

# NIKOLAS & COMPANY

## Audiobook Adventures



Episode One

THE MERMAN AND THE MOON FORGOTTEN

# NIKOLAS & COMPANY



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## CHAPTER SIX



**L**yons?” Captain Jonn said. “Steward Nikolas Lyons? But sir. He has been missing for years.”

“We’ll need to find him then,” Lir said.

“Very well,” Captain Jonn said, then turned to a Merrow guard. “Sound the alarm.”

Within moments the fortress bellowed a whale like horn.

“You come with us,” Captain Jonn said to Yeri. They quickly marched to the back of the hall as mermaids and men rushed in a frenzy from the approaching monster. Just on the other side of the congregation was a waterhole encircled by a golden banister.

“Duke Lir wants you close so I’m afraid you’ll be accompanying us to the bridge,” Captain Jonn explained,

pointing to the waterhole. It looked placid and was difficult to see through. "This is a merway to the bridge. Much like the tubes you see all around here. You first."

Yeri gulped at the merway. "I'm very good with stairs, sir. Is there—"

"Its twelve levels down and we'll be dead by then," Captain Jonn said. "Afraid this is our only recourse." And with that the Merrow captain stiffened his index finger and forcefully tapped Yeri on the shoulder. He tried to grab for the merman's arm as he fell into the water, but the only thing he caught was the captain's smirk.

The merway's current immediately pulled Yeri into the tube, almost sucking out the precious bit of oxygen trapped in his cheeks. The tube quickly turned right and banged him against the side. He lost his oxygen after all. The translucent tube suddenly went gray and he could tell they were outside the fortress. With a nice straightaway, the merway increased its speed. His arm skin and lips began to drag behind him. He put his hands out to slow it down (though he really wanted to be out of this ghoulish merway as soon as possible) but the surface felt like glass and was little help to him.

The merway cut left and everything went from gray to stone black. Yeri's mouth tried to open for a gulp of oxygen. He forced it closed but his lungs were starting to ache.

The merway whipped him in an almost complete circle, dropped, whipped a second time, then a third, fourth, fifth . . . Yeri lost count. Meanwhile, lights from outside the tube flashed on, and there were ghostly figures. They disappeared. They came back again, and disappeared a second time. This happened over and over. He must have been moving between levels.

Yeri was turned upside down. He looked to his feet, which was now upward, and saw a small light in the distance. He might actually make it out of the bowels of this nightmare fortress alive.

He gulped for air.

Water blew into his lungs.

He gulped a second time.

Water rushed through his nostrils. He pounded the glass, crying out in his mind. He was going to die upside down in this tube.

Like a geyser, the merway flung Yeri through the opening, feet first. He flipped once, landed on his bum, and then fell over, gagging. A large hand slapped him between the shoulder blades, and he coughed out what seemed to be gallons of water.

"You were a little slow," Captain Jonn said. "But not so bad after all. I half expected to be resuscitating you with an airworm. Now, afraid I've got a bridge to look after." He spun around and bellowed. "Forego port maneuvers, helmsman. Planesman. Withdraw ballasts! Right rudder and all ahead flank!"

From somewhere Yeri could feel the engines growl as the floating fortress leaned hard away from the cliff face and turned.

"Weapons conn," Captain Jonn said. "Engage hex shields. Flank bell, Helmsman. Open that throttle. Give it all she's got. Engineering. