

48 Hours 221

Chapter 221: No Where To Run, Jarvis

“You?” asked a skeptical Dufresne.

“I’m small enough to squeeze in, which means I can fix the hole without moving the cabinet,” Harry replied.

Dufresne looked at the carpenter, who then turned to Harry for a good look. Then he nodded.

“It’s possible... theoretically.”

“Mr. Dufresne, please let me try. Otherwise, we’re all going to die here!”

“How about the wound on your arm?”

“It’s no big deal. I hurt it earlier while running because I was too afraid. Don’t worry about it,” Harry chuckled while swinging his arms to prove that he was fine.

“Quick! Take off your shirt.”

After Harry took off his shirt, Dufresne tore a sleeve off and wrapped it around a cork. He then passed it to Harry.

“Use this to plug the hole. If you think it’s not big enough, wrap some more cloth around the cork.”

“Understood!”

“You want to become a part of the Jackdaw, right? Finish this task, and I will suggest that the captain take you in as an official crew. Now, be careful.”

Harry was elated when he heard that.

“Leave it to me!”

Immediately, he took a deep breath and dived into the water.

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On another note, Jarvis had invested a lot of time making sure he got as far as he could from the Jackdaw. After a long while, he finally managed to get close to the navy ship. From his little boat, Jarvis could see Worden and Chris on the main deck. This was his first time meeting Worden. All this time, he had been contacting Chris. Throughout the entire operation, Jarvis had been leaking the pirates’ plans to Chris, knowing he was a high-ranking officer of the navy. When Jarvis came under the shadow of the hull, he put down the oars and waved to Chris, who strangely avoided eye contact.

“Are you ashamed?!” Worden harrumphed.

“No, sir.”

Though Chris’s face burned hot, he still managed to hold himself most confidently.

“Remember, they are a herd of primitive beasts. There’s no shame in fooling them. Think about the people they killed. You shouldn’t feel the slightest bit of guilt! I want you to lift your head and look him in the eyes.”

Chris longed to disobey the order, but he did it anyway. Jarvis was still waving his hands at him, glad to have finally caught their attention. It wasn’t too long before Jarvis realized the ice-cold stare coming out of Chris’ eyes. He quickly caught on, sensing that something wasn’t right. Being a legendary pirate of Nassau, of course he could read Chris’s mind. Whether he wanted it or not, he had thrown in everything get to where he was today. There was no turning back now.

The moment he betrayed Black Prince Sam and the rest of the captains, he knew that he could no longer return as a captain. Besides, most of his men were killed in the battle. Now, he was all alone in the vast ocean. Jarvis initially thought that he could get his immunity documents, thereby severing his past for good. But even if he managed to leave his life behind him, the door to the new world seemed to be permanently shut as well. Right now, he had nowhere else to go.

“Great! Now, I want you to kill him. Tell Count Lambert that Captain Jarvis was killed in battle. We shall honor our word and allow him to return to a civilized society. That only applies to his dead body, of course.”

Jarvis then saw the cannons on the main deck aiming at him. If he wanted to, there was still enough time to abandon the boat and swim away. After all, the navy was focusing on the Jackdaw and the beach. If he jumped into the water, he could probably dodge the cannonballs. Despite everything that could be said about him, Jarvis valiantly stayed on little boat. He knew that he would never be able to live in this world anymore, even if he managed to survive.

The cannoner lit up the fuse once Chris gave the order to fire. The first projectile missed its target. So, the cannoner readjusted the cannon and retook aim. As luck would have it, the second shot missed as well. The little boat rocked and shuddered violently as the massive cannonballs flew past at supersonic speed! Still, Jarvis sat like a statue, unwilling to yield. The third time around, the cannoner took half a minute to aim at Jarvis. Finally, he fired!

The flying cannonball landed directly on Jarvis. Seconds after that, his body surfaced, but no one seemed to care about the man. The death of Captain Jarvis was just a tiny interlude in the long symphony of battle.

After that, the navy and pirate-hunters started firing on the pirate ships docked onshore. Black Prince Sam used the swiftest way in dealing with the remaining pirates from the Warrior, gathering whatever of his men were left and rushing back his own ship. Casualties were mounting, and right now, they severely lacked men to fight off the navy and the pirate hunters. The cannoners they had were enough for only two ships, so after a short discussion, they decided to gather all that could still fight into one vessel.

Just when they alighted a small boat and were about to row to the nearest ship, the navy and pirate hunters launched a massive volley of artillery at them. This time around, they received their reckoning.

They were forced to watch flames engulf their ships. The first one that sank was Brook’s Swordfish. Having been severely damaged by the Spanish treasure ship, the carpenters had only fixed half of the

damage. As Jarvis had personally relayed this piece of information to the navy, the Swordfish would naturally become their first target. Brook knew all too well that his ship would be first to go. Still, he could not help but feel upset. After all, they had been through countless battles together, and his heart was like an anchor.

The next to come under siege was the Tigershark. Its strength was only second to the Quidah and was initially one of the ships that Black Prince Sam and the pirates intended to board. Before they could even get there, the enemies had started bombarding it with cannonballs. Luckily, its hull was tougher than the Swordfish. It lasted longer than the former, managing to buy the pirates some valuable time.

In the end, Black Prince Sam decided that he would give up boarding the Quidah because it was simply too far away from them. Immediately, he asked his men to turn around. Now, their new heading was to the Warrior. Previously, their crew were thinking of leaving the place after their betrayal had been found out. They were parked closest to the beach. Unfortunately, things had gone south, and now, they were unable to board. This gave Black Prince Sam and the rest a fighting chance instead of running away.

Though the outcome of this battle was no rocket science, they insisted on fighting for honor, till life's very end.

Chapter 222: Fury

"Are we safe now?"

By some miracle, the Jackdaw didn't sink even after two rounds of intense shelling. Instead, she limped clumsily out of the harbor.

Anne dislodged a large splinter stuck in her shoulder and asked, "Are we safe?"

When the armored ship opened fire, Zhang Heng had to stay by his post, so Anne shielded him. Although fortunate enough to steer clear of the explosion, the shrapnel from the blasts was an even more significant threat. Thus, the red-haired girl bore the brunt of all the flying debris.

It wasn't just her busted shoulder. Her arm, calves, and cheeks also had varying degrees of chaffs and lesions. Yet, despite the pain, she didn't whine or complain.

Zhang Heng did thank her – with the relationship they shared; there was no need for verbal expression. Instead, without saying a word, he took off his shirt and bandaged her wound with it.

"I don't think so. If they didn't have the upper hand, they wouldn't have just let us off like that. However, they won't need so many ships to fight the people on the beach, so I believe they will split up and send some after us."

As if a demented prophecy, the silhouette of two armored ships emerged amid the thick fog of war!

They must have just turned around since they were pretty far away from the Jackdaw. Nevertheless, they caught up to ailing ship pretty quickly.

Zhang Heng wouldn't typically worry about having a tail. With the Jackdaw's imposing firepower and a crew to match, he could easily win a fight against two pursuing enemies. Even if the situation did go south, they could just turn away and escape.

Right now, the Jackdaw was in terrible condition. They were understaffed, having practically no gunners on board. At least three masts were damaged, and the leak in the hull was getting worse. The flood had quickly risen by three feet and was already at the danger line.

