waste of time. He would have also informed others if he did something like that. I want everyone to be extra careful. Something doesn’t smell right.”

The moment Zhang Heng was done talking, the sound of footsteps came from in the dark woods. Immediately, he drew his gun, and Anne charged to the source of the sound. Just as she was about to land a slash, she paused midair!

“Harry?”

“Boss Anne!”

She saw Harry in an awful state. His whole body was soaking wet, looking as if he’d just been fished from the sea. Anne also noticed that Harry was limping, and had a hand of his covering a wound on his arm. Evidently, Harry was extremely relieved to meet Zhang Heng and the rest of them.

“I have something important to tell all of you!!!”

“Something important? Maybe you can start by telling us what the blazes happened to you?”

“What I’m about to tell you is extremely urgent! Someone betrayed us. Jarvis and his men have been pardoned, and they’d stopped being pirates for months! He’s only still in Nassau because of an agreement he made with the new governor-general from Charleston. He promised the govener that he’d help capture all the famous pirates of Nassau!”

“Jarvis, the Dynamite Jarvis? Are you sure you want to accuse him of such a grave crime? He is one of the oldest pirates in Nassau. He even arrived in Nassau before Blackbeard Teach did!” said Dufresne.

“I heard them talking about it earlier when I was lazing away. Oh no... I mean, I came here when I had my stomachache. Not too far from the cliff, Jarvis and his men hid a small boat over there. I saw it with my own eyes! When I tried to take a closer look at them, someone pushed me from the back, and I fell down the cliff!”

It was visible that Harry was still in shock as he described what happened to him.

“There were sharp rocks everywhere. I was lucky enough to fall between two of them. Thanks to that, I wasn’t hurt much. After that, I didn’t dare to swim back to the shore, so I swam to a giant rock and hid behind it. After a while, the one who pushed me down came to see if I was alive. After searching the entire place, they found no one. Perhaps they thought that the fall had killed me. That was when they let their guard down. They were close to where I hid, and I managed to hear what they said.

“One said that they were supposed to be in Nassau for a little longer. Right now, it would save them a ton of trouble since all the famous pirates are here, all at once, on Parrot Island. They said that their job would be done once they captured all of us. By doing that, the governor-general will pardon all their previous crimes, and he would add an additional 20 pounds to each of them. I’m afraid they’ve been planning this for a very long time. Before we left Nassau, they leaked our plan to the authorities!”

Harry was getting very nervous and started talking faster and faster.

“A fleet made up of the navy and pirate hunters have been secretly following us from the very start. They used the small boat I saw to make contact with them. Tonight’s grand party is Jarvis’ idea! He was hoping to create a perfect window to attack all of you!”

Suddenly, Zhang Heng remembered the incident that Brook told him. A group of mysterious people had ambushed Brook and he was sure that they were unfamiliar pirates. The question was now answered. They were pirate-hunters working with Jarvis.

Chapter 214: Time is of the Essence

Previously, considering that there was no need to keep this operation a secret, Black Prince Sam revealed the travel plans of the Spanish treasure ship to all five captains. If Jarvis did betray all of them, he must have had many opportunities to contact to the navy. From what they remembered, the Warrior was always the one at the back of the line. By doing that, Jarvis would be able to communicate with the navy without anybody noticing. After hearing what Harry’s story, they were sure that Jarvis must have indeed betrayed them. Now, the only question that loomed over their minds was if they had enough time to flee the island.

Under normal circumstances, the naked eye could only spot ships that were about ten nautical miles away. Any prospective enemies should be located at least twenty nautical miles away if they wanted to remain invisible. If someone from the island instructed them to attack the pirates, they would need at least 5 hours to get there and back. In other words, the navy should be arrive when dawn was near.

“I don’t think we have that much time left. It’s dark, which means our visibility is down to a mile or two. This means they won’t need to stay too far from us. If they are fast, they should be able to reach the island within an hour. However, this is only the worst-case scenario. When did you see the little boat leaving?”

“I’m not sure. I was so nervous earlier that I didn’t pay attention to the time. From the moment I fell off the cliff until they left the island, it should be half an hour or so,” stammered Harry.

Harry started shivering the moment a gust of wind blew.

“That means the enemy can appear in front of us any time now!” said Anne.

“We have to quickly inform the people on the beach. Otherwise, we’ll lose this battle! The first thing the enemy will do is to sink our ships. And they can do it from afar. Then, they won’t even need to get on the island. They’ll leave us all here to starve!” exclaimed a distressed Dufresne.

“We spent about an hour coming to this spot. Even if we are fast, it’ll take no less than forty minutes to get back,” Anne added.

“Not everyone here needs to go back to the beach. I’ll go with you first. The others can head back later,” said Zhang Heng while taking off his jacket and draping it on a frozen Harry.

He then handed three of his four guns to Dufresne, keeping one for himself in case he needed it later. He even discarded his sword as well. Zhang Heng realized that he needed to take drastic measures to lighten up if he wished to return to the beach in the shortest time possible. Anne also did the same, stripping off everything that weighed her down. The only weapon she kept on her was a dagger.

After shedding off the heavy iron, the two started running to the beach as fast as their legs could carry them.

When they were living together, Anne spent most of her time laying on a chair like a piece of dead meat. Zhang Heng rarely saw her working on her physique. Somehow, she managed to keep her body fit, where every single muscle on her body was firm and tight. She could sprint better than most men. Apart from her small chest, her body was close to perfection. In her defense, even she paid no attention to the size of her chest, as well.

