

Captives of Jasiiradda-ki

(Somali: *Pride Island*)

The full moon cast a ghostly beam of light across the dark, rough waters of the Gulf of Aden. The air was warm and wet with humidity, yet a cold breeze cut across the surface of the gulf. The *Flint Castle* sliced through the waves bravely en route to the wealthy city of Jeddah. All her storerooms were filled with priceless treasures of gold, spices, silks, jewels, and supplies for the journey ahead. The *Flint Castle* had aboard many passengers on their pilgrimage to the

holy city. Since leaving their home harbor of Sri Lanka one week ago, sailing had been smooth. The wind had been ever on their back, pulling *The Flint Castle* forward, cheering her on. There had been no dangerous weather, only warm, sunny, windy days. The result of all of this were carefree, overconfident sailors. They were innocent, unsuspecting, and so vulnerable. This pilgrimage was a walk in the park. Everything was in their favor; nothing could go wrong.

Tonight, however, was different. The surrounding atmosphere felt strange. It might have been the uncomfortable humidity mixed with cool air and the shift of the wind – sure signs that a storm was brewing. It might have been the feeling of being totally alone, for up until that point, they had been travelling with a group of ships. Since entering the gulf, the other ships had parted ways and now they were alone. On top of this, the passengers were getting restless. A week at sea and still a week or two ahead was discouraging. Despite all these factors, the crew and passengers alike were too ignorant and carefree to pay attention to anything.

They'd been spotted. They were being watched ever since the sun had set that night. They thought they were alone, that *The Flint Castle* was alone on the gulf, but they were wrong. A thick mist rolled in, cloaking the ship in blindness.

Captain Graves "Fearless" Windsor was a veteran. He knew these waters inside out and backwards. He knew the other ship, *The Flint Castle*, carried wanted merchandise and he knew they were innocent, ignorant amateurs. He also knew that they were drifting through the mist, completely blind to his ship, *The Achilles Heel*.

His ship was enormous, with three masts and three decks. It had a large galley, a deep hull, and two anchors the size of wagons. *The Achilles Heel* had a pointed spike on its bow and large billowing sails. She was made of strong, dark wood giving her an evil, shadowy appearance. She was the most feared ship on the ocean and her captain was too.

After hearing the sharp, quick command of Captain Windsor, the crew began what everyone feared them for. With a whoosh two sails dropped and caught wind. *The Achilles Heel* gathered speed, pulling a wake behind her. Lightning cracked overhead giving only a brief moment of illumination, but it was enough. The comfort onboard *The Flint Castle* wilted as the horrified passengers caught sight of the enemy hurtling towards them.

Rain pelted down around the ships. The *Achilles Heel*, the most feared ship on the ocean, was nearing the *Flint Castle*. To disable her prey, the *Achilles Heel* launched the first cannon ball of the night. The *Flint Castle* staggered. Frantically, passengers scrambled away from the damaged side and towards the lifeboats. Splintered wood littered the ocean surface and water gushed into the puncture in the *Flint Castle's* hull. As the *Achilles Heel* pulled up alongside the *Flint Castle*, Captain Windsor gave more orders.

BANG.

BANG.

Two planks were thrown across the gap between the two ships, creating bridges for Windsor's crew. They swarmed the slowly sinking *Flint Castle* like wasps, and picked up everything they could carry, knocking over anyone who stood in the way. Lightning flashed. Thunder cracked. The *Flint Castle* lurched. Gasping and screaming, passengers and crew tumbled across the deck, some overboard. Windsor grinned awfully. He shouted again. The impaired *Flint Castle* was getting too rough. His crew began to retreat to the *Achilles Heel*, snagging any last objects that seemed to have value.

The *Flint Castle* groaned, and water rushed over her deck taking more people and loot with it. Captain Windsor shouted and motioned for the planks to be pulled back in and the *Flint Castle* to be released. He couldn't have his ship dragged down with her.

A few forgotten crew members waved miserably from the deck of the sinking ship. "Wait! Wait!" but Captain Windsor knew, as any veteran or celebrity of the ocean did, that to wait was to lose. Another flash of lighting accented the departure of the now richer *Achilles Heel* and with a final sweep of water, the careless *Flint Castle* was swallowed by the waves.



Suspended on the side of a cliff and staring out along the coast of the Gulf of Aden stood the Kibirsan Tavern. It was small, rough-looking, and made of weathered wood. Running along its front was a drooping porch, and one lone window was carved into its side. The roof looked like it might cave in if a sea gull landed on it. Rickety stairs ran down from the porch along the

side of the cliff and met up with a dock on the water. Though the water was deep here, most captains preferred to anchor farther out, and then come in on lifeboats and tie up on the dock. Even in deep water, one had to be cautious of rocks waiting in ambush closer to shore.

The tavern was rough on the inside as well. The regular customers were sailors, pirates, and criminals all looking for a good place to come in and talk about the adventures they'd been on or the loot they'd collected. On the most exciting nights, usually just after dark, some of the best stories were told – sailors are the best story tellers – and the night usually became a competition of who had the most exciting story.

The tavern was full that night, the water outside was filled with ships anchored and their crews sat in a semi-circle around some tables in the dining room. They were in the middle of an exhilarating story, being told by a short sailor sitting at the counter, when suddenly the front door blew open and smacked the wall with a bang. The lonely window shook and the glasses on the counters and tables rattled. A sudden hush fell over everyone in the room, including the sailor who stopped mid-sentence. "And raising my sword I swung onto the ship and...." Thirty pairs of eyes watched, terrified as the shadow outside the door stepped into the dimly lit tavern. The hush dissolved into whispers.

"It's Fearless."

"Captain Fearless."

"Captain Windsor."

The sailors whispered his names into the tavern.

Heavy boots thumped across the dining room and up to the counter.

"The usual, Zeke, and hurry up about it."

The bartender scrambled nervously under the counter, a moment later he pulled up a glass with foam pouring over the side. Picking up the mug, Windsor turned to face his admirers.

"Are you telling stories tonight?"

The tavern shuffled uncomfortably. Finally, someone said, "Yes Captain, but we were waiting for the grand finale."

Windsor chuckled coldly. "I've arrived, and I've got the tale of the night."

Cautiously, the crowd inched forward and crowded around him, drinking in his every word. The beauty of the *Flint Castle*, how Windsor could smell the gold and spices aboard her, the speed of the attack, every detail. Captain Windsor lived for these moments. He knew these sailors admired him, that they would do anything to be a member of his crew and join him on his adventures. Too bad that they couldn't. He was too good for them. He almost felt sorry for them. Almost.

He was just getting to the good part, when the *Flint Castle* began to sink, when suddenly, the tavern door burst open again, slamming into the wall even harder than before. A glass on the counter tipped and rolled off, shattering on the floor. The wind outside had picked up, and it howled into the room blowing out the candles.

The newcomer entered proudly, slamming the door behind him. The bartender shuffled around, struck a match, and lit a small candle. As the newcomer marched up to the counter, Windsor heard whispers.

"Captain Scar."

The admiration in the tone of the sailors baffled Windsor, and he watched enviously as Scar reached the counter. Instead of ordering, he leaped onto the counter and drew his sword. The sailors gasped, delighted, as Scar spun his sword in his hands and then drove it into a barrel across the room. The sailors ran forward hungrily and happily. Before Windsor realized it, his story had been forgotten. "Tell us of your adventures Captain Scar!" shrieked someone near the back. The crowd roared in agreement. The bartender, shaking, ducked under the counter.

Huffing, Windsor slouched in his chair. He didn't even know this fellow. He looked young but wealthy. He was wearing a thick coat with embroidery along its front. He was an exceptionally good storyteller, gesturing and standing up to act parts out. His story seemed far-fetched, though.

"And so, with one hand tied mercilessly behind my back, and fifty soldiers racing towards me, I fought them off..." he held his hand behind his back and swung at the bartender, narrowly missing. "One handed I kept those hooligans off my ship..."

What interested Windsor most though, was the long scar running down his face. It started beside his left eye, narrowly missing it, and continued down his cheek all the way to the side of his mouth.

Unable to stand the obvious lies any longer, Windsor got up to go outside. The night had cooled off considerably and the wind had picked up. He admired his ship for a moment, beautiful and dangerous, even in the dark.

“She’s a beauty, ain’t she?”

Windsor turned to face the short sailor from the tavern. Windsor grinned. “The finest ship I ever stole. Did I ever tell you about how I captured her?”

The sailor chuckled. “Plenty of times. But I wasn’t talking about your ship. I mean *that* ship.”

Windsor followed where the sailor pointed to a ship to his right. His stomach dropped. Anchored there was the most beautiful ship he had ever seen in his life. It was easily twice the size of his ship. It sported different levels of decks, three flags, six large sails, five smaller ones, two crows' nests, and a detailed carving of a dragon on its bow. It gleamed in the moonlight, bobbing gently in the waves. Windsor could just make out some crew members moving quietly around on-board. They probably loved living on a ship like that.

“Whose ship is that?” He managed to say hoarsely. He hated how amazed he sounded.

“That’s the *Revenge*, Captain Everett Scar’s ship,” said the sailor dreamily. “The most beautiful ship on the sea in my opinion. Scar stole her from the navy, you know. You should hear that story some time! They say he’s got more wealth than any king, and a crew the size of an army – which you would need to man a ship like that.” Captain Windsor gripped the railing, jealousy boiling inside of him. “You haven’t been around much the past few months,” the sailor continued. “So, you haven’t really met Scar. He’s a lot like you, you know. Only he’s richer and younger and he’s got this incredible scar. That’s why they call him Captain Scar. He got it when he was just a kid ‘cuz he took on another kid, bigger than him, over some money they found on the ground. He won.” The sailor turned to look out over the water again. “After that Scar thought

nothing could stop him and he aspired to be the richest man on earth. So far nothing has stopped him. He's famous."

"But he's young and I'm a veteran," argued Windsor.

"That's why it's amazing," the sailor sighed.

"I've defeated more ships, captured more prisoners and stolen more gold than he ever has." Captain Windsor's voice grew louder and more intense. "I'm Captain Graves 'The Fearless' Windsor. Do you know why they call me that?" He jabbed a finger into the sailor's chest. He stumbled back a bit but stayed silent. "It's because I'm fearless! I'm me! The most-feared captain on the ocean! All the sailors around are Fearless-crewmember wanna-be's! And no amateur is going to take that from me!"

With a swoop of his cape, Captain Fearless dashed down the steps towards his lifeboat. Whistling sharply, he leapt into his boat. Two of his crew members jumped up from where they had been sitting on the dock and climbed into the boat. The oars dipped into the water and they pushed off towards the ship.

"Gentlemen," Captain Fearless glared at his men and dropped his hand onto his sword. "We've got a date tomorrow."



The next morning the sky was overcast, and the dark water was choppy. The *Achilles Heel* wasn't sailing, though. It bobbed in the waves with loose sails and waited.

Captain Fearless paced in his cabin. They had sailed during the night, putting about a four-hour distance between them and the Kibirsan Tavern. Or, to be more accurate, between the *Achilles Heel* and the *Revenge*. All night, Captain Fearless could think of nothing but Scar. His achievements despite his age, his wealth. "*He's richer than you,*" the sailor's voice echoed through the cabin. "*He's got an incredible scar...He won.*" The worst part was his beautiful ship. Captain Fearless wanted it. He was supposed to be the best pirate on the ocean and for some reason, that ship seemed to be his ticket back to that position. He had a plan, but it was unbelievably risky. Desperate times called for desperate measures, and Fearless was more than

desperate. He relayed the plan in his mind. There stood a cove not far away, that he and his crew often anchored in when the weather was bad. The cove was dark, deep and large enough around for a few ships. There was one corner of the cove that was rocky and shallow, and during the night, it was difficult to see this spot. Captain Fearless wanted to attack at night in the cove, which was the risk factor, but it was also his best shot. Most inexperienced sailors struggled at night. He only hoped that Captain Scar's crew was inexperienced.

A cry lifted from the crow's nest and descended on Fearless' ears. The *Revenge* was in view and they were making a beeline for the *Achilles Heel*.



The wind picked up, launching the *Achilles Heel* forward and carrying it. The *Revenge* followed closely behind, riding along on Captain Fearless' wake. Up ahead, Fearless could see the ring of rocks slightly to the left of an island. It was the cove. The destination in sight, the *Achilles Heel* persevered, and the crew worked harder, keeping her just out of range of the *Revenge*.

Then, the *Revenge* did something unexpected: they shot a cannon ball. It was as if time stopped for a moment. Captain Fearless could hear nothing but the whistle of that black object as it hurtled, seemingly slowly, towards the hull of his precious *Achilles Heel*. The ship that he himself had stolen on that night so long ago at the Kibirsan Tavern. It had been owned by some young sailor, who had left the ship anchored and entirely unguarded. To this day it held the position of both Fearless' easiest steal and his best, and now, in one instant...

The ship keeled to one side, a wave washing over her deck.

"No!" shouted Fearless dropping on his hands and knees from the impact, but no one heard. His crew was too busy clinging to the railings and masts and the *Revenge* wasn't finished yet. Another cannon ball crashed through the deck. Water gushed in. This *Achilles Heel* was sinking. This wasn't supposed to happen. The plan had been for Scar to follow the *Achilles Heel* into the cove, thinking they had something in there that he wanted, then Fearless was planning to attack. Now Fearless realized something he'd never thought before: he was losing.

Captain Fearless never lost. Before he had even consciously realized what he was doing, Fearless grabbed a lantern that had not yet gone out and threw it on the ground. The glass cage surrounding the flame erupted, and shattered glass flew in all directions. The single flame, now free from its prison, rushed out, and latched onto a nearby rope.

At least now he would be the one who had destroyed the ship. He wouldn't give that satisfaction to another man. Flames engulfed the ship, eating the sails and choking out the fresh air with black smoke. Frantic sailors leapt overboard, hoping to save themselves.

Fearless backed up against the railing of the ship as the flames crept closer to him. He had no other choice. At least if he died, he might become a legacy. Turning, he climbed up on the railing of the ship and after one last look at his most precious possession, he jumped, bidding his beloved *Achilles Heel* goodbye.



When Fearless opened his eyes, he was nearly blinded. The sun beat down on him mercilessly. He sat up stiffly, finding he was severely sun burned and he wondered how long he'd been unconscious. He was sitting on a beach of white sand with some dunes and a jungle behind him and the vast ocean in front of him. The past events came crashing back to him and he knew immediately where he was. He was on the island behind the cove. He'd never bothered to explore this island before. Now he wished he had taken the time, because he was suddenly extremely thirsty. He stood and turned to face inland just in time to see something dash out of view into the forest. The leaves waved back and forth betraying the hiding place. Fearless stopped and waited. Nothing happened, so he continued into the forest, following the path of whatever that thing was. It wasn't hard, because whatever-it-was had left a trail of broken leaves and footprints in the damp ground. Suddenly, he came to a sort of valley and the ground dropped off somewhat steeply. Looking down, Fearless saw who he was following. It was his look-out from his crew! "Roman!" he shouted. Roman turned and gasped, looking slightly terrified. Fearless hurried down the cliff towards Roman. "*C-captain,*" he stammered. "We didn't know you survived, Captain."

"We? There's a lot of you?" exclaimed Fearless.

“There’s about eight of us who survived, captain.”

Captain Fearless wilted. He’d lost most of his crew. So much for having a crew the size of an army. He’d have to recruit some new men once he got back to the Kibirsan Tavern.

“You better have food and water with you because I’m so thirsty and hungry.”

“Yes Captain, of course Captain.” Roman swallowed. “Just follow me, Captain.”

Fearless liked Roman because he always remembered to call him Captain. Sometimes twice in one sentence.

They walked a little farther until they came into a clearing near the edge of the forest. Fearless was surprised to see how much they’d already collected. They had a fire going and some strange looking fruits piled in a corner and some coconuts.

Captain Fearless hurried over to help himself to a coconut. He broke it on a rock and drank deeply. Satisfied, he threw it into the woods and turned to his crew.

“I need everyone to start gathering boards and wood from the *Achilles Heel* that may have washed ashore and any other materials that we could use. We need to start building a raft at once so that we can get out of here. We’ll make our way back to the tavern, find a nice ship there, and be on our way.”

Roman coughed nervously. “Captain, we thought of another idea that will be faster and less work,” he said. “There’s a cliff down the beach that goes up pretty high. We’ve already started piling wood there for a smoke signal, Captain.”

“No!” shrieked Fearless. “No! No! No! Do you know who’s going to see that and pay attention? The Navy! They’ll rescue us alright, straight into prison. Captain Fearless is never *caught*.”

His crew looked down at the ground hesitantly before one said, “Maybe that’s better than being here.”

Fearless bristled. He’d never been caught; he’d never be caught. He’d already lost his first battle and he wasn’t planning on losing again anytime between now and *ever*. He couldn’t let Captain Scar have the joy of prancing into the Kibirsan Tavern gloating over how he’d

destroyed Fearless, the most feared captain in the ocean. What a fun time it was going to be, bursting into the Tavern as Scar was telling the story. He would be the most popular pirate then. Just think of all the rumors that would come out of that!

The alternative would be embarrassing. To be “rescued” by the Navy and brought straight to his death. That was losing, too, and Fearless wouldn’t let it happen.

“Gather wood immediately,” he ordered, “and maybe I’ll think about keeping some of you once I have my ship again, instead of making you all walk the plank.”

With that, his crew busied themselves on the beach, collecting bits and pieces of the *Achilles Heel*.

However, Fearless didn’t notice Roman sneak off towards the cliff.

Long into the afternoon the crew worked. They found some vines in the jungle that worked nicely for tying boards together, and they collected lots of food and hollowed out coconuts to carry water. Fearless worked hard, too. One of his sailors discovered that Fearless’ second most prized possession, a map that he’d always stored in a bottle to keep it dry, had floated onto the beach. So Fearless busied himself with trying to figure where they were. He would need to know that in order to get back to the tavern.

Fearless traced his finger along the map, locating the tavern, the direction they’d sailed in the other day, and finally, the cove.

“We must be on Jasiirad,” he decided. It was the tiny island behind the cove. That was a good place for them to be. They weren’t more than 4 hours sailing distance away from the tavern. Fearless figured a day paddling on their raft would get them to the Kibirsan. With this comfortable knowledge in his mind - along with the image of Scar’s facial expression when Fearless barged into the tavern - Fearless settled with his back against a tree for a short nap.

It was late afternoon when it happened. One of Fearless’ sailors was busy tying a knot in some vines that he had been making ropes with. He was also busy sulking with the others. Ever since Fearless had fallen asleep under that tree, they’d been grumbling about tomorrow. Nobody wanted to paddle all day under the hot sun, just to get to the tavern and then have to steal a ship. They’d just been shipwrecked less than forty-eight hours ago! He, along with all the others, was

completely exhausted. He'd noticed Roman on the cliff a few hours ago, piling logs into a teepee. Now he wondered when Roman would light it. It would be dark in a few hours, and you can't see smoke in the dark. The fire itself wouldn't be big enough to be able to see the actual flames from very far away either.

He carefully stripped the leaves off the vines and stood to throw them into the ocean. As he did, he looked up. He gasped. On the horizon, he could just barely make out the small white speck at he knew was a ship. He spun around, to point it out to the others, and when he looked up on the cliff, he saw Roman. Roman had the best eyesight of any look-out ever. That's why Fearless had wanted him. Roman was lighting his teepee arrangement.

With a hiss, a flame began to grow that the bottom of the wood. Smoke curled upwards as the fire grew. The campfire smell wafted down onto the beach. The sailors looked up. Spotting the fire, they jumped up and cheered and then turned expectantly to the horizon.

Captain Fearless started. He stretched. The sun was getting lower, so he'd slept for longer than he'd planned to. He had woken up to the sound of cheering. The crew must be finished his raft! He jumped up and smelled something immediately.

Smoke.

His stomach sank. Looking up, he saw Roman standing proudly beside a huge bonfire.

"Roman!" he shouted.

Roman cowered a little, then pointed out into the ocean. Captain Fearless looked and saw that there was a huge ship flying the flag of the navy, and it was anchoring. The colour drained from Captain Windsor's face. They were coming for him. His crew had signaled them, and they were going to "rescue" them. Captain Windsor hated it, but he had one option left.

He turned and fled.

The navy sailors climbed into their lifeboat. Windsor dashed into the jungle. The lifeboat was lowered. Windsor climbed higher into the island. The oars of the sailors dipped into the ocean. Windsor began to climb up the cliff. The lifeboat neared the beach. Windsor passed Roman on the hill and shoved him the rest of the way down. The lifeboat hit the beach. Windsor reached the top of the cliff.

He stared down from the cliff and watched as the navy sailors took his crew –including beat-up Roman (he must have taken a few hits when he tumbled the rest of the way down the cliff) - tied their hands back and loaded them into the lifeboat. Despite being captured, despite being sentence to prison for sure and maybe even death, Windsor’s crew looked relieved. Part of Windsor wanted to go down there and surrender himself to them, too. Just so he could have some real food and get off this island. But that wasn’t an option. Captain Fearless never loses, never gets captured, and never gives himself up to others. He knew Scar wouldn’t do it, so he couldn’t either.

He wandered to the edge of the cliff and watched some more as the lifeboat carrying his minions began to push off from the beach. Suddenly, they stopped. Windsor was close enough to hear.

“Where’s Captain?”

Roman pointed. All heads turned to spot Windsor on the cliff. *No*. Not again. Windsor looked down at the waves below him as they crashed against the rocks. The height made him dizzy. He heard shouts. Navy sailors were leaving the boat and heading for him. “Fearless” Windsor panicked. At any moment, those sailors would come crashing up to the top of the cliff. He was trapped. He never gave himself up to anyone. He never lost. He wouldn’t give that satisfaction to another man.

So, he jumped.

Captain Graves “Fearless” Windsor was a captive of Jasiiradda-ki.

Pride Island.