Under such circumstances, it would take a miracle for them to make it back to Nassau. They couldn't fire, and they couldn't flee. How were they supposed to fight? This was the same situation that hit Dufresne. Even if the Jackdaw could break through the naval blockade, she wouldn't go any further in such a hamstrung state.

Zhang Heng couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel, but since he had put everything he had on this mission, he wouldn't have come unprepared. He put Anne in charge of the rudder after borrowing her dagger. Then, he went up to the mainmast. Back when he was on the Sea Lion, he was Roscoe's apprentice for some time and was no stranger to climbing high structures.

Even though he hadn't done anything of that sort since he became captain, he wasn't wholly rusty yet. Clamping his dagger between his teeth, he scaled the rickety rope ladder as quickly as he could. Once he was on the top at the crow's nest, he saw the scratched surface where an ancient Celtic name was once engraved.

Zhang Heng took the dagger out of his mouth. Ironically, being the one who crossed out the name, he was the one to carve it back on again.

Initially, the plan was to communicate with the so-called 'ancient Celtic god' only after he got the Tulewood box, the safest method he could think of. Now he had no other choice.

Zhang Heng had quite a few game props in his possession, but the only thing that could be of assistance in this situation was the yet to be identified seashell.

However, nothing out of the ordinary happened after he finished engraving the name, and the two armored ships drew even closer to the Jackdaw, their gunners ready to light the fuses.

Time was running out for Zhang Heng. That said, he wasn't inclined to think that Betty, the ancient Celtic god, must have abandoned him. In fact, he had always suspected that the god's objective back on the ghost ship wasn't Seth, but him, the captain himself.

Anne's sudden presence interrupted the god's appearance. As a result, it had to give up on Zhang Heng and targeted Seth instead since he was all alone. From the beginning, her goal had never changed. There was a reason why she instructed Seth to steal the three notebooks. She intended to use him as bait for Zhang Heng, knowing it would draw his attention.

But if that was the case, then why didn't she look for him again the moment he got the shell?

Zhang Heng quickly reevaluated his earlier conversation with Seth. He recalled the abrupt storm they encountered on their way back to Nassau, and he remembered Seth saying that anger was needed to control it.

Zhang Heng's brows furrowed. Perhaps it was because his parents were never around, and he was part of the grow-up-real-fast group, that he ended up more emotionally stable.

There were times when he got mad, of course, but ever since he realized that anger only solved nothing, he rarely flamed up at every other matter that annoyed him.

When Wei Jiangyang got cheated on his first job, his friends brought him for a night out. After having a little too much to drink, he told Zhang Heng, "Zhang Heng, I think that the most incredible thing about you is that: you see this cruel world for what it is, yet you're not disappointed by it. How do you do it? You're just like a bystander... you are good at everything. It's just that sometimes, you're just too calm that it gets boring.

Zhang Heng also knew that his SAN value fell slower sometimes, but he never thought that it would be a problem for him someday.

He looked back at his life, finding that no particular baggage weighed him down, nor was there the taste of bitterness in his heart. He harbored no hate towards anybody, hence the cavalier disposition.

This was going to be tricky.

Based on his deductions, not only did he need anger to summon the storms, but it would require continual waves of rage to keep the storm going. Seth's anger came and went quickly, which was why the storm only lasted for a short while.

So, if Zhang Heng wanted to break away from the two ships, he would need a storm that could last at least thirty minutes.

Zhang Heng had to find another way. He took in a deep breath and squeezed his eyes shut.

Half a minute later, the bows of the armored ships had almost come up to the stern of the Jackdaw. Suddenly, a flash of lightning as bright as the sun flashed across the night sky, striking a mast of one of the armored ships! Although no one was standing near it, the crew was shaken, terrified by the incident.

However, that was only just the beginning. Thunder rumbled along the horizon, and the wind started billowing from all directions. At the same time, the purple bolts of lightning grew more frequent akin to a discharging power grid. The calm seas became blustery, battering the wooden hulls with fury. Seeing that their target was mere feet away, the armored ship's captain gave the order to open fire.

However, a massive wave suddenly came crashing onto the side of their ship, knocking the cannons off their posts with a mighty force!

Chapter 223: Successful Escape

The Jackdaw's pirates waited patiently in the cabin, staring at the fallen cabinet. Harry had been under the water for a minute and a half. An ordinary person could only hold their breath underwater for about thirty to forty seconds. For those who lived by the sea from a very young age, they could stay submerged for two to three minutes. Considering that Harry needed to fix the hole while holding his breath, his oxygen consumption would increase and should be reaching his limit now.

There was no still response from below. Then, the pirates saw that the water had stopped rising. In other words, Harry must have successfully blocked the hole. The pirates started cheering and patting

each other's backs. Soon, the cheers faded off as they realized that Harry hadn't emerged. Immediately, Dufresne took off his shirt and jumped into the water.

Harry didn't disappoint, managing to fix the hole as promised. Unfortunately, when he was about to head back, his leg was caught a fishing net. Desperate to flee himself, Harry did everything he could, but only got entangled more. Despite his best efforts, he couldn't get rid of the net. Soon, he started choking for breath, and strength slowly sapped away from his muscles.

Due to the lack of oxygen, Harry's mind went blank.

"Is this where I die? I should have told them that I couldn't do the job. But then again... come to think about it, I think I'm the only one capable of fixing the hole. If I didn't do it, the Jackdaw would have sunk..."

Harry's lungs burned and could see his world turning darker and darker. His hands and legs stopped moving. That was all he remembered.

He regained consciousness after feeling someone slapping his face and pumping his chest. Immediately, Harry vomited a mouthful of seawater as he sputtered and gasped for dear air. The next thing he remembered was somebody lifting him onto their shoulders, and pirates chanting his name.

'Is this what it feels like to be a hero? Hmm... I think I like this feeling a lot,' thought Harry as he scratched his head in a daze.

Before he could relish the fame, there was a violent jolt, and he was thrown back into the water! The pirates around him were shocked as well. Suddenly, the Jackdaw started shaking and vibrating. It was so bad that nobody could stand on their feet. The roof started to crumble, and the holes and cracks they just fixed started to tear open again.

Dufresne quickly ordered two men to pump all the seawater from the cabin. As for the rest, they were instructed to get down to fixing the holes and cracks again. Everyone in the cabin was tasked with something to do. Soon, the situation stabilized, and when Dufresne was sure that they were out of danger, he ran up to the main deck in a hurry.

The moment he got outside, he was dumbfounded by what he saw. After he spent twenty minutes in the cabin, the ocean had changed entirely. Giant waves rocked the seas, and a gale with terrifying howls blew at them with ungodly force. With the storm came bright flashes of lightning. The wheelhouse was only a few steps away, but Dufresne spent half a minute to reach it. He even slipped and fell twice.

"Where's the captain?!"

Anne was unable to hear Dufresne over the deafening wind and thunder. Now, Dufresne had to shout to get his question across. Anne pointed at the mainmast behind her. It was all blurry, but Dufresne could see a shadowy figure right atop of the mast. Of course, he didn't connect the sudden storm to Zhang Heng, thinking he must have gone up to keep the mainsail.

"Where is the navy?"