Her swift moves and light-footedness were like an agile deer in the woods. Anne's weak stamina had always been her Achilles heel, and although better than most people, her endurance still fell short of Zhang Heng's marathon prowess. During the first ten minutes, Anne was way ahead of Zhang Heng. However, like an overheating cheetah, she gradually fell behind him. They were not even halfway to the beach at this point.

"You should go first. Don't worry about me. I'll catch up with you."

Anne huffed and puffed, as she stopped to catch some breath.

Zhang Heng nodded in reply. This wasn't the time to act like a gentleman. The earlier he got to the beach to tell the pirates about Jarvis, the more time they had to prepare for battle. As he swept away the branches that blocked his way, Zhang Heng managed to maintain the rhythm of his breathing, thus, giving his running a constant speed.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, he heard the whizz of a bullet flying past him followed by the unmistakable bang of a gunshot!

Fortunately, the shooter had shot from a great distance, and since Zhang Heng was on the move, even the best snipers would find it challenging to him. The bullet meant for him landed on the small tree on his right. The first thing that he did when the moment he heard the gunshot was to immediately drop on the ground, laying as low as he could.

Then, he remembered the two persons that pushed Harry down the cliff. Whoever that was shooting at him must be Jarvis' trusted ally. Zhang Heng didn't expect them to hide in the woods and ambush him. They must have heard his search party shouting out Harry's name loudly. That was how they discovered his location and ambushed him on his way back to the beach.

Seeing that Zhang Heng had started running, they would have figured that their plan must have been exposed. Hence, they decided to kill him, effectively stopping him from sounding the alarm. Zhang Heng roughly knew the location of the two shooters, catching a glimpse of them when he lifted his head.

They were about twenty meters away from him. One was aiming at him from behind a tree, while the other was frantically reloading gunpowder and bullets into this gun. Without hesitation, Zhang Heng pointed and pulled the trigger on the one aiming at him!

Then, he stood up and charged at the other shooter! Seeing Zhang Heng coming at him, the shooter was so nervous he spilled all his gunpowder. Left with no options, he dropped his gun and pulled out his cutlass to fight. Just as Zhang Heng reached his target, he tossed his gun at the assailant. Instantly, he

shielded himself with his saber. Seeing the opportunity, Zhang Heng landed a kick on his wrist, causing him to drop what was in his hands! Within seconds, he also landed an uppercut on the shooter's chin.

After taking on Zhang Heng's surprise blows, the man was disoriented. He took a few steps back before he fell to the ground. Zhang Heng quickly jumped at him to continue punching. Before he could do so, somebody jumped down from the tree, intending to slash his back! Zhang Heng did not expect a third enemy in the woods. Harry told him that there were only two of them. Now, Zhang Heng knew that Harry was telling the truth when he said that they were attempting to kill him.

Though he managed to dodge the attack, the third enemy still managed to cut his back. Luckily, it was just a flesh wound. Right now, he had to deal with two enemies at the same time with no weapons whatsoever. He knew some karate, but swordsmanship was the melee skill he trained the longest on. Besides, the enemy ship might arrive on the beach any time now. He couldn't afford to waste precious seconds on a brawl.

Suddenly, Zhang Heng saw Anne running towards him.

"Go to the beach! Let me deal with them."

Anne took out her dagger and licked her lips.

"I didn't have the chance to fight during the previous battle. I hope you'll allow me a good workout!"

Chapter 215: End of the Party

Zhang Heng entrusted Anne with the two other enemies while he took off his inner shirt and bandaged the wound on his back. After that, he continued running towards the beach.

All in all, his entire trip back to the bonfire party took him less than twenty-five minutes.

Things weren't looking good right now. The party had been going on for quite a while, and most of the pirates were already gin-soaked. No other pirates successfully robbed a Spanish treasure ship ever before. Everyone, including Sam, was in an extraordinarily cheery mood.

In the past, although there had been joint-operations between Nassau's pirates before, this was the first time six influential pirates collaborated with each other. Since the partnership was off to a good start, many thought about joining forces again. They also intended to use this as an opportunity to cultivate stronger bonds amongst themselves.

The gold was just a few hundred yards from them, almost within grasp, and the fact that so many were gathered together gave them a strong sense of security.

One had to admit that Jarvis had chosen a good time, a time when the pirates were at their most gullible and susceptible. Other than six people guarding the gold, even the men in charge of patrolling the area couldn't help but join the celebration.

The sailors were so drunken on rum that they lost the ability to determine one's own keep. Pirates from different ships had their arms slung around each other's shoulders, and they were all mixed up. No thanks to all the intermingling, Zhang Heng couldn't locate Sam.

When someone saw that Zhang Heng had returned, they stumbled over to him and urged him to have a drink.

Instead of accepting the bottle, Zhang Heng grabbed a musket from the pirate and fired a shot into the air!

The camp ran silent for a moment. Then, in all bewilderment, the pirates exploded into roars of laughter, thinking it was a sideshow that Zhang Heng prepared. Some found it so amusing that even they joined in, firing their guns into the sky!

All at once, gunshots rang all over the island, along with the pirates' loud cheers.

Zhang Heng knew immediately that with the condition they were in, confronting the men wasn't the brightest option. It was simply unrealistic to expect this group of dazed men to pick up weapons and fight the navy, of all people.

The only viable option was to inform the captains and have them evacuate their people. As he was looking for Harry, Zhang Heng found a dozen men who were not as sozzled. These men should be reliable enough to navigate the Jackdaw. As for whether the other ships could find enough sober men for their helms, Zhang Heng didn't know for sure. He couldn't do anything about it either.

