

Chapter 2: The Raj Gipling

First, Kallwyn, after realizing that he had no provisions, decided that it was not in his best interests to head back to shore. It was more than likely that there was an island or two in the near area on which he could find food or fresh water. The village leaders had always had conversations with the villagers about other islands and their possibilities, and Kallwyn had overheard several of these in his time.

Usually when an island was discovered in the distance, the matter would be brought to a village leader. The village leader would then proceed to call some big meeting and actually declare war on the empty land, but no one had ever built a boat and no one knew how, either, but the land was empty, so nobody was stopping them from conquering it, QED. Said village leader would proceed to claim the land without actually setting foot on it and the ever-growing problem of available space – the reason the island had been brought up in the first place – would remain unsolved. This was largely due to the process in which a former village leader would keep his lavishly built residence by sheer stubbornness and the new leader would, by the same stubbornness, build a new one which was even more luxurious and large. Thus the cycle would continue.

Kallwyn had passed some such islands during the night, but he hadn't seen most of them, largely due to a combination of his impaired vision and the darkness of the night. The ones he had seen he had ignored in his haste to get away from the peninsula. Now, under dawn's light, he was seeing a lot more of them and briefly worried that he had gotten disoriented during the night and was getting closer to the original launch point of his voyage, where the mercenaries would almost certainly be waiting. But the worry passed away as he found himself staring at islands that he knew he'd never seen before. Islands that were getting closer and closer together.

Kallwyn panicked because of the islands closing in and worried he would be cut off from open waters. At this thought, he turned around, moving back into open waters.

Several hours later, at about noon, he began to regret that decision; he was getting hungry and he believed there could have been food on one or multiple of the islands. But at least he hadn't seen any other ships, and to him, that meant that the mercenaries either weren't on his trail or were just bad at tracking.

In unfamiliar waters and becoming increasingly worried, Kallwyn began to wish the mercenaries had just killed him instead of leaving him doomed to the fate he was now living.

To maintain some element of a cliffhanger, we will now broach the extremely important subject of the Overking.

The Overking, currently William Esmour, is a powerful lord of many lands – in fact, almost every land from the Southern Ahntonlea Sea to the Cold Waters. This kingdom is known as Galdrania.

The Overking owns most, if not all of the currently explored lands to the date of the destruction of Sahmonvale and taxes it heavily. Generally, about five or six major rebellions arise against him every year. To avoid these, his armies and fleets of ships – the Enri Djirin, or the “King’s Fist”, and the Raj Djirin, “Fleet of Kings” – are well maintained..

The Galdranian Empire, or simply Galdrania, is powerful in its military might as well as in its financial status. Its grassy fields contain many mines full of gold and silver, as well as other precious metals. The exports from these are also taxed.

The system of roads within Galdrania are known for their reliability, as they were created over the ages by work crews – essentially large numbers of slaves – and see much traffic. Many successful trade ports are maintained, although some are harder to maintain than others. Trade ships sail across the seas with goods from Galdrania or from other countries coming into Galdrania, and all imports and exports are taxed.

Galdrania has no colonies but has somehow managed to limit its own expansion to a single continent. Though it is current inhabitants are unaware, Galdrania takes up most of the largest continent on the globe.

Galdrania’s power is only challenged by Ybaevia, an empire across the seas from Galdrania. They have warred multiple times, each one coming to a peaceful resolution after years of costly battles. Both nations are currently enjoying a period of lasting peace, although the aforementioned peace was not bound to last.

The village of Sahmonvale was very technically part of Galdrania, as one of King Esmour’s predecessors had annexed King Allen’s kingdom about a century and a half after the failed colonization attempt. But that is not important, as the village of Sahmonvale no longer exists outside of the memories of Kallwyn and his brother, the two survivors of the attack by the natives of the peninsula.

And now, back to our protagonist.

Kallwyn was sailing even further away from the islands which could have had food and water. He didn’t necessarily *realize* he was doing this, but he did it anyway.

Because of this, he had sailed into waters on which a patrol ship from the Raj Djirin was sailing. Consequently, seeing as the patrol ship was cruising at somewhere around ten knots, Kallwyn’s boat was just barely struck and water began to fill the dinghy at a very slow rate (though it seemed much faster to Kallwyn, who had never been in a boat before).

On board the ship, which was named the *Raj Gipling*, the captain was at the tiller. His name was Turett Singh and he had sailed ships since he was fifteen. He was attuned to the *Gipling*’s every movement, however slight. This in mind, he definitely felt Kallwyn’s dinghy as it smashed against the prow of the ship. Upon the realization that something had happened, he called out to two of his crew, who had been sleeping on the job, and gestured for them to check it out. When they saw Kallwyn’s boat turning lazy circles in their wake, and now taking on water rather rapidly, they alerted Captain Turett. Within a few minutes, Kallwyn had been pulled aboard.