It was about then when a cannonball suddenly landed ten meters away from the Jackdaw. An armored ship was hot on her tail, closing in fast from the left! The captain of the enemy vessel had ordered his

men to attack it. Fortunately, the wild storm would stop even the most experienced cannoneer from landing an accurate shot. Every time their cannoneer adjusted their sights, a mysterious wave would hit them, and the cannons would be misaligned.

As for the other enemy that was further away from the Jackdaw, they were less fortunate. The storm came so suddenly that their sailors failed to keep their mainsail in time. The unrelenting gusts caught the sails and broke their mainmast along with it. Left with no options, the captain turned around and returned to Parrot Island. With one enemy less, the Jackdaw could breathe a small sigh of relief.

The same couldn't be said for Dufresne's mood. Though they managed to solve part of the problem, he knew that it would be a great challenge for the severely crippled Jackdaw to survive such weather. As for Anne, she was busy wrestling the ship. Throughout this time, she had managed to employ brute strength to convince everyone that she was worthy of staying onboard.

However, Dufresne and a few on the ship knew all about her background. Before she came to Nassau, she had never been to sea before. In other words, she didn't know how to handle a ship. From the start, all she did was to hang on the wheel for dear life! Zhang Heng told her that all she needed to do was to make sure that they traveled in a straight line.

Dufresne was getting more worried that Anne might actually mess this up. What amazed him the most was the waves hitting the bow, literally like an undulating magic carpet ride. He didn't see a single wave hit the Jackdaw's side. However, Dufresne wasn't one to risk sinking the ship, and after witnessing Anne's less than stellar skills, he immediately took over the wheel. The enemy was still on their left. Soon, the storm only grew bigger, and the enemies started to question their rationale for continuing the pursuit.

The enemies knew that the Jackdaw was reaching the end of its line. All they needed to do was to strike them with some cannonballs, and they would see her on her merry way down to the bottom of the ocean. They were so close to their goal, and giving up now would be a waste.

However, these were pirate hunters and not the navy. Though Worden told his men to eliminate the Jackdaw at all costs, they wouldn't just put down their lives for some order. Under such dire circumstances, it was simply too risky for them to continue on. The storm too didn't look like it was about to let up anytime soon. There was a good chance that it would destroy their ship even if they managed to sink the Jackdaw.

Frustrated by the futile effort, the pirate hunters were forced to turn back after a few minutes. The Jackdaw was finally free of enemy pursuit. Right now, they had one last enemy left to fight – the storm. That was what bothered Dufresne in the first place. They would be forced to endure the raging sea for a little longer. Half an hour later, the wind gradually subsided, and like sorcery, the sea returned to its former calm.

Things seemed to be looking up for the Jackdaw once again. Throughout their tumultuous voyage, they managed to overcome every single threat that was hurled at them.

Chapter 224 New Crisis

After the wind and waves died down, only the Jackdaw remained on the vast ocean.

“I can’t believe we actually escaped!”

Dufresne surveyed the surrounding waters until he was sure that the enemy was nowhere to be seen. Only when he was convinced that they were alone did he plop down on the deck, breathing a long sigh of relief.

After finding Harry and hearing of Jarvis’s betrayal, he had been extremely anxious and tense. He held it all in until the danger was over. Now, he was completely drained and weak.

In a case where the navy had absolute firepower and completely blockaded the seaport, twelve pirates miraculously got the Jackdaw through the blockade, shook off their pursuers, and even successfully made it through the terrible storm. All this in a ship that was less than seaworthy at that time.

Every step of the way was a perilous affair, and everyone contributed by doing their absolute best. Even so, a lot of luck was involved, especially with the occurrence of the storm. It started brewing at the perfect moment. Had it struck them a minute later, and the two armored ships would have sunk the Jackdaw. What was even more incredible was that even in her condition, the Jackdaw was able to survive the fierce storm and still come out in one piece.

As the skies brightened, a soufflé of pink clouds lined the horizon. The drunk sailors finally woke from their slumber. Soon, the main deck began filling up with a hushed murmur audible amongst the pirates, most merely happy to be alive. Dufresne looked around until his gaze finally fell upon a silent figure standing at the stern.

When that man said that he was going to take everyone home, Dufresne thought that he was only saying it to appease the sailors. After all, as captain of the ship, it was only his duty to stabilize the situation first. What Dufresne never expected was that Zhang Heng would actually fulfill his promise, and lead the Jackdaw in an astonishing escape from a desperate situation that seemed hopeless.

Whatever he had done last night, no one else could have done it in his place.

His achievements overshadowed the sphere of what an ordinary human could do. The Jackdaw’s incredible night was nothing short of a miracle, clearly reflected in the expressions of awe and admiration on the sailors’ faces. Zhang Heng, however, didn’t look particularly cheery.

Having recuperated his strength after resting for a bit, Dufresne walked up to the captain and looked in at the direction he was looking at. It was probably toward Parrot Island. Nevertheless, they couldn’t spot anything from so far away.

“Do they... still have a chance?”

Zhang Heng shook his head. “The navy came very well prepared this time. And then there’s Jarvis, their spy. We’ve lost a lot this time around. If Black Sam and the others wish to live, they would have to retreat to the heart of the island. But that is exactly what the navy hopes for. They won’t even have to do anything. All they need to do is to wait for two weeks, and when they get on the island, they’ll find themselves a gang of famished, diseased pirates who are on the verge of death.”

Dufresne fell silent. He, too, had already guessed it. This was the very reason why Zhang Heng did everything in his power to get the Jackdaw away from the island. This battle was doomed long before it even started.

Although both sides were on equal footing when it came to firepower, it wasn't a fair contest at all. The pirates on the island were attacked while celebrating, caught completely unaware. They were separated from their ships and their weapons weren't loaded. On top of that, their brains were gin-soaked – in no condition to fight, yet, forced to do so. One could only imagine what the outcome of that would be.

While Dufresne and Zhang Heng were in the middle of the conversation, the recently hired bookkeeper hurried over to them.

"Captain, Mr. Dufresne, you better come see this," said the man while panting.

Zhang Heng and Dufresne quickly followed the bookkeeper to the hold. Nearly all the seawater had been pumped out, and except for the dampness, it was mostly back to its normal state. However, the sailors inside looked grim, as they stood looking at a bucket of clean water.

Dufresne reached in and scooped some into his hands. He took a sip, but its saltiness made him spit it out instantly. He asked, "How much?"

"We're out of luck, sir. Two shells hit the area where we stored our fresh water. It destroyed around seven or eight barrels of them. It was fine at first, but when the flood came in, seawater mixed with it. There's also not much rum left on the ship because we took out thirty barrels for the party!"

"Anything else?" the quartermaster asked when he saw the bookkeeper gulp.

"The biscuits stored in here are soaked in seawater as well. We managed to save some of it, but the rest of it can't be eaten."

"So, how long can our reserves last us?"

"We have enough food. Even without the biscuits, we still have the dried meat and potatoes. We can also have our men go fishing. If we carefully ration our food, it should be enough to last us till Nassau. But..." the bookkeeper paused. "...there's only enough water for four days."

"Four days?!"

"At our rate of current consumption, yes."