Zhang Heng found Billy first in the crowd. Unsurprisingly, he was as drunk as a skunk and was sprawled on the ground, snoring away. Zhang Heng shook Billy hard, hoping to wake him up, but the man seemed to be out like a light. It took a good while before he finally responded. Billy opened his mouth but appeared to completely clueless – like a completely different person from the usually calm and reliable helmsman he was.

Realizing he couldn't possibly rely on Billy tonight, Zhang Heng searched for a few more sailors. Most, however, were in bad condition. The Warrior's crew had been coaxing the others to drink the whole time. Now, the people on the beach were no different than Billy, having drowned themselves in rum for a good two hours. Many of them were worse for wear.

Zhang Heng looked everywhere, and after a lot of dragging and hustling, was finally able to put together a group of sober sailors. With Ramsay being the main chef of the bonfire, he and his helpers were so busy roasting that they didn't drink much.

Zhang Heng pulled Ramsay aside and told him, "Hurry and find all of our crew. Tell them to gather and tell them... forget it. Tell them I'm about to give out extra money, and those who are late won't get any. As for those who can't walk straight, have the others carry them. Remember, you have ten minutes. In ten minutes, I want to see at least fifty people here. Do well, and you'll get double your portion the next time we distribute the loot."

"Alright," Ramsay nodded vigorously. He immediately put down the lamb he was cutting, wiped his hands on his apron, and hurried off to find his fellow sailors.

Knowing that the kitchen staff must be sober, Zhang Heng quickly found the cooks of the other ships, including the Warrior's chef. He asked them to bring their captains here, telling them that he had figured a way to get the gold out.

The situation was worse than Zhang Heng imagined it to be. He knew that the people on the beach would be drunk, but he never thought that they would be this bloody drunk. Strangely, the Warrior's men were in the best condition. So, even though the other ships had the numbers, it would be challenging to overpower Jarvis and his men, at least in the short-term. At this rate, it would be easier if everybody just surrendered to the navy.

Zhang Heng's only advantage now was that Jarvis didn't know Zhang Heng knew about his betrayal. The three assailants in the woods only made a move because they saw someone sprinting. So, Zhang Heng decided to change tactics and take the opportunity to overcome Jarvis lest it would be difficult to board the ships from the beach.

Every second that passed was painful, especially when he had no way of knowing when the navy fleet would arrive.

In the meantime, Zhang Heng used Billy's clothes as a tourniquet for his wound, even taking his cutlass and short musket.

The person who appeared first was Brook from the Swordfish. He appeared to be in pretty good shape, probably because he was still outraged. Having lost so many of his men, he didn't have the appetite for drinks and merry food. Because the Warrior and Swordfish were also enemies, Jarvis' men did not coerce Brook to drink.

When he came over to see Zhang Heng, he looked somewhat surprised. "So, you've figured out how to get the gold, huh? That's great! I won't have to see Jarvis' annoying face again."

Zhang Heng shook his head. "No, it's something else."

Brook looked at Zhang Heng with raised eyebrows. He was about to ask more when the second captain arrived. It was Captain Kemp of the Shark. He had to be carried all the way to the rendezvous point, and on his way there, he thought removing his trousers would be a good idea. Luckily, the ship's cook could stop him before he did. The third captain soon arrived in no better condition.

Black Sam and Jarvis arrived last. The two chatted and laughed away. Sam looked sober for the most part, except for a little stumbling. When he saw Zhang Heng, he flashed him his signature smile.

"We were just talking about you! Where'd you go? You disappeared when the party started, so we had to ply your helmsman with liquor. To be honest, I like the man. Had you not returned, I would've been tempted to recruit him over to my ship."

However, Sam suddenly stopped in his tracks as Zhang Heng pulled out a short musket and pointed it at Jarvis. "I'm sorry to interrupt the fun, but I'm afraid we'll have to end the party early."

Chapter 216: Patience

"What's the meaning of this, Captain Zhang Heng?"

Jarvis looked at the gun pointed at him, and the smile on his face instantly vanished. He was baffled by Zhang Heng's actions. A few other captains that stood beside him were equally shocked. However, what Zhang Heng said next shocked them even more.

“A fleet of navy battleships and pirate hunters have been following us since we departed Nassau. They are planning to attack us tonight. Our enemies are on their way to this island as we speak. I believe they would appear anytime now.”

“How is that even possible? We’ve sailed for many days, and we would have seen a tail. Unless...” said Black Prince Sam.

“Unless someone betrayed us. The traitor has provided our itinerary to our enemies. With that, they would be able to follow us without being noticed. It was no wonder that someone randomly attacked my ship. I see that you have sold your soul to the nobles. What do you think? You like licking their butts, right, Jarvis?” said Brook.

Jarvis was one of the most experienced pirates amongst them and remained calm even after he was accused.

“I can understand your anger. All the time, you suspected that the ambush had something to do with me. Of course, it is human nature to believe someone the moment they point out a traitor. Luckily, there are more sensible people here,” replied Jarvis as he turned around and looked at Zhang Heng without waiting for Brook to respond to him.

“Captain Zhang. You have made grave accusations towards me. I would like to ask if you have any evidence to prove your claims. For all we know, you could have been the one who betrayed us. Or, perhaps, you’re trying to use a dirty trick to make us leave the island so you can take possession of all that gold!”

Jarvis’ statement sounded logical, and most of the captains on the beach agreed with him. Especially the last sentence, powerful enough to make everyone suspect Zhang Heng as the traitor. Even Brook started leaning towards Jarvis. As compared to Zhang Heng, they knew Jarvis longer than him, being one of the longest-serving pirates in Nassau. Amongst the old-timers, Zhang Heng was just a newbie, only arriving in Nassau not too long ago. Technically speaking, this was their first time working with Zhang Heng. When it came to credibility, they had every reason to lean towards Jarvis. No one could say for sure that Zhang Heng wasn’t lying.

Jarvis was sure good at what he did. Previously, he was confident no one would find out about his relationship with the navy. He did not expect his plan to be eventually exposed by Zhang Heng. After doing some thinking, he figured that the people assigned to guard the little boat must have been captured by Zhang Heng. Since those were his men, he knew that they would never admit to the accusation. However, there was still a possibility that they would spill the truth under a death threat.

With a knife on their throats, they could have been forced to admit to crimes they didn’t commit as long as they got to keep their lives. Jarvis figured that he could convince everyone that the captured men were interrogated under duress. Although doing that would not exonerate him completely, it was enough to stall them until his allies came to his rescue.

However, he had to admit that Zhang Heng’s accusation had brought with it significant trouble. Initially, he planned to pretend to fight the attacking navy. Now that Sam and the rest of the captains started to suspect him of treason, that plan was officially over. With Zhang Heng’s warning in mind, the other

captains and pirates would definitely watch out for him. He needed to figure out a way to protect himself when the navy arrived here later. As of now, he managed to deflect the threat away from him.

After Jarvis was done defending himself, he looked at Zhang Heng calmly.

“We need to investigate this matter first. I have a proposal. Since I am not accused of anything, I can ask my men to watch the bay...” Sam added, but before he could finish, Zhang Heng interrupted him.

“All of you have misunderstood my intention. I’m not here to accuse Captain Jarvis. I’m only here to break the news to you. I don’t care if you guys believe me or not, but I’m leaving with my men right now.”

“You want to leave? Now? How about the gold at the bottom of the ocean? And are your men sober enough to even climb on board?” asked a shocked Brook.

It was just then that Anne, Dufresne, and the rest of their party emerged from the woods. Anne still held onto her bloody dagger. As for Harry, a few strong pirates took turns carrying him back to the beach. Ramsay, on the other hand, had put in his best efforts to earn the double-reward he would get. He gathered all the Jackdaw’s pirates in the shortest time possible. Most of them were drunk, going on endlessly about how they’d be rich once they sold off the gold.

“You guys can keep the gold bars,” said Zhang Heng while pointing his gun at Jarvis.

“I’m sorry, Captain Jarvis. Please ask your men to lower their weapons. I will lower mine once my men are safely back on our ship.”

Jarvis did not expect Zhang Heng to be so decisive in a critical moment like this. He had no intention to reason at all. Technically, Jarvis had more pirates than Zhang Heng. Should the worst happen, he could order his men to force Zhang Heng to remain on the beach. By doing that, however, everyone would know that he was indeed the traitor. The other captains and pirates would not hesitate to fight him then. Although it was possible that Jarvis wouldn’t take such risks, Zhang Heng took no chances, ensuring that he made his men stand down.

It had been almost an hour since the little boat that Harry saw left Parrot Island. The more time passed, the more dangerous it was to remain there. Besides, Zhang Heng had spent an extra fifteen minutes on the beach.

He knew that it was time to leave this island immediately. Seeing that Anne and the rest of his men were back, Zhang Heng quickly asked Dufresne to send them back to the Jackdaw. The cramped boat could only fit around ten people, and they would need seven to eight minutes from the beach to the Jackdaw. In other words, a total of thirty minutes were required to take the entire crew back to the ship.

Thirty minutes was simply too long, and Zhang Heng knew they didn’t have the time. Suddenly, the Warrior’s ferry caught his attention.

“I’m going to borrow your ferry,” Zhang Heng suddenly said.

Without waiting for Jarvis’ reply, Zhang Heng instructed Anne to approach the boat. Immediately, a group of pirates from the Warrior jumped up and tried to stop her. Though outnumbered, she had no intention to retreat, quickly drawing her saber to resist. On the contrary, Zhang Heng had acted faster.

He pointed his gun at Jarvis's feet and pulled the trigger! The bullet penetrated his boot, causing him to scream in agony. Next, Zhang Heng took another gun from his men and aimed at Jarvis's head.

"Do not test my patience."

Chapter 217: A Decent... Human Being

Right until Zhang Heng fired his gun, the incident that happened in Nassau not too long ago wasn't of the minds of the crowd. Zhang Heng eliminated Wilton and his men of two hundred pirates, leaving unscathed. Those who were on the ship after the massacre described the cabin as a slaughterhouse. The entire floor was awash with blood.

Throughout the entire hunting trip, Zhang Heng had been inconspicuous to the point that most forgot he was a man of his word. In a life-threatening situation like this, Zhang Heng had no interest in playing the Werewolves of Miller Hollow with Jarvis. He had done his part by informing Sam and the rest of the captains about this incident. Having them believe what he said was out of his control altogether.

From the gunshot, Jarvis saw Zhang Heng's determination, which was why he wasted no time asking his pirates to make way for Anne. He only accepted the pardon after he figured out that he made enough wealth as a pirate. However, he would not be able to return to civilian life since he was a wanted criminal in all the colonies. Hiding from the authorities like a scared kitten, his heart was filled with fear whenever he returned to his hometown.

Now that he finally had the opportunity to clear his name by eliminating all of Nassau's famous pirates, he could eventually return to his hometown with pride and glory. Before he could do that, though, he had to stay alive until the navy came to rescue him.

Jarvis never once doubted Zhang Heng's determination. From the beginning, Zhang Heng's gun stayed glued to Jarvis' head. Even though Sam and the other captains tried to talk Zhang Heng out of it, he failed to change his mind. Such determination caused alarm bells to ring among the others about what was to happen next. Sam planned to send his people to set up an observation point in the woods, wanting to monitor the ships that sailed toward this island. At the same time, Brook was left in a profound dilemma. Due to previous bad experiences, Jarvis was one that Brook could never ever trust. For this reason, Zhang Heng trusted him most right now.

If Brook chose to leave, he wouldn't get his hands on the gold bars. Throughout the entire trip, the Swordfish suffered the most damage compared to the rest of the pirate ships. His ship's hull was in a wreck, and repairing the broken masts wasn't easy as well. It was hard for him to accept he wouldn't get a single penny out of an operation that cost him so dearly.

In the end, Brook decided that the value of gold didn't outweigh the value of his life. Immediately, he sent someone to inform his men about the impending attack. That said, he didn't plan to stray too far from the island. He would linger nearby and observe the situation. The remaining two captains were still in a dilemma, this especially true for the one getting drunk at the earlier celebrations. Even the wave of a gold bar in front of him wouldn't make him budge.

Time passed swiftly, and soon, every captain had their own plans. To prevent further chaos, they decided to refrain from telling their men the details of the impending attack. Sam did best, having done a shipload of things with the limited time they had. He first retrieved the cannons he set on the beach before handpicking a few sober pirates to set up an observation post in the woods.

Although setting up a post at this time would be pointless, it was better than sitting there doing nothing nonetheless. The spotters would be able to spot a ship from a distance if it was day, giving enough time to inform the captains about an impending attack. Unfortunately, it was in the dark of night, and visibility was extremely low. The fleet would be too close once spotted, and it would all be too late.

The terrain on Parrot Island granted countless advantages when they ambushed the Spanish treasure ship. Now, it had become their biggest inconvenience. The tall ridge blocked them from viewing the port.

Sam actually sided more with Zhang Heng, having worked with him before, after all. Between Zhang Heng and Jarvis, one of them had to be lying. If Zhang Heng was the one, all they needed to do was to keep an eye on the Jackdaw, and the gold would be safe. However, if Jarvis was the one that betrayed them all, then they were in serious trouble.

Less than half the pirates were in any condition to fight, and those who could, couldn't think straight. After the massive battle, all their ships suffered a certain extent of damage, not to mention out of ammunition as well. They would lose almost instantly if the navy appeared in front of them right now. Zhang Heng knew that they were in bad shape. That was why he wanted to leave the island as soon as possible.

Sam did not blame Zhang Heng for abandoning them and fleeing on his own. Judging the Jackdaw's current condition, Zhang Heng barely had enough people to operate the ship, let alone sparing some of his men to fight off the enemies. He was left with no other option but to leave the island.

Meanwhile, all the Jackdaw's pirates had boarded their ship. Harry and Ramsay did a fantastic job, managing to gather most of the ship's complement in ten minutes amid the chaos. Unfortunately, two pirates from Jackdaw remained missing.

Zhang Heng couldn't afford to wait any longer. He was the last to leave the island. Seeing that the ferry was here, he pushed Jarvis onto it before he got on.

Anne and a few other pirates rowed the boat with all their might. As for Dufresne, he had temporarily relieved Billy's position at the helm and took command of pirates still sober enough to understand a sentence. Releasing the mainsail with a whoosh, they retrieved the anchor and prepared to leave the island. Every second counted if they wanted to stay alive. Once the ferry was well on her way, Jarvis finally dropped the act.

"How did you find my men in the woods?"

"No. Technically, your people found my people in the woods."

"What an interesting coincidence. You do know you can't be running forever, right? Even if you manage to escape this time, there will always be a next time. It's extremely rare that pirates have good endings. Take a look at Honegg, for instance. He now has power over the cannons set up to protect the island! He

said he's done with risking his life as a pirate. If the Red Coat from Scotland sniffs him out, he would have no place to run."

"I agree with you to a certain extent. But, this can't be the only reason you betrayed the people on the beach. Many saw you as their friend, your brother."

"You will need some courage to begin a new life, young man. I shall cut off every garotting of my turbulent past. Only by doing that will I be able to live a better life in the new world. You have not seen the way those people look at us, Zhang Heng! We are like savages, ferocious beasts to them! You see, the letter of pardon isn't of importance. I have to wipe my slate clean and leave everything behind here. If I do that, then I will be able to become a de... a decent human being."

"I hope you get what you want."

The ferry finally arrived at the Jackdaw. Zhang Heng kept away his gun and grabbed the rope beside him. Just as the Jackdaw was about to leave, a black shadow appeared near the island.

Chapter 218: I Will Take You Home

Dufresne started getting nervous the moment he saw the black shadow.

"What should we do? Are we going to attack them?"

"How many sober cannoneers do we have?"

Zhang Heng and Anne were probably the only ones that could remain calm in a critical situation like this. They displayed uncanny fearlessness even as the fleet of battleships charged towards the island furiously.

"Four. I was a cannoneer last time. I can take up the position if you need me..."

"It's pointless to fight with them with sticks and stones. Release the mainsail. Let's get to them before they get into formation."

"They have seven battleships! How are we going to fight?"

"We don't have many choices here. It's do or die right now. They will sink us if we stay on. We will also lose our window to attack if they get into their battle formation and seal off the port. As long as we are fast enough to charge into the middle of their formation, I'm pretty sure that only two or three ships would attack us since they need to be careful and not shoot their allies. I believe the Jackdaw is tough enough to withstand the onslaught."

When all was said and done, Zhang Heng took a glimpse of the beach. The pirates had realized that a fleet of navy battleships was moving fast towards them. Immediately, chaos and panic broke among the crowd. These the best pirates Nassau had ever seen, gathered here for a common goal, doing something that no one had done before. If only they'd not gotten drunk and prepare respective ships, they might have a chance to defeat the navy. Unfortunately, just a single lapse of judgment sealed their fate. The celebrated pirates were reduced to running and screaming headless flies.

The only pirate that hadn't given up was Black Prince Sam, mustering up his people as he attempted to aim the cannons at their enemies. The fact that he was the only one who retaliated made him seem a

little lonely. On the other hand, Jarvis boarded a small boat and was ordered to row back to the island. However, he changed his mind the moment he saw the navy fleet dawning on Parrot Island. He quickly changed direction and rowed towards the navy, waving his hands and screaming out to them.

At this point, Zhang Heng wasn't bothered about his allies anymore. He turned around and looked at his men. Panic and despair had hit the crew hard. Helpless and afraid, they didn't know what they should do if they wished to live to see another day. Suddenly, Zhang Heng heard a deep, commanding voice in the dark.

"Don't worry. I will take you home."

...

The fleet of battleships moved faster than expected. Even though the Swordfish decided to leave Parrot Island, they were still attempting to gather all their men. It was too late for them to escape. Brook's face had turned pale with the Jackdaw being his only comfort. Although Zhang Heng and his men got on the ship earlier than them, it seemed like it was too late for them to get away as well.

To everyone surprise, not only did the Jackdaw not retreat, but they now charged at the navy without respite. Such a suicidal move shocked everyone.

Worden, the navy fleet commander, stood on the deck, watching the Jackdaw calmly.

"Is that the corvette we lost earlier?"

"Her exterior seems different. I believe the pirates modified it. But yes, sir. This was indeed the Glory, a corvette we lost during the battle of Charleston," replied the chief officer after taking a good look at the Jackdaw.

Worden kept shaking his head as he replied emotionlessly, "This corvette no longer deserves her name of the Glory. Elmer, the idiot, has chucked the glory of the navy to a bunch of bandits! Now, I have to clean up his mess. Open fire at them right away. I want them all dead tonight."

"Erm..."

"What's wrong? Is there a problem?"

"Captain Jarvis' boat is still close to them. If we open fire now..."

"Have you just graduated from navy school? Didn't you hear my orders?! I told you to kill everyone! Everyone! That includes Jarvis and his barbaric beasts."

"But... I thought they were ours? Captain Jarvis provided us with all the information that we need. I heard he has an agreement with Count Lambert. After we eliminate the pirates, Count Lambert is supposed to grant him and his men immunity! After that, they will serve the queen..."

The chief officer was interrupted by Worden.

"Open your eyes and have a good look, Chris! Look hard and long! Those creatures on the beach aren't humans. They are a herd of wild beasts! Do you know what they did to Count Bellomonte and governor-general Watt in Charleston? Oh right, and the idiot Elmer. Let me tell you! They took over the

Scarborough and killed every single man on board. I'm talking about seven hundred navy sailors! That excludes the collateral of innocent citizens killed during the senseless raid."

"Do you know why Count Lambert asked for me specifically to deal with sea-threats, kid?"

"Because you are the best at dealing with pirates?"

"No. Because I never negotiate with wild beasts. I know a few aristocrats who said that we should deal with them in the most humane way possible. I can guarantee you; I'm not the kind of person to be merciful to such a lot. What makes you think I'll allow a bunch of thugs immunity, let alone returning them to civilized society? After all the blood on their hands, all the pain and suffering they've caused, we grant them a good life as punishment?! Let's just pretend nothing happen then!

"So, no. I will never allow such good to happen to them. Over my dead body! So, do me a favor and kill everything that moves out there! No one will know what happens tonight except for us. Our mission will be complete, and Count Lambert will get to keep his reputation. Now, are my orders clear?"

"Yes, sir."

Chris gulped.

"Excellent! Let's begin."

By now, everyone knew that Jarvis was the traitor in question. The pirates from the Warrior started fighting the other pirates as well. It came as no surprise that they were all still sober. Knowing a fight was coming, they had kept their weapons close to them. From the very start, they had the upper hand in the situation.

However, they were outnumbered not too long after that. As time passed, Sam and the other captains managed to hold the line, albeit barely. They started to turn from being defensive to offensive. The pirates from the Warrior began to panic as Jarvis, their leader, wasn't with them. Besides, whatever they were to their fellow pirates doing was uncouth, nothing to be proud of. Soon, their morale diminished, and they were defeated. Jarvis wouldn't risk his life by heading to the beach to help his men to fight back all the other pirates.

His only option left was to row to the navy as fast as his arms could muscle the oars.

Chapter 219: Assault

Jarvis felt safer the further away he was from the beach. Since he was now away from the island, there was nothing Sam and the other captains could do to him. His boat was getting closer and closer to the navy ship, and once he got on, he would shake off all threats and bid his troubled past farewell. He had been just granted a new lease of life. Just when he was sure that nothing could touch him anymore, he saw the cannons of the navy creaking out of their shutters!

That shocked Jarvis and without thinking, he quickly turned away from the navy ship. At the same time, he saw the Jackdaw on a collision course with the navy ship. He never thought that Zhang Heng and his men were bold enough to attack the navy even after knowing that it would be pointless. Jarvis blamed the Jackdaw for condemning him to such a dangerous situation, and so, wasn't slightly bothered if Zhang Heng decided to fight or retreat.

The navy would unquestionably fire on the Jackdaw if they saw it on a ramming course. Jarvis was now in an awkward position. Caught in the middle of two raging behemoths, he continued to row to the navy, making sure that he stayed as far as possible from the Jackdaw.

Minutes later, the cannons of the navy ship were in position. Without hesitating, they fired first, having the Jackdaw bracing themselves from the incoming cannonballs. Worden did not ask all the ships to fire at once knowing it was a bad idea. In this operation, there were only two navy ships. The rest of the five armored ones belonged to the pirate hunters. When it came to pure discipline, the navy was no match. Luckily, the battle would prove easy this time. Although having the numbers, the pirates had just undergone a fierce battle, and most were drunk silly as well. Sprawled on the beach, they were all but target practice on easy mode. All they needed to do right now was to sink the ships of the pirates, and they would be completely incapacitated.

The only surprise element in this battle was the Jackdaw, and the navy was thrilled to arrive in the nick of time. Seeing that the Jackdaw was still nearby parrot Parrot Island, Worden wasn't one to let them just leave like that.

Soon, the second navy ship fired their guns. Zhang Heng was ultra-focused right now, electing not to sail in a straight line. Though it would allow him to reach his destination in the shortest time possible, his ship would be severely damaged. Right now, there were no available cannons on the Jackdaw and they were in no position to retaliate either. All they could do was break the defense of their enemies and leave before they sank their ship.

This battle would put the Jackdaw's defensive capabilities to the ultimate test. It was important that it dodged as many cannonballs as possible. Zhang Heng knew that he couldn't possibly avoid all of them. What he could do, though, was to take on the lighter attacks and avoid the ones that could cause critical damage to the Jackdaw. The helmsman played an essential role at this moment where life hung by a thread.

So far, the best helmsman that Zhang Heng encountered had to be Hutcheson. Brook came in only second to him. As for Zhang Heng, his LV2 sailing skills were only considered above average when compared to the rest of Nassau's pirates. That said, he was left with little choice. Amongst the sober pirates here, his seamanship was the best. Besides, he was known to handle such stressful moments with finesse and calm.

Without Zhang Heng saying a word, the crew of the Jackdaw was all ready to brace for their enemies. Anne was the only one who chose to stay beside Zhang Heng. He wanted her to hunker down somewhere safe, but he was only responded by a smile on her face.

Without the slightest warning whatsoever, the first cannonball landed on the deck with a boom! The massive impact blew a gaping hole, sending shards of wood flying all over the place. The impact had shaken the Jackdaw to her core, and as a result, her keel started to take damage as well. This was just the beginning of a long and unforgiving survival game. As more ships joined the battle, the Jackdaw was now under an immeasurable amount of pressure and stress.

Though the navy's cannons were not as powerful as the Spanish treasure ship, they had the advantage in numbers. During the previous battle, they had the Swordfish to draw the enemies' attention. This left them to suffer the brunt of the Spanish treasure ship. Right now, the Jackdaw was left alone to face the

navy. With their firepower expanding by the minute, the Jackdaw was in an even more precarious state than it had been previously.

The larger the threat was, the calmer Zhang Heng was required to behave. While the Jackdaw was under fire, Zhang Heng tried his best to look for a window out of this sticky situation. He even ignored notifications sent by the system. The chosen escape point wasn't just a random place. It was a spot that the wind blew at. That wasn't something people would usually do while battling at sea. Under normal circumstances, both ships in the fight would position themselves into the wind. By doing that, it made their attacks more potent.

However, the Jackdaw couldn't attack right now and it was pointless doing that. On the contrary, thick smoke from the enemies' cannons would help conceal it since Zhang Heng elected to sail with a tailwind. Now that the Jackdaw was in bad shape, capitalizing on every environmental advantage that presented itself was essential in surviving the fight.

Meanwhile, Sam fired his cannons from the beach. Technically, it was a bad time to attack the navy vessels. Having just approaching land, some distance still lay between them and the beach. In other words, Sam's attack wouldn't be that effective and their ammunition was limited as well. He had launched his attack now, intending to assist the Jackdaw. Zhang Heng was the one who told them about Jarvis' betrayal. Although it was too late, and the majority doubted Zhang Heng, he was still the one who warned them about Jarvis. It was only thanks to him that they avoided getting stabbed in the back.

Right now, Sam tried to repay Zhang Heng for his good deeds. The least he could do was distract the navy. He knew that saving ammunition and waiting until the navy arrived on the beach was useless. All who were there would probably be killed by the navy tonight. Nevertheless, it wasn't Sam's style to just sit there and wait for death to descend upon him. After emptying all the ammunition he had on the enemies, Sam drew his cutlass and cried,

"My brothers, are we willing to fight like warriors and be buried under the sea, or do you fancy a public hanging by the colony's port? Would you allow your decomposing body to rot in the sun and be devoured by flies? Do you want to be rejected eternally by the people of the colony?!"

"F*ck the navy! F*ck Jarvis!" chanted a pirate.

Seconds later, the pirate's head was hit by a bullet; his body falling to the ground with a thud and his rage-filled eyes open wide. More and more started to shout in anger, where even the drunk pirates did their best to get up and grab whatever weapons they could find. After a while, everyone gathered around Sam. They knew they were all going to die tonight, but they were unwilling to die as cowards.

"Kill the traitors first and take back our ship. We shall let the navy taste our wrath!"

The moment Sam finished, his men started charging towards the Warrior's crew like ravenous lions.

Chapter 220: Perhaps, I Could Try?

The Jackdaw had never been attacked by so many cannons before, and within a matter of minutes, her hull was riddled with holes. Throughout the entire battle, Zhang Heng managed to outperform himself, dodging most of the lethal shots. Right now, they were only a quarter of a mile from the navy. The

attacks grew fiercer as The Jackdaw drew closer to them, with cannonballs raining down on them like hailstones.

