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Chapter One

The Beginning

The motorboat glided swiftly across the placid ocean as the rays of the evening sun reflected off the water in a dazzling display of beauty and magnificence. Almost unnatural rock formations sat in the ocean next to the few islands that were this far away from the mainland, waiting for strike of erosion to topple them into the blue waves. Green vines stretched from one rock to the other, allowing strange, climbing crabs and grey colored monkeys to move across the ocean without having to touch the green land at all.

It was all quiet except for the low hum of the gas engine and the high pitched whistling of the captain. Jon Griffin sat on the bow of the boat, legs dangling of the side. His shoes catching the barest bit of ocean spray as he held on to the railing to keep from falling off the sleek fiber glass into the waters of the Indigo Ocean. Thankfully his salt-encrusted boots were water proof, courtesy of Captain Reed, an old weathered black man. He had enough strength to kill a bull, but was still fatherly to Jon. His scrubby white beard, tinted sun glasses, and bald head were a warm and familiar sight.

Too bad that couldn't be said about the other two crew members, the improper Kate Watson, and the underhanded Geoffrey Bengal. Kate was checking some maps in the cabin. She would have been attractive if she were younger, but a broken nose and a 35th birthday took that away, she did have striking red hair and cool green eyes. She also gravitated to the more baggy side of clothing, wearing cargo pants, a thin loose jacket. Her tough-as-nails attitude gave her a reputation in the coastal taverns as a tomboy and a scrapper.

Geoffrey, on the other hand was thin as a reed, wore a long coat (Filled with filched goods he stole in the last port), greasy black hair, and always had a sly look on his face that gave him the aura of a rat. Jon's nickname for him was "Grease".

The two reasons why Jon was out on the deck was that Grease was cleaning the few archaic weapons they had that he was used to tinkering around with, and he didn't want to mess up the engine again like he did last time. He was used to these three, but was a little cautious about people, a side effect of having a horrible childhood.

The second reason was because he got to shoot the 50. Cal to 'light up' the engine of the boat they were hunting.

"How close are we Kate?" The Captain called to her in the back room.

"Uhh... About three nautical miles," replied the focused woman, brushing her red-hair back from her vision.

The captain smiled approvingly, his beard curling with it. As far as they knew, the boat they were tracking was carrying something expensive, valuable, and really fun to steal. With a slow yacht and a skeleton crew without any armed men, it was "Pirate's Meat," or as they call it.

The United Federation of Katan, UFK, regularly dispatched military and economic tech to the coastal city of Militabar from the island fortress of the most southern point of Katan, because of the wonderful labs on the north side of the city. Unluckily for the government, the narrow strait they had to pass through was where Captain Reed made his dangerous living. This year was exceptionally good for pirates, as land and air based travel was practically none since Katan's government had cut the funding on the military strictly.

Jon felt uneasy about this one though; partly because Grease found the tip-off (The seedy bastard he was), also the absence of armed guards on what he called a million dollar steal. Maybe he was just being paranoid, but he felt like Grease was going to make this more financially beneficial to him and not to the rest of the crew or this wasn't a rich entrepreneur's diamond stash.

Kate switched from maps to watching a movie on their small television set, propping her feet onto their rag-tag table and eating a bag of junk chips, the static very prominent. Her usual mean demeanor change while watching the comedy, her face lit up with laughter as a particularly good joke was said. Jon smiled in spite of his uneasiness; it was always funny to see Kate almost act humanly, though she seemed a lot more happier of late. A loud *clank* followed by a curse ascended from below deck. Kate snorted, which earned her a look from Reed

"Fine ill check on Greasebucket," she said with a groan.

"Hmmm Kate came up with a better name, I should see what else she has" Jon thought, relaxing *"Maybe this isn't so bad, maybe I should just go with the flow, gotta stop worrying"*. He looked up at one of the large rock formations to see a gray monkey fight over a crab with a bird, screeching its monkey screech as it earned its meal. Jon sat there watching the monkey eat the crab with a weird interest. The little gray warrior then saw Jon looking at him, clutched the crab to his chest, and ran to follow the boat, going across a network of vines the monkeys knew well. He made little cooing sounds that Jon thought meant curiosity, while carrying a crab in his mouth that almost unbalanced him from the bridge. Jon looked over and saw no one was looking at the little critter or him,

so he made a loud cooing sound. Right after acted, a large amount of gray monkeys started crowding the rock nearest to them, screeching and jumping up and down

“Just cut himself,” Kate said, coming from the stairs and relying Grease’s latest dilemma.