Dufresne immediately recognized the direness of the situation. It took the Jackdaw almost two weeks to get from Nassau to Parrot Island, and that was with the wind on their tail.

The Jackdaw had just endured a major battle. As luck would have it, the masts were not seriously damaged, and the sails had been patched up by the crew. Now, of all things, the wind wasn't in their favor. It would take them much longer to return to Nassau.

"Are there any islands nearby where we can replenish our water supply?" Zhang Heng asked.

"There is one near us... a small island, only a quarter of the size of Parrot Island, but there's no water there, sir," a sailor answered.

"Then, from now on, we'll start restricting the water on board. Everyone will receive an allotted amount every day," Dufresne said.

Zhang Heng made no comments. Instead, he turned to Harry and said, "Go get my chart from my quarters."

The latter had been eavesdropping on the conversation, wondering when Dufresne would tell Zhang Heng about his contribution. When Zhang Heng spoke directly to him, he was taken aback, but for whatever reason, a look of excitement suddenly washed over his face, and he made haste to the captain's quarters.

However, once inside, he was distressed. Unfamiliar with the room, it took him almost half a day of rummaging around to find the chart tucked away at the top of the bookshelf.

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Zhang Heng spread out the chart, and the first thing he did was to locate Parrot Island and tried to look for the nearby island. He seemed to be calculating something in his head.

Dufresne was puzzled. "There's no fresh water on the island. What is the use of us going there?"

"We've been hounded and pursued by these guys for the longest time now. We'd be letting them off the hook too easily if we just leave without asking for any recompense. Also, the water that we need will come from them," Zhang Heng explained.

Chapter 225 Coral Island

Jackdaw no longer suffered the lack of staff after all the pirates sobered up. The ship's cannons could finally be put to good use. As for its condition, most of the cracks and holes had been hastily patched up, and she could move normally again. Although not the best option, restoring it to its mint state would take ages, not to mention needing a dry dock. Right now, there weren't any materials left to fix it. Any further repairs would have to wait until they returned to Nassau.

In the jerry-rigged state that the Jackdaw was in, they would certainly meet their end if they engaged in another battle. This time around, Harry was asked to attend the pre-battle meeting. Back then, when discussing the attack on the Spanish treasure ship back, Ramsay and Harry were asked to stay out of it. Later, it was discovered that Harry became very upset due to this. So he was pleasantly surprised when Zhang Heng allowed him to be a part of the coveted discussion, a closed-door meeting typically attended by the higher ranking staff of the ship. Naturally, this got Harry really excited, and though the captain forbade him from talking during the meeting, he was so happy that a silly grin couldn't leave his face.

On the other spectrum of emotions, Billy was deeply guilty about what happened last night. He had gotten so drunk that he couldn't help protect the ship and was genuinely disappointed in himself. Feeling dishonored, he insisted on giving up his helmsman post. However, after some persuasion, Zhang Heng and the rest of the crew managed to talk him out of it.

No doubt, Billy was the best candidate to be the helmsman on the whole of Jackdaw. Dufresne, although no slouch, preferred to work as quartermaster of the ship. Before last night's incident, Billy had been always been a trustworthy crewman, taking his duties very seriously.

The crew wouldn't simply deny all his contributions because of one accidental lapse of judgment. Of course, he would be punished accordingly for overindulging to the point where the ship's security was

compromised. For the next three voyages, his regular portion of loot would be cut in half. However, he was still allowed his bonus. Fortunately, after all the deductions and subtractions, he would still receive the same amount as the others, more or less. Even as they were talking, Billy was already well into his tasks again.

“Are you sure they will come after us?” asked Billy.

“I’m bloody sure they will. Previously, they sent two ships because they wanted to defeat us in one go. We only managed to shake them off because of the sudden storm. I have every reason to believe that the navy sank all pirate ships on Parrot Island last night. In other words, they would only need a ship or two to keep an eye on the remaining pirates there. This leaves the rest of them free to pursue us. After all, we have suffered a considerable amount of damage, and we are only half a day from Parrot Island. They can easily catch up to us if they depart now.”

“What if they decide to come after us all of their ships? If that’s the case, we would be willingly walking into their trap,” said Dufresne.

“The possibility of it happening is extremely tiny. After crossing paths with the enemy, I see that their commander is extremely good at what he does. I think he should figure out that we would take the longer route back to Nassau if we wish to avoid them. So, the best option for them would be splitting up to cover more water. Our hull is severely damaged. We won’t last long if we engage in battle with them again. They know that one ship of theirs is enough to defeat us even if they all split up. I believe that the commander is willing to risk it to finish us off.”

“Coral Island is two hundred nautical miles east of Parrot Island. It is in the same direction as Nassau. However, it is slightly to the north. We should stop here and wait a day. If my deductions are wrong and our enemies choose to stick together instead, they would head straight to Nassau. If that’s the case, they will pass by without noticing us, and our threat would be nullified. If I’m right, then one of their ships would definitely cross paths with us. By that time, we could take to take their ship and solve our water problem.”

“What should we do? The hull is in real bad shape. I don’t think we will survive another high-intensity battle,” said Billy.

“This is why we need a small island. It’s similar to the strategy we used for the Spanish treasure ship. First, we dismount the cannons and move them to the island. After that, Jackdaw will lure the ship into the firing range of the on-shore cannons. We will attack them with everything that we’ve got! By luck, we can prevent our ship from taking further damage.”

Zhang Heng had so much faith in his strategy only because he heard the game’s notification earlier. He leveled up his sailing skills from two to three, but in the heat of battle, he was so focused that he completely ignored it. Once the storm was over, he noticed that his level on his character panel had changed.

When he rammed his ship into the navy’s defensive line, the tremendous amount of pressure he was put under inadvertently awakened his potential. Thanks to that, his sailing skills received a massive boost. After he realized that it had been upgraded to Lv3, he found that maneuvering the Jackdaw was

as easy as a swing of the arm. He was confident about using his ship to lure the enemy into his trap without receiving any damage.

The key to success for this plan was to make sure that Jackdaw could lure its target within their shooting range. Then, the cannons had to make sure that it was eliminated. It had to be done there and then. Once the enemy was out of range, it would be impossible for the crew to move the cannons back to the ship and continue pursuing them.

“Let survey the terrain first. We should figure out a way to solve this problem,” said Zhang Heng.

The nautical charts of the 18th century weren’t as accurate as their modern counterparts. Without the existence of the Global Positioning System, it would be an arduous task to accurately map out the entire terrain of the island. Everything was drawn by hand, and other than its name and a roughly estimated size, they got nothing useful out of it. Luckily, Jackdaw was very close to the island, and after half a day, they finally arrived. Zhang Heng, Anne, and the ship’s senior crew proceeded to explore the place.

“I finally know why they called this place Coral Island,” said Anne.

“The reef made up most of the island, more than its landmass,” Billy continued.

While on their way here, they noticed the most diverse coral reef they had ever laid eyes on under the water. With brilliant and kaleidoscopic colors, they blanketed the ocean floor. However, there were shallow reefs hidden around the area as well. This had Zhang Heng interested.

“Perhaps we have a way to make the target stay within our firing range after all,” Zhang Heng muttered.

“Are you planning to use the shallow reefs to force them into a particular spot? Sounds like it could work. That said, if we do that, our ship will be in danger as well. I don’t think we have the time to locate every shallow point.”

“For that, we will have to rely on the draft of both ships. Our ship and our enemy’s ship are similar in size. However, once we dismount the cannons, our ship will be significantly lighter. But no. I want it even lighter! We will move all our food, drinking water, and anything heavy to the island. With that, Jackdaw will run well above the shoals, and we will cross safely!”

Chapter 226 Crossing Paths

The previous battle ended less than a day ago, and now, Jackdaw was already preparing for the next fight. None of the the crew complained, though. The pirates were in deep frustration about the previous battle. Most were drunk silly, and they didn’t know what happened to them. All they knew was that the navy suddenly appeared and started attacking nonstop. Having so many pirates around, the navy and pirate hunters should have had a challenging enemy, but unfortunately, the obscene amount alcohol the pirates consumed rendered them useless.

No one could accept losing such a lopsided battle. That was why everyone snapped out from their misery the moment Zhang Heng said he wanted to attack one of the enemy ships. They were reignited by the prospect of taking all their food and water before returning to Nassau. After witnessing what Zhang Heng had done for them and the ship, Jackdaw’s pirates now had absolute trust and faith in him. They would forge a path ahead even if it meant death awaited them.

Without wasting any time, the pirates doubled their efforts and dismantled all the cannons from the ship in the shortest time possible. Only the chase gun was left on board. Other than the artillery, they moved their entire supply of food and water to the island as well. Some even went around the cabins to dismantle everything that could lighten the ship. When everything was done, Zhang Heng kept twenty men with him to operate the vessel.

There was practically nothing left on board, save for some food rations that could last them half a day. In exchange for amenities, the ship's draft had reduced significantly and was now literally sitting on the very surface of the water.

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The target came into sight faster than anticipated. Jackdaw had only departed the island for less than two hours, and already, the watchers spotted a ship from afar heading for them full speed ahead. Zhang Heng's deductions were right. The navy would leave no stone unturned, making sure that not a single pirate would leave this place alive. Destroying five ships wasn't enough for Worden. Though they had the upper hand, Jackdaw still managed to escape. Such a humiliating outcome was unacceptable for the likes of Worden.

When the storm was over, Worden instantly sent some men to pursue Jackdaw. Zhang Heng knew these people. They were the two armored ships that came after him earlier, one of them being Miranda. It was the ship that persevered till the very end, not letting up until they were forced to turn around after the storm got worse.

Although Worden didn't say anything about losing the target, Ford found this an unacceptable outcome as captain. This was his first time letting his prey slip away ever since becoming a pirate hunter. Accordingly, he quickly volunteered to join the hunting team. Ford intended to sink Jackdaw as proof that he was the best pirate hunter around these waters.

However, when he was told that every ship had to choose a different direction, Ford didn't have much hope that he would cross paths with Jackdaw again. To his surprise, the goddess Fortuna had once again showered her blessings upon him. They had stumbled upon the one that got away. The moment Ford spotted Jackdaw, he quickly ordered his men into a combat-ready status. This time, he swore he would never let his prey escape his sight anymore.

At the same time, Zhang Heng also saw Miranda charging towards them. Putting down his monocular in hand, he declared with confidence, "Let's stick to the plan."

After the chase ensued for a while, Ford noticed that Jackdaw had released their topsail to increase speed. However, that seemed ineffective as there were holes in the fabric. Ford figured their topsail might have been damaged during their previous battle, and wondered why they didn't fix it. Anyhow, this explained why Miranda caught up with Jackdaw a lot faster than expected. According to Ford's calculations, he estimated that he would need at least a full day to catch up with them.

This early encounter gave Ford a pleasant surprise. He wasn't interested in knowing what had happened to Jackdaw. All he wanted to do right now was to destroy them. Since Ford became captain, his Miranda was one of the fastest ships around this area, almost as fast as Jackdaw. Now that it was in a bad shape, it was time for Miranda to shine.

The invincible Jackdaw was now running away from it, and they had become the hunted. Ford instantly noticed the prowess of Jackdaw's helmsman when they escaped the navy earlier. Just like that time, Jackdaw didn't disappoint. Only that now, there was a huge difference in speed. Soon, Miranda would catch up with Jackdaw.

Standing at the bow, he could spot Jackdaw's pirates working nonstop with the naked eye. His blood started boiling with excitement. Like most pirate hunters, Ford used to be in the navy. Not too long after joining the force, he was hired as captain for a merchant ship. Through that, he managed to earn himself a handsome amount of money. Most pirate hunters who chose that line of work had been robbed by pirates before. Their resentment and grudges towards the sea bandits turned them to pirate hunting. They hoped to end the menace for good. Ford was different, though. He had never been plundered by pirates before.

Ford chose the life of a pirate hunter simply because he craved adventure. Other than the bountiful reward and glory that came along with the job, becoming a pirate hunter reminded him of hunting with his father in the woods when he was still a kid. He always enjoyed a good fight with his prey. Words could never describe the satisfaction gained after killing his victim. All that money aside, this wasn't something he could experience being a merchant ship captain.

"Captain Ford, there's an island dead ahead!" said the chief officer.

"Eh?"

"According to the charts, it's Coral Island."

The chief officer then paused before continuing.

"Do you think they fled here on purpose?"

"For what?"

The chief officer didn't know the answer to the question. After the pirates used Parrot Island to ambush the Spanish treasure ship, the chief officer became cautious whenever he saw an island. However, after putting some thought into it, he realized that Jackdaw couldn't afford to ambush them. Five out of six pirate ships were destroyed in this operation, with Jackdaw the only survivor. Even if they wanted to ambush them, they had no allies for support.

"On the charts, I see that this area has been marked high-risk. There are many shallow reefs around the entire place. Could they, perhaps, intend to lure us there, and run us aground? We'll be stranded if we hit the shoals."

"Regarding this... well, I don't think they had time to explore this area. Unless someone on their ship is familiar with this place, it will be even riskier for them if they run into those reefs. However, it appears we won't have to test our luck. Have the helmsman follow them closely. We will move directly behind, following their path. If there's anything to hit, they'll hit it before us."

Ford paused a while then harrumphed,

“Previously, they tried to use the storm to make us retreat. This time, they use hidden reefs to scare us off! Do they really think that we are a bunch of cowards? I will quit pirate hunting if they manage to flee from us again!”

Chapter 227 Victory

A cannonball aiming for Jackdaw flew past the gunwale and landed onto the water. The cannoneer on Miranda was so frustrated that he slapped the bow chaser. This was the fifth time he missed his target. It had never happened to him before. Not only did Jackdaw manage to dodge the attack, but as if taunting them, they also successfully hit Miranda with their chase gun.

Ford could feel that it was going to be a big challenge to deal with them this time. They were like mudskippers that always slipped away from their hands, no matter how hard they tried to grasp it. It was no wonder they were known as one of the best pirate crews in Nassau. They were bloody good at what they did. Even in this critical situation, they were still alive and kicking. However, certain things couldn't be solved by courage alone—things like Jackdaw's damage. They were also a lot faster, and the moment Miranda pulled up to them, they would be able to fire their side cannons.

By that time, Jackdaw would be greeted by death, whether they wanted it or not. That was why Ford wasn't too worried when his cannoneer missed their target. The sailors on Miranda started to loosen up as well. Coral Island was different from Parrot Island. It was smaller, and there wasn't a tall ridge running through it. The land was unobstructed except for a small forest in the middle. After circling half the island, the chief officer was confident that no other pirate ships were hiding there.

It appeared that Jackdaw and her crew had run out of options, and they were forced to sail into a hidden reef zone. Just like what Ford said, their ship would be safe from scraping the reefs as long as they followed right behind them. A couple of old and experienced sailors were on Miranda, and they had been through many battles with countless pirates. These were cunning and crafty old sea dogs. Defeating so many pirates was enough to prove that they were no ordinary folk. Their experience taught them to be extremely sensitive to any threats that approached them.

Until now, they didn't notice anything fishy. Victory against Jackdaw was within their grasp. Just as Ford started drowning himself in joy, he felt his ship shudder violently. Many sailors were caught off guard and fell off balance.

“What's going on?!” asked Ford.

“Captain, I think our ship hit a reef,” said the chief officer.

“Of course, I know we hit something! You don't need to tell me that. I'm asking, how is it possible that we hit the hidden reef?!”

Ford lost all calm and had started shouting furiously. He then pointed at Jackdaw.

“They just passed this place as well! Why didn't they hit the reef?!”

“About that...”

The chief officer was left speechless. The ship had started taking in water as they were arguing. Having hit a rather high shoal, it scraped open a large gash under the hull. The hole was too big to be fixed, and

soon, Miranda started to list before finally stopping at 30 degrees. Just before they could do anything, they heard cannons being fired at them.

The pirates asked to stay on the island had been waiting for this moment for far too long. Miranda colliding with the reef was their signal to open fire.

Lady Fortuna must have missed her mark, and Ford wasn't in luck today. Cannonballs rained on Miranda during the first round of attack. Their sailors stumbled again as their ship was pattered by the relentless firing from the shore. The chief officer was shouting orders, attempting to gather all available cannoneers to return fire. Unfortunately, Miranda was at an angle where the beach was out of reach of its cannons. At most, their shells could only reach the beach. They simply didn't have the range to attack the enemies that were hiding in the woods, no matter how hard they tried.

At the same time, Ford shouted and ordered his men to adjust the mainsail with the hope of getting his ship away from the place. Unfortunately, it yielded no result. His bulging eyes were bloodshot, and the veins on his neck popped out. No matter how hard he screamed, he couldn't stop Miranda from sinking.

"Captain. It's time to abandon ship!" cried the chief officer desperately with tears in his eyes as he embraced Ford.

Ford was unable to accept that this was happening to him. The whole thing was puzzling. Only a few minutes ago, Miranda was slated for a sure win in this battle. Within the blink of an eye, everything changed dramatically. This was the second time Ford dealt with Zhang Heng. Supposedly, Jackdaw had lost all her advantage. However, today's outcome was worse than in the previous battle. At that time, Ford had to retreat due to the weather, something he didn't have control over. Now, he had no excuse. The haggard man was embarrassed and disgraced. They hadn't even touched Jackdaw, and they had already started sinking.

How did Jackdaw pass the hidden reefs undamaged?

Where did the attack come from?

Who was working together with Jackdaw to attack them?

These were questions Ford couldn't answer. It was indeed a peculiar battle. Disgraced and demoralized, the crew could take it no more, hence jumping into the sea one after another.

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Ford had no recollection of being dragged down the ship by his chief officer all the way to the beach. By the time he regained consciousness, he was greeted by guns pointed at him. The survivors from Miranda were huddled together on the beach, trying to tell each other that everything was going to be okay. With their heads bowed, they were waiting for fate's judgment.

Once the battle was over, Zhang Heng rowed to Coral Island on a small boat. Billy was so excited that he ran up to Zhang Heng when he spotted him.

"This is a tremendous victory for us! Other than a pirate getting hurt while capturing the sailors, everyone else is fine. However, we spent a lot of ammunition to complete this mission. I tried my best to ask our men to conserve it, but it seems many grudges are buried within their hearts. Luckily, they

managed to stop in time. The Miranda is still intact. I have sent someone of our men to see what they have on board.”

“Great.”

Looking at a dejected Ford, Zhang Heng wasn't surprised by the outcome. The Miranda's fate was sealed the moment she took the bait and decided to pursue Jackdaw. The fighting part wasn't that complicated. The complicated part was getting Miranda to take the bait. Now that victory was claimed, Jackdaw's food and water problem were solved.

Zhang Heng was also surprised that he managed to capture Miranda's captain and chief officer. In other words, he could extract valuable information about Worden's plan, the number of ships they had, the direction they were heading, and the rendezvous point. This could greatly help in their safe return to Nassau.

“Look for a quiet place. I want to interrogate them.”

“Understood.”

Chapter 228 A Bold Plan

Zhang Heng interrogated the captain, chief officer, and the sailors separately. This was to prevent them from working with each other and fool him with some story. He then compared all the information he collected to verify the authenticity of their stories. Half an hour later, he was about to unveil some shocking news. He quickly gathered Billy, Anne, and the rest of the ship's senior staff. He even looked for the chief carpenter to join the meeting.

“You wish to return to Parrot Island?!”

Billy was taken aback by Zhang Heng's decision.

“According to the information from our prisoners, there is one navy battleship, the Kent, docked at Parrot Island. Their defense is at their weakest right now. Perhaps we can take this opportunity to rescue everyone from the island. It's a double-edged sword. We can also retrieve the gold bars at the bottom of the sea!”

“How do you plan to do that? Judging by Jackdaw's current condition, I don't think we can survive another battle. If our ship is fine, we wouldn't have needed Coral Island to eliminate Miranda in the first place. Once we arrive at Parrot Island, we can't use its terrain to aid our battles anymore. This time, we can't just beat them by coming up with another plan to outsmart them.”

Though Billy was interested in rescuing all the pirates stuck on Parrot Island and retrieving the gold bars, he figured the risks were simply too great. Zhang Heng didn't respond to Billy's concerns, and instead, turned to Gale, the chief carpenter.

“With enough materials, how long would it take to fix the ship till she's combat ready?”

“If I have all the materials and manpower I need... six days. No. I can complete the task in five days.”

“Where are we going to get the materials we need?” asked Dufresne.

Zhang Heng then pointed at Miranda.

“Cannibalize her, and we will have enough parts.”

“That is a good idea! If that’s the case, two days would do it, captain,” replied Gale.

“Time is not a problem. The navy sent five ships to pursue us. We managed to eliminate one. Now, they have four ships. They’d all agreed to return to Parrot Island in two weeks to kill the remaining pirates. One day has passed now. Let’s say we take a week to fix the ship. I believe we should have enough time to return to Parrot Island and fight them.”

Zhang Heng’s plan convinced Billy. Truth be told, the navy didn’t just carelessly leave only one ship to guard Parrot Island. With Jackdaw’s current condition, it would be a miracle if they returned to Nassau. The prospect of Jackdaw returning to Parrot Island simply didn’t cross their minds. One navy vessel was more than enough to keep an eye on the marooned pirates. Zhang Heng’s plan might sound ridiculous, but it was doable. The pirates of Jackdaw were elated when they defeated Miranda and even had even stocked up enough rations to carry on with the voyage. This, of course, didn’t make up for the losses that they sustained.

This time, the entire pirate entourage had almost been entirely defeated by the navy. Not only did they lose their ships, but the gold they worked so hard to get were also about to fall in navy hands. However, if they managed to save all the pirates and take back all the gold bars, it could be a huge turning point for them.

“I think this plan could work. We can start preparing for the next battle.”

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Soon, everyone on the ship had gotten wind that Zhang Heng was to return to Parrot Island. Just as expected, no one went against his decision. This plan for retribution had everything to do with the pirates’ honor and 5,000 pounds of gold bars. Very quickly, everyone gave up resting and began all the necessary preparations for their next battle.

Since he had all the men he needed, Gale decided to clean up the entire ship. It was littered with all manner of filth, and the hull was smothered by a thick layer of barnacles and seaweed. By clearing them off, Jackdaw could at least speed up by half a knot, a crucial increase in facing their next fight.

While everyone was working hard to patch up the ship, Zhang Heng was nowhere to be found. When Anne finally found him, he was sitting on a rock, gazing at the sunset. His mind was 200 lightyears away from the beach. From afar, he looked like someone from another world. Anne looked for an empty spot and sat beside, passing a bottle of wine to him.

“The repairs are going well. We should be able to complete the whole thing by morning. Gale says the ship will become even sturdier after the repairs.”

“Great. We’ve spent a little too long on this island. It’s time to leave.”

Zhang Heng sipped a little wine and passed the bottle back to Anne. The calm sea breeze blew in their hair as they silently gazed at the setting sun.

“How about you? Are you doing okay?”

“Hmm?”

“Aren’t you going to talk about the storm? Everyone said that it was a miracle. They said the Goddess of Ocean, Thetis, must have blessed us. We both know that’s not true. We all heard Seth’s story. I know you engraved the name of the Celtic god on our mast during the storm, right? What’s her name again? Betty, was it?”

“Yes. Look. Don’t worry. I won’t let our Jackdaw end up like the carrack. I just... I don’t remember the last time I sat down quietly to enjoy the sunset.”

During those critical moments, Zhang Heng did indeed use the shell. He did not have a bitter past, and he was no angry teenager as well. In the end, he had to immerse himself into the world of literature to trigger his anger. He chose the novel, *Les Misérables*. The main character, Jean Valjean, was jailed for nineteen years just because he stole some bread to help his sister feed her seven hungry children. Before meeting Bishop Myriel, he had been through unspeakable torment, and it made him hate the world and all that was in it.

The method was very effective. Not only did Zhang Heng manage to summon the storm, but he even led Jackdaw to escape their enemies. That was the very first time Zhang Heng came in touch with Betty. He finally knew the reason why the goddess didn’t look for him. She wasn’t trying to be mysterious, nor was it bad timing. It was because she was in a weakened state. After convincing Seth on the carrack, she did not have enough strength to show herself anymore. It wasn’t until Zhang Heng took the shell and engraved her name on the mast that she finally managed to recover some of her power.

According to her, she was way weaker than she used to be. One didn’t have to go as far back as a thousand years when she was at the top of her prowess. Just a hundred years ago, she was even stronger than her current self. That was why Zhang Heng couldn’t control the storm to speed up the ship. The most he could do was to ensure that Jackdaw got out of the storm in one piece.

Chapter 229 Crocodile and Plover Bird

Zhang Heng managed to talk to Betty for a short while during the storm. She told him the similar story she told Seth. Betty claimed she was an ancient Celtic God, and had the power to protect all sailors out at sea. She would grant her followers the power of controlling storms. This power, however, was limited for now, and Zhang Heng could only use it once a month.

According to Betty, the world had almost forgotten her name. If Zhang Heng could recruit more disciples for her, she would eventually be powerful enough to grant Zhang Heng more abilities. Once she was restored to her pinnacle, she would be able to make Zhang Heng the lord of the ocean. In order for it to come true, the goddess would need millions of disciples. This was why she targeted Zhang Heng all the while after noticing his extraordinary leadership skills.

However, Zhang Heng didn’t answer her on the spot. He knew that he would only be only in this world for another decade. It would be pointless even if he became king of the ocean. Aside from that, what Betty said reminded him about the Moresby, the monster that escaped from Papua New Guinea.

According to that older man, that thing was a sacred totem worshipped by one of the Papuan tribes. Along with the extinction of the Alkiz tribe, Moresby had to stick himself into a short time loop. When it emerged, it had significantly weakened.

After talking to Betty, Zhang Heng discovered that all supernatural entities were actually facing the survival problem as well. As compared to humans, their situation was on the verge of collapse.

Thanks to that, he didn't wholeheartedly believe what Betty told him. Since she would cease to exist real soon, the promises she made were questionable. Besides, Zhang Heng still couldn't figure out what happened to the carrack. In no way would he place all his faith in this mysterious being. Be it as it may, he still managed to extract useful information from their conversation.

Whether it was Moresby or Betty, their powers had everything to do with the number of disciples they had. It seemed as if they were afraid of being forgotten by the world. When Zhang Heng was a kid, he heard countless stories about gods. Regardless of where the mythology originated from, gods were always perceived as mighty and powerful beings. They created the world and humans, and they could do anything they want. Right now, Zhang Heng understood that gods and humans actually shared a mutual relationship. Just like the crocodile and the plover bird, the sea anemone and hermit crab.

Zhang Heng wasn't sure if his metaphor was suitable to describe the ancient gods' current state of affairs. This evening, he could watch the sunset on the beach. It had nothing to do with any previous occurrence whatsoever. In retrospect, he realized that he had been in this world for almost two years now, and was getting increasingly comfortable with his current life. Memories of his real-life strayed further and further away from him.

As he gazed at the crimson sunset, faint wisps of memories from the real world drifted through Zhang Heng's mind. Perhaps that was the only thing that remained unchanged throughout three hundred years. Nonetheless, despite being homesick, he didn't dwell too long in his nostalgia and longingness. He pulled himself back to where he was and finished the wine with Anne. As the sun descended into the horizons, the two strolled back to base camp.

"I'm not sure if Anne's told you about the progress of our repairs. We are nearing completion! If it all works out, I think we can set sail tomorrow afternoon," Billy said as he ran towards Zhang Heng.

"Everyone has worked very hard for this. Let's take half a day off after it's done. We need to rest well and prepare for our next battle. We will depart to Parrot Island day after tomorrow."

Billy was cool with the idea. After he left, it was Dufresne's turn to look for Zhang Heng. He gave the situation report to the captain.

"The food and water problem is solved for now. We have enough for another month and a half. However, since we are heading to Parrot Island to get the rest of the pirates, I've hidden the rest of the rations inside a cave west of the beach. By leaving the extra bulk here, our ship will sail faster during critical situations. We can always come back if we need them urgently. After all, it's only a day from Parrot Island."

"Good job." said the captain.

Dufresne wasn't finished and continued,

"As for our ammunition, we have been through several fierce battles, and we have spent a lot. We still have some for our twenty-four-pound cannons. We got some from Miranda as well."

“Worst come to worst, we can always replace the twenty-four-pound cannons with the twelve-pound cannons.”

“Actually, I’m not worried about the number of cannonballs we have. I’m worried about the gunpowder. Miranda didn’t do a good job of keeping their gunpowder away from getting wet. When we fought with them, most of their gunpowder barrels were opened. We managed to salvage some of it. I opened up two to see if they were any good. After I looked at it twice, I found it badly affected by moisture.”

“Do you think our gunpowder is enough for the next battle?”

“It’s enough for seven or eight rounds, sir.”

These figures were acceptable for Zhang Heng. Seven shots should be enough to end a battle. However, that meant they couldn’t afford to make a single error. Everything was ready, and they had no reason to give up on the mission. Once Jackdaw was wholly fixed, it would be strong enough to handle a battle. Even if the enemy was more robust than them, Zhang Heng could still choose to run away. Ever since his sailing skill had increased to Lv.3, he felt confident about his seamanship.

Whether it was for the five thousand pounds of gold bars, or to save the pirates marooned on the island, or even for vengeance, this battle was inevitable.

“Don’t worry. We will defeat them with seven rounds,” said Zhang Heng while patting Dufresne’s shoulder.

“Yes, captain.”

Dufresne didn’t want to return to Nassau empty-handed as well. His job was done, and he reported the current situation to Zhang Heng. Now, he would wait for the captain to make the call.

The night went by peacefully.

On the second day, the pirates were done fixing Jackdaw, launching it back to sea over a bed of rolling logs. The moment she hit the water, cheers erupted when they saw the vessel bestowed to her former glory. All that effort hadn’t been wasted after all. Not only had all the holes and cracks been fixed, but they even employed extra materials cannibalized from Miranda’s wreck. Blending hard work with a bit of scrap, they managed to greatly fortify the ship.

Jackdaw was now ready for the next battle.

Chapter 230 Black Flag

Nine days had passed since the battle began.

The navy fleet’s sudden appearance caused the celebrating pirates to suffer massive losses. It was complete chaos on the beach. Under Black Prince Sam’s persuasion, Brooke and some pirates not too sloshed from the drinking launched a bold counterattack against the navy.

However, their valiant efforts were not enough to alter the final outcome. Brooke and Black Prince Sam each lead their men to not only successfully board a pirate ship but also to employ its artillery against the navy. Alas, their attacks only lasted two rounds before the enemy sank their ships.

Some sailors lost their lives to the sea, and some, like Brook, swam to the shore and escaped into the woods. Not long after, they came across the second group of pirates who also managed to escape. They had brought along with them their other drunk men from the beach as well. Owing to time constraints and with gunfire and explosives raining on them, they only managed to bring less than a fifth of them.

Brook looked around him. Including those who died battle, fewer than a hundred men were left from six pirate ships that sailed together. After nine days of starvation and exposure, the one hundred men were frail and on the verge of death.

Due to the hasty retreat, they brought almost nothing with them. Most of the food and water were on the ship which was now at the bottom of the sea, no thanks to the enemy. Brooke knew very well what the navy planned to do – very soon, they would return, and the final battle will ensue. There was nothing he could do, though. He had lost his ship and was stuck indefinitely on the island.

Despite Parrot Island being rather large, it was devoid of freshwater. For the past few days, the pirates could only quench their thirst by licking off condensation on the rocks, much like mountain goats, or sucking on wet earth. The moisture tasted like mud, and there wasn't much of it either. Brook's lips were dry and cracked.

Thankfully, they successfully captured a goat last night. Not only did each of them have a piece of lamb, but they also had a drink of its blood. Though enough to relieve their hunger and thirst by a little, the goat was shared among nearly a hundred people. There was barely enough to go around.

To make matters worse, there were not many goats on the island to start with. Most had already been hunted for the party, and now it was becoming more and more difficult to find any of them. The goat they managed to capture was the only one they came across in two days.

Along with the lack of food and water, they were also short on medicine and ammunition.

They had nearly one hundred men but only twenty long muskets and eight blunderbusses. Even bladed weapons such as daggers and scimitars weren't enough for every man. Whatever remaining bullets they had were used for hunting, and with no medical supplies, the wounded had to get by with simple tourniquets. It was safe to say that they had reached the absolute point of exhaustion.

Of course, the worst part of it all was the devastating blow to their morale. At this point, none could see the light at the end of the tunnel. In the dark of the night, agonized howls of their wounded comrades could be heard, many of them near the brink of mental breakdown. Some, unable to put up with the terrible conditions, threw themselves into the sea. Nearly every day, someone chose to end their life.

Brook got up from the ground and passed the last piece of lamb to Eric, the Quidah's helmsman. The man had eaten practically nothing for the past eight days. Sitting motionless under a large, shady tree, there was an emptiness in his eyes, as if his soul had been ripped out of his body.

As he knelt beside Black Prince Sam, the most fearless pirate in all of the Caribbean, he broke down and cried like a child. He hugged his captain's lifeless body, seemingly forgetting that he was still on the battlefield, reluctant to let go until the Warrior submerged under the water.

Thank goodness, one of the Quidah's men managed to rescue him just as he was about to drown. When Eric came to, the first thing he did was look for Black Prince Sam's body. When he realized that the captain's body had been washed away, he completely shut down.

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Brook pressed the food onto Eric's lips, but the helmsman did not respond.

In a hoarse, cracked voice Brook said, "If you don't try to live now, then you will never be able to avenge him."

When the helmsman heard those words, something flashed across his pale, grey face. He finally opened his mouth and whispered in a weak, almost inaudible voice, "Revenge... how will we do it?"

"I don't know, but if you give up now, then it's over for all of us, for sure."

"You haven't comforted many people, have you?"

"I'm doing my best, but you insist on dying, I have no problem with that too. After all, in the situation we're in right now, having one less mouth to feed isn't completely a bad thing," Brook shrugged.

"Is there only one ship out there?" asked Eric as he took two bites of the lamb. It wasn't long before he recovered some strength, finally turning his attention to the situation at hand.

"Yes. It seems that Jackdaw managed to get away that night, so the navy sent the others to pursue them."

"It's unbelievable how they could break through the blockade."

"I guess it should be considered good news... which is rare these days. Unfortunately, it's no use for us," Brook smiled bitterly. "It would be great if we had a boat – whatever kind – at least we'd have some hope."

While both of them were talking, the pirate on scout duty suddenly shouted, "There's a ship over there!"

Brook and Eric looked at each other, knowing right away that when the ships sent out to pursue Jackdaw returned, their reckoning had come.

This meant that there wasn't much time left. The pirates, however, were surprisingly calm even after knowing they were practically doomed. Their time on the island was only getting harder each day. Compared to the endless torment of waiting for death, they would rather die in battle.

But just as Brook and Eric were rounding up the men for the final battle, the spotter suddenly shouted with a look of disbelief on his face, "Jackdaw! It's the Jackdaw! She's back!"

"What??? I thought they were gone?!" Brook could hardly believe that Jackdaw had returned. Being able to escape was already a miracle on its own. Had he been in Zhang Heng's shoes, he would never have returned to Parrot Island, especially since they had no clue about the situation there. There was no way Brook would've returned knowing that they risked coming under siege.

Then, as if to thwart his doubt, Jackdaw's black flag rose to the top of its mast.