“Captain! Captain! We can’t go on like this! The Jackdaw will be in pieces before we can get close!” shouted a desperate Dufresne.

“Repair the damage! It’s too late to back down now! Do you really think they will let us turn around and flee?” asked Zhang Heng as he guided the ship through choppy waters.

A few moments ago, a cannonball flew past Zhang Heng’s elbow, the shockwave it produced stunned him silly. He and Anne were at the most dangerous spot on the ship. All his men could hunker down except him, having to make sure that his hands were always dancing with the wheel. The only thing he could do was pray that the Lucky Rabbit Foot was in effect.

“Even if we manage to break through their defensive lines, the Jackdaw can’t get far. Look at her state, Captain! We’ve lost a topsail and a mainsail!”

“We will discuss this problem after we get through their defensive line.”

Soon after that, his voice was overcome by the sound of deafening cannons firing at them. Dufresne realized that this would be the ship’s most precarious moment. He ran out instantly, pulling pirates that were still sober to fix every damage he could see. Even Ramsay turned acting carpenter, looking for everything around him to patch up the ailing boat. Unfortunately, the crack-team of workmen couldn’t keep up against the ever-increasing holes no matter how quick they worked. Helplessness began setting in.

It was then when Zhang Heng’s strategy finally worked. After a few volleys of continuous firing, the entire area was covered in thick smoke. It was time for the Jackdaw to enter the smokescreen. Now, the navy would be staring into a grey mist, let alone aim at anything. Naturally, Worden wasn’t very pleased. They were now in perfect alignment to deal a fatal blow to Jackdaw, now that they were close enough. If they waited until the Jackdaw exited the smokescreen, it would be impossible for some of the ships to attack as they would emerge misaligned to their cannons.

Wanting none of it, Worden ordered his men to continue firing into the thick fog. That said, the Jackdaw could relax a little for now.

At the same time, the battle on the beach was reaching its climax. Since Jarvis’ betrayal had been exposed earlier than expected, pirates from the Warrior were well prepared to face the inevitable battle. Still, they didn’t manage to hold the upper hand for too long, soon to be rendered passive. Under the command of Black Prince Sam, every pirate fearlessly charged at their enemies like stampeding rhinos. Since they were severely outnumbered, the Warrior’s pirates were in deep trouble. They could only hope that the navy would come for them after dealing with the Jackdaw. Unfortunately for them, that wish didn’t come true.

“Sir, the battle on the beach is wrapping up! I think the Warrior’s men are about to lose. The remaining pirates might bring us a lot of trouble if we let them get back to their ships.” said the chief officer after he put down his monocular.

“Inform the Miranda and Warrior. Let them deal with the corvette we lost in the smoke. We have damaged them severely just now. A few hits, and that’ll be the end of her. The rest of us will prioritize attacking the pirates on the beach. The first thing we need to do is destroy all their ships,” Worden muttered while rubbing his chin.

“Aye, sir!”

Although the Jackdaw was concealed in the smoke, Zhang Heng was sharp enough to detect that their enemies had been significantly weakened. However, he could hear their cannons firing again. Zhang Heng guessed that something must have happened to the beach. The navy must have turned some of their fire and focussed it there. It would seem this was the best time for the Jackdaw to flee the place.

Right now, they were extremely close to the enemy. At such close proximity, it would be impossible that he could escape detection. All of a sudden, the fog cleared just enough for Zhang Heng to see his enemy pointing their cannons at him. The enemy, too, had noticed the Jackdaw, and without hesitation, opened fire! In such moments where life hung by a thread, all of Zhang Heng’s sailing skills were rendered useless. There were no dodging attacks when both ships were so close to each other.

All he could do right now was to point the Jackdaw to the beach and sail there full speed ahead. Dufresne led a few men to fix a massive hole in a cabin under the main deck. Without warning, the spot that they just patched blew up in their faces, and a cannonball squashed one of the pirates’ heads. Before they could react, more and more cannonballs were launched at them. The hole started to let seawater in.

The flooding water into the cabin gushed at everyone with mighty force. It threw Dufresne off balance, and his head hit a barrel beside him. He went unconscious, only to wake up a moment later after he almost drowned. Dufresne got up and touched his forehead. It was bleeding profusely, stinging from the salty seawater. Dazed and confused, he vaguely saw broken pieces of wood floating everywhere around him. With the water up to their knees, his injured men lay sitting at a corner, crying for help. He then looked to his left and saw a hole that was as big as a basin, filling up the ship fast with seawater. He shook off the pain in his throbbing head and quickly grabbed a floating board to fix it.

With Dufresne’s initiative, the pirates that weren’t too injured jumped in to help. They managed to plug the leak in the shortest time possible, but the water level still didn’t go down.

“There’s one more hole at the end of the ship. I think it’s behind a wine cabinet, and my hands can’t reach it,” said one of the pirates.

“Let’s work together then. We will have to first move the cabinet.”

Instantly, a few pirates went into action, trying to pick up the fallen cabinet. Unfortunately, it wouldn’t budge, lodged securely in the hole it fell in. The water had now reached their waists, and if nothing was done, the Jackdaw would sink indefinitely.

“Can we cut it into half?”

Dufresne asked a bald pirate standing beside him, the only qualified carpenter on this ship.

“Yes, we can, but it will take some time. I don’t think we have enough,” replied the carpenter after a short moment of hesitation.

Just when the last drops of hope were almost dried up, a young man spoke up.

“About that... perhaps, I could give it a try?”