Jon looked at the two as she seated herself, now they were looking at the monkeys, Kate looking sour again.

“Nice job ya’ lump,” Kate replied with a taste of spite, Jon was just about to reply when he felt a rock contact with his head.

“Sonunva...” he said as he looked back at the monkeys.

“Devious bastards,” he murmured as they dispersed with a high pitched screech or two. Reed’s face now wore a small smile and Kate snorted while Jon removed his cap and felt his short brown-haired scalp for a bump. Disgruntled with a bit of blood, he went down below to see how Grease was doing with the weapons, not wanting to see his gun broken by the dirty rat.

The interior of the boat was all metal and muscle; stainless steel plates covered the walls to protect the boat from bullet holes and leaks while a few choice weapons hung from racks. One large one was Jon’s favorite, the infamous 50. Caliber Stalker Rifle, almost entirely silent with the right hardware and dead aim, it could hit a target from a mile away, lay on a table with Grease cleaning it. Its silencer was removable in case Jon ever wanted to give a little fear-factor too it. Although he never killed anyone before, he had disabled many ships and blown a few guns right out of people’s hands, he was just as proud of his dead aim as he was with fixing things, by all right; he should be cleaning the guns.

“Hey Grease, how are they doing?” he said with just the hint of jealousy.

“Hey rookie, why don’t you just go to bed before all the action starts, I can handle the shot,” he said with a black chuckle for good effect.

“Yeah right, you couldn’t hit one of those monkeys from hear,” Jon replied

“You just keep thinking that harbor urchin.”

Defeated and without a comeback, Jon walked away to the sink seething, removing his cap and running his hair under the faucet, its cold water cooling his anger. Finished, he spat in the water for good measure and ascended back up deck. The immediate light blinded him as the tropic sun burned into his cornea, the faint cry of evil monkeys came from the rocks. Jon pointed a rude finger in their direction, and engaged the captain.

“Hey cap, what was the size of the boat again?” he said.

“Just over thirty feet, big enough to carry a stockpile of diamonds, Grease tells me,” with the big exuberant smile Jon came to expect when he talked about “booty”.

“And only five people?” Jon asked disbelievingly his uneasiness returning full force.

“Lucky for you,” Kate whispered tartly.

“Yes only five, unlike you two, I trust Mr. Geoffrey with something like this, but not my wallet.”

The matter only half-settled he stalked back to the bow eyeing the monkeys warily as Reed changed course away from the rocks to avoid any of the obstacles.

“Ya’ want to gun it cap? Were getting close enough for a visual?” she conveyed to Reed, the captain took a moment to consider the matter

“Yes... Jon, get the gun from Mr. Geoffrey and set up, I want to get this boat before it notices us,” he commanded. Jon hurriedly sped below deck to get the Stalker.

The government official, a white man from the country of Bruiska, eyed the air and water from his position on the large yacht, blinking from the sunlight bouncing of the waves. The humidity made his brow sweat, not that it needed it. He was nervous for their cargo, they had a tip off from HQ that something was tracking them, no specifics though, making it all the more worrisome.

His partner was just as nervous, the horizon was all ocean and jungle islands, nothing of the civilized environment they were used to in the frozen plains of Bruiska; even the birds made wild and dangerous noise. The sentry constantly wished it was more than just him and his partner; “to drop attention” his CO said; a load of bullocks that was. As the craft meandered slowly across the waves, he couldn’t help his imagination going wild with what was tracking, UFK officials, pirates, or gods forbid dragons. With only two people, all would surly spell disaster for them and their cargo. Even if they did live to make it back to their country, they would probably be tortured to death for the loss the precious cargo.

They were bound for a port town of Militabar, where another pair of Bruiskians officials would take the package to an airport, to pass to another pair, and back to Bruiska by plane. They were just the first and most crucial part.

“How much longer of this crap!” he called down into the cabin

“Just one more hour, it’s going to fine, just chill,” despite his words he sounded just as anxious.

“Please, my Taret protect us…” he whispered to himself, scanning the horizon again.