“You have to watch out!” Kallwyn complained as he grabbed the nearest sailor and shook him by the arm. “You just wrecked my boat!”

The sailor stared at him quizzically, as if Kallwyn was speaking some foreign language. In reality, he was speaking a foreign language, though he wasn’t yet aware. Over the years, many Overkings had tried to destroy the language barrier by choosing one language to use as a universal standard, but the problem was that no one wanted any language other than their own to be used, and so on the problems persisted. Kallwyn had grown up speaking Carikeinan, a common language throughout most of the smaller kingdoms which had not yet been annexed by Galdrania. The sailor, and for that matter most of the crew, had only ever known Gormano, a widely spoken language throughout the western half of Galdrania. Kallwyn, who had been raised in Sahmonvale knew only Carikeinan and the dialect of the native tribe (which no one knew what to call). Thus, he had no idea what the sailor said as a reply.

The reply in question was “Speak Gormano, uneducated swine!” and was said with such force that Kallwyn worried he had accidentally offended the man. Realizing that there wasn’t much to be done in the way of communication, he shrugged apologetically and ran towards the ship’s bow.

At the helm was Captain Turett. He was about six feet tall, with deep blue eyes, greying hair that may once have been brown, and a distinctive nose that stood out from the rest of his face. Kallwyn tapped the man conversationally on the shoulder. The captain turned around, starting to say something; he too spoke in Gormano, so Kallwyn was left without understanding.

This cycle of sorts continued for a solid three minutes, until eventually both sides of the conversation – one being Kallwyn and the other being the ship’s crew – realized that the other side could not understand them and thus they were speaking different languages.

Kallwyn, upon figuring this out, grabbed one of the sailors by the arm and dragged him to the stern of the ship, pointing to the wreckage of the dinghy. Said wreckage could now be seen just below the surface of the water, quite a distance away. The sailor calmly walked back to Captain Turett and explained in Gormano that they had just wrecked this person’s boat and he seemed rather annoyed about it. Turett shrugged and replied, “Nothing I can do about it.” With that, he went back to patrolling the seas.

Kallwyn, now furious, tapped Turett on the back and shouted, “You can’t just ignore that you’ve wrecked my boat!”

“Well, it wasn’t much of a boat, anyway,” Captain Turett replied in near-flawless Carikeinan. His voice had a sort of accent to it that made his *n*’s sound like *n*’s.

“Wait, you speak my language?” Kallwyn asked, the anger leaving him as he wondered why the sailor hadn’t brought it up earlier.

“Of course I speak Carikeinan,” Turett said matter-of-factly. “Why wouldn’t I? Before I was the captain of a King’s Ship, I was a scullery boy on a trading vessel. We ran frequent visits to Ferrellia. Is that where you’re from?”

“Wait, wait, wait,” Kallwyn said, the fury coming back into him. “You’ve spoken Carikeinan this entire time and let me play around with hand gestures?”

“You never waited long enough to ask,” Captain Turett said, and then, “But where are my manners? I am Captain Turett Singh, captain of the Raj Djirin vessel *Raj Gipling*. And you?”

“I am...” Kallwyn hesitated, unsure if he should tell the near stranger his name, but then decided to tell the truth. “My name is Kallwyn.”

“No last name, Kallwyn?” Turett asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Kallwyn Jameson,” Kallwyn said with surety. “That’s my name.”

“And where are you from, Kallwyn Jameson?”

“I’m...” there was another moment of hesitation as Kallwyn internally debated how much he should tell the captain.

“Where are you from?” Turett pressed, but there was no malice in his voice – only curiosity.

“Um, I don’t think you’d know it.”

“Try me, my lad. Like I said, I’ve been all over the world on me travels as a sea cap’n.” Turett’s eyes got a faraway look, then he cleared his throat and fixed his gaze on Kallwyn.

“Um. I’m from the...” Kallwyn began, then realized he didn’t know where he had come from in relation to anything. He had never been outside of Sahmonvale before.

“The Western Dunes? The Southern Isles?” Turett suggested as the curious tone entered his voice again.

“Well, I come from a small town.”

“What do you mean?”

“I couldn’t say... I don’t really know where I lived. Or where we are right now. I never left my village until last night. Where did you find me?”

“I picked you up among the islands by the Western Dunes, lad,” Turett answered. “Be that the place?”

“I guess that’s where I’m from. I was a blacksmith–” Kallwyn explained, but Turett cut him off at that comment.

“Hold up, now, lad!” Captain Turett said, his eyes widening significantly. “Ye be one of the blacksmiths of the Western Dunes?”

“Um. Yeah?” Kallwyn responded, unsure why the captain seemed so interested.

“Why did you leave without provisions, from your home?” Turett inquired, sounding very interested.

“Well, we were attacked by pirates, and they stabbed my eye out...”

“Oh, something did look a tad wrong with that,” Captain Turett admitted. In reality, the eye was sort of glazed over and there was a hole in the middle of it. In addition, a lot of blood had dried around the socket. “Here!” he cried, seizing something from his pocket and handing it to Kallwyn. It was a piece of cloth with a sort of stretchy band attached to it.

“It be an eye–patch,” Captain Turett explained, his tone encouraging. “It be yours now.”

“Are you... are you sure?” Kallwyn asked, reluctant to take a gift from the captain. He had just met him, after all. But there was a sort of easiness, a casualness, in fact, that seemed to permeate the atmosphere around Captain Turett, and as the captain nodded, Kallwyn put it on. It fit snugly but not so much as to irritate the injured eye. Kallwyn nodded again to show his thanks to Captain Turett, who returned the gesture with a fatherly smile.

“Now what can we do for you, as we’ve wrecked your boat?”

“Um,” Kallwyn said. “I just want to find out my place in this world, I guess. I was a blacksmith – the best in my village, in fact – but now I don’t really have any money, or any worldly provisions, I guess, so I’m kind of confused as to what I should do. I feel like I owe you, though – I was probably going to die out there, because I didn’t have anything – no food, no water – and I–”

“Hold up there, lad,” Captain Turett said, cutting off Kallwyn. “That sentence felt like it was going to bring on quite the deep, bondin’ conversation and, honestly, I don’t care for that sort of thing, so...”

There was a pause.

“Here,” the captain said finally, breaking off from the awkwardness of the previous conversation, “I’ll introduce ye to the crew. They can help ye out.”

“Okay,” Kallwyn said obligingly, following Turett as he walked away.

They walked towards the center of the boat. Kallwyn, deep in thought, kept a couple steps behind Captain Turett, though the distance didn't keep him from almost bumping into the burly sailor when they had reached midship and stopped. He did manage, however, and looked up from his bare feet to look at the crew.

They had dirt smeared all over their bare arms and faces, and about half of them weren't wearing shoes. Those who were had scuffed-up leather boots, soaked by the constant sea spray. The better part of them were wearing green and blue uniforms with gold trim and copper buttons, while two or three were in white uniforms, with long sleeves. Some were shirtless. Captain Turett looked to Kallwyn and said in Carikeinan, "There are more of them, but they're workin' their posts." Then he turned to the horde of sailors and said, "Afternoon, men," in an authoritative tone. Kallwyn didn't understand due to the fact that Turett had spoken in Gormano. The men responded with various grunts, mutterings, and various obscene gestures.

"These two," Turett said, now speaking in Carikeinan to Kallwyn as he pointed to a man in white and a man in blue, "speak Carikeinan. Don't ya, fellas?"

"Greetings," the one in white said. "I'm Freidrich." He had the same strange accent as Turett did.

"Ahoy there," the man in blue said. "I be Drall. An' you?" He smiled easily, akin to Turett's manner of smiling yet different somehow. Kallwyn decided he liked Drall.

"I'm Kallwyn," Kallwyn responded quietly.

"Speak up there, lad," Freidrich instructed. He had a sort of condescending tone and Kallwyn frowned slightly.

"I'm Kallwyn," he repeated firmly.

"Good to meet ye, Kallwyn," Drall said, extending a grubby hand with a rag in it, then realizing he had a rag in that hand and extended the other. "Nice eye patch." Drall grinned, winking.

"Thanks," Kallwyn said, shaking the tall man's hand. Drall had quite a grip and Kallwyn tried not to flinch as his hand was squeezed.

"Welcome aboard, Kallwyn," Drall said. "Always good to have a lad around, right?" He translated and the other sailors laughed. One said something in what Kallwyn assumed was Gormano, and Drall leaned in close, saying "He says you're good for swabbing the deck."

Kallwyn raised an eyebrow. He didn't know what swabbing the deck was, and he didn't know he wanted to find out.

"Tis okay, lad," Captain Turett said with a playful tone. "We won't be making you swab any decks." He glared surreptitiously at the man, then turned back to Kallwyn. "...Unless ye misbehave. So, what can we do for ye?"

Kallwyn smiled. "Are you stopping at a city anytime soon?"

"As a matter of fact, we are, lad," Captain Turett said, "or at least, now we are!"

Then he turned to the crew. "Look alive, boys, we're heading for b'Zheouh!"