Jon felt jumpy as adrenaline started to enter his veins, goosebumps starting to show up on his arms as he held the cold weapon. He rested the rifle in his lap, sitting in the built-in chair just before the bow. With his heel in the air, he started jiggling his leg in a vain temp to calm himself down. While Kate’s face held a small smile, Reed’s held a more focused seriousness, which gave him his reputation as a pirate; a mix between an invisible snarl and emotionless that made him respected. Grease just sat there, no expression or movement to show he was interested.

“I can see it from here, can I take the shot?” Jon asked the captain, who looked back surprised.

“You think you can hit it from this far away?” he said, the boat was but a dot on the flat blue expanse.

“Of course, I’ve been doing some more tinkering with the scope,” Jon answered, smiled his self-confident, cocky smile.

“Ill bet any of you five silvers ill blow the engine off in one shot,” Kate and Grease both looked up at the offer, saying in unison “You’re on!”

Come on Taret, may you bless this shot, that’s my entire weeks cut if I miss Jon thought as he sighted down the barrel, turning his cap around to press his eye on the scope. He quickly found the boat -no a yacht- and flicked the safety off, if he hit, he wanted the crew to here, and maybe blow Grease’s ear drums. He saw two men, dressed in formal uniforms; he didn’t know which country, one driving and the other using the binoculars. The engine was exposed behind the vessel, not propelling enough water to disrupt his shot. His dot zeroed in, he felt himself breathe inwards. This was the time were everything slowed, nothing moving fast enough to miss, where reflex were at their best. His trigger finger squeezed slowly, his shoulder tensing to avoid bruising from the recoil, his eyes going into tunnel vision.

A millisecond before he felt the shot go off he registered the click of the trigger, the resulting boom rattled his ear drums.

The Bruiskarian agent kept up his scanning of the horizon, looking for anything unnatural. Then a black dot appeared making it look like it rose from the ocean. Before he could yell to his partner in the cabin the engine on the bow exploded in a shower of metal shrapnel. He quickly fell to the ground; unfortunately his partner wasn't so lucky. A piece of shrapnel the size of his fist was lodged in his head, buried deep in his brain. Cursing, he ran to the corpse slumped on the wheel, bleeding heavily. The agent shoved him off and grabbed the wheel, sticky with blood, and aimed for a nearby beach, the boat quickly losing speed. He stole a glance back at the boat, now a slightly larger dot.

Jon looked back at Kate and Grease, a cocky grin plastered on his face as he tilted his hat down. Kate and Grease were shocked, the two opened mouth and making sputtering noises. Reed just smiled.

"Fork it," Jon said holding out his hand, Kate dug in her pocket but Grease hesitated.

"How do I know you didn't cheat?" That earned him a slap across the head for his stupidity from Kate. He grudgingly gave up his coin, which Jon pocketed immediately.

Reed was looking at the other boat through a pair of salty binoculars that he kept on the table; he frowned as it turned to the near island.

"Kate, turn up the speed, we better catch them before they hit shore, I don't feel like hiking in a jungle," he said sourly. Kate and Grease immediately snapped out of their shock, Kate grabbing the wheel, Grease going to grab Jon's rifle.

"No Grease, you sit this one out, I believe Jon earned his turn to raid the boat," Reed said to Grease, a small bit of challenge in his eyes. Grease's eyes flashed with anger at Jon and he grudgingly sat on the chair and started watching the TV, switching Kate's channel. Jon felt giddy; he finally got his chance to prove himself on this ship, after three years he actually got to rob the other boat, instead of just watching the others come aboard with all the raided valuables, like Grease was now. He looked at Grease and smiled like an idiot from ear to ear, earning him a rude hand gesture.

Jon sat on the bow, holding onto the rail as the boat's nose splashed of the waves, misty spray blasting his face. Kate came and took his rifle and gave him a holster and 45. Caliber Handgun, a silvery shine to it from Grease's cleaning earlier that day. He slapped the leather belt on and fixed the handgun inside; making sure it was extra tight. His arms and legs felt jiggery from the adrenaline, his face numbing from the cold wind and icy spray.

As they gained speed the monkeys screamed in alarm, surprised by the floating object as it accelerated. The boat started hitting the waves, launching the bow into the air as it came down to slam another wave.

“Jon! Remember do *exactly* as I tell you! Don’t do anything else!” his yelling was just audible over the engine noise.

As their boat flew across the blue-green ocean, the other yacht continued to the island, slowing like a wounded animal, its futile attempt almost pitiful. Jon almost laughed, but he was determined to show everyone he was serious enough to carry the weight of the job. As they neared Jon thought about his life and how it led up to this happy moment, right down to his childhood as a harbor urchin.

He remembered a few key things, of how he saw life was a hell of a lot harder than most commercials showed. He saw himself back in his parent’s house, thinking he was invincible because he was seven, forcing himself to not see his parents were just cutting by. He also remembered when his father would pass out from being drunk; he wasn’t an alcoholic, only an irresponsible idiot. His mother was no different, sometimes joining her husband in drunken bliss, or spending their last nickel to a gambling addiction.

Sometimes Jon got to go to school, he learned the rest of his knowledge on his own, skipping some lessons like math and history, choosing instead to read fiction and study science. He found his passion in mechanics and how things worked, constantly fixing things in the rickety apartment that were broken. He discovered firearms when things got a little rough, carrying a pistol where ever he went to scare off thieves and muggers. Practicing in the more shady parts of the harbor, he hung with some unsavory people, pirates mainly.

At about thirteen, he found himself staring at an empty apartment, parents gone and everything cleaned out, dead or skip outs, Jon would never know. He then started stealing and begging, mostly stealing, to survive. His life went down hill fast, finding some meager work as a mechanic’s shop, he furthered his talents in stealing stealthily and fixing junk. He also remembered spending time with some girls, getting lucky sometimes, but not often, though he couldn’t keep a steady relationship being a small time criminal.

At sixteen Jon found himself upping the ante, stealing cars and credit cards, finding himself in a little disagreement with the law on some occasions, sometimes spending time in jail. He saw that his name was getting a little hot, cops now having a picture of him in some places; sometimes a low bounty appeared, making him more and more nervous. While spending some time in a bar, so far he avoided being drunk, remembering his parents and keeping a three drink minimum, he met Kate and Reed talking about a recent pirating, how they lost two crew members in the last town, how they were worried they would have to give up some of the cargo to some gang members who were keeping an eye on them. Jon saw an opening, he knew who they were talking about, and maybe he could do some *appealing* for the pirates to earn a spot. He finally had a chance to get out of the gray overcast town, always dangerous and nothing was

good. So he steeled himself, took a wrench from the shop and headed off to find the gang members, bringing his old handgun for backup. He got a tip in the same bar that they were on one of the piers, selling drugs. Jon walked down to the water, taking note that no one was around to witness.

Behind a cargo container, two people with tattoos of decapitated dragons on their neck waited with a small bag of black doses of Andorra, a drug that confused the brain into thinking it was totally content and happy. They asked Jon how much and he explained he didn't come here for drugs, but to leave to pirates alone. One pulled a knife, the other a gun. Jon pulled his wrench out and dashed the gunmen across the head knocking him into the cold ocean, the other lunged at Jon. Luckily, Jon had been in a few fights and he fought well, being very fast. He flew backward, and grabbed the man's arm, twisting him closer and threw his elbow into his face. With a crack he stumbled back and reached for Jon's gun, pulling it out, but Jon broke his elbow with his knee and arm. Jon's gun flew into the water while Jon pulled the knife from him and shoved it into his throat, treating to kill him if he didn't leave the two pirates alone.

With that accomplished, he went to see the pirates on their boat, a long motorboat named *Black Cruise*. He showed them some proof of his skills, the gang members arm patch, asked to join, and showed some more of his skill with a gun. He was let in as a rookie, doing all the extra stuff that they didn't want to do. They also picked up Grease, him being older he was treated with more respect. So he was the new guy till now.

Jon felt his stomach tingle with a bad jitters as he saw the man onboard look at them almost calmly, like an accepted feeling almost, it made him feel like a storm was coming and he couldn't stop it. Jon walked up to the railing as they slowed and bumped into the hull, Grease tying a rope to the other boat preventing them from floating away. Reed and Kate jumped over the railing and Jon copied, although less gracefully.

"Sorry about the engine," Kate said sarcastically "compliments of rookie here,"

"Please address all concerns to the captain," she added pointing at Reed, smiling.

"What do you want?" the man said in an icy tone of Bruiska.

"The regular, jewels, valuables, government secrets to sell, you know," Kate replied.

"We... I don't have anything onboard; I *was* just moving this man to the nearby island" he said gesturing to the dead corpse.

"Oh *do* shut up, you're a horrible liar," Kate said in a horrible copy of his accent.

“Jon, search below deck, look in, on, and around everything,” Reed commanded, Jon following suit. As he headed below, the inside clean and spacious he saw Kate and Reed hefted their guns up to keep the man in his place. As Jon overturned furniture and searched the room, he heard Kate and Reed’s muffled voices ask questions, like which country he was from. Then in the corner of his sight he spotted a small wooded box, with writing of a different language on the top. He picked it up, his hands a little sweaty as he looked for an opening. Then it slipped from his hands, making a loud thud that could be heard from outside. Jon heard a curse from a man, then a gunshot, then another. Jon flinched at the sound badly, hitting his head on a cabinet. He grabbed the box and ran to the topside. The sight made his gag.

Kate was leaning against the rail, blood on her cloths with a hand plastered on her mouth, utter shock imbedded deeply into her eyes. The man was slumped against the side of the boat, near his dead friend, head half blown off with brain matter plastered on the cockpit glass. But what made Jon cringed was Reed, a bullet in his breast, blood spewing out his mouth and forming into a puddle on the deck, but worst of all his eyes weren’t moving, his chest wasn’t heaving, his blood just kept coming.

Jon’s eyes caught the shock of Kate’s, his mouth gaping dropping the box, looking at Grease, hatred replacing shock as he remembered whose tip got them here. Before he could act his eyes drifted to the dead mans head, his stomach heaved violently and he blacked out, his face falling into the pool of blood, a dark red stain on the white boat.

Jon woke in his bunk, the realization was bitter and deafening, his brain still murky with shock. He head was hurting; feeling like someone washed his face off, and noting the absence of blood. He sat up, fell into the motion of the ship, and got up to walk over to the stairs. His mind drifted to the stairs of the other boat and he grimaced as he went topside. That was when he noticed that two bodies were in the water, and Reed’s was on the other boat, on top of a table, with Grease layering on some gasoline. Kate looked at Jon; her eyes were a little puffy, like she had been crying. Jon didn’t know what to think, his world was just so weird, and he didn’t even feel himself walking. It was like something was just blocking his sense, no smell, no thought, no hearing, just sight.

Kate’s hand was on his shoulder and she pushed him onto the chair, explaining to him that this was a funeral by sea, for being a pirate this was an honor. She told him to take it easy and went to help Grease. Jon just watched to ocean, the nighttime sky was glinting with stars and the moon, making the water a light show. They must have drifted closer to the island as he could the surf lapping onto the beach; the monkeys were silent, watching like statues over the makeshift funeral. Jon just put his head in his hands, his hat falling off, limply laying on the ground.

He looked up as Grease gave him a match, sympathy in his eyes, any past injustices forgotten at the moment. Jon took the match and held it softly, scraping it on his pants lighting it in a bright flash that exposed his watery eyes, but he was determined not to cry. He tossed it on the other deck and pushed off, watching as it floated away, a fiery inferno, licking Reeds body with flames and burning his hair off. The smell of roasting flesh floated in the air, making Jon sick when his mouth watered. They watched it for a good hour as it floated away from them when it exploded like the largest firework.

Then Jon felt his anger build up, a heat building in the deep part of his soul. He walked down to the gun storage, grabbed the handgun he was using earlier and went topside. Kate and Grease's eyes widened when he rose from the stairs, Jon's eyes flashing with challenge and anger. Kate stood up and started to walk toward him, stopping when he turned and pointed the gun toward her, with a good dose of fear she sat back down with Grease. Jon then made his way to the bow, silence raining on the boat as his boot heels clicked on the deck.

Jon raised the 45. and shot at one of the dead bodies, a bloody splatter and a thud made him smile grimly. He continued to shoot; sometimes the bullets skipped across the water. Eventually the bodies sunk when the lungs were pierced, leaving Jon to shoot the flaming hulk that was the yacht. Kate and Grease just watched with fearful eyes while Jon just calmly walked back inside.

Jon curled up on his hard bunk, falling asleep almost instantly, but not before a single tear ran down his cheek. Unknown to him, Kate had placed the box from the boat on his nightstand as a mysterious green light flashed behind his eyelids. He had no clue of what the events he had just set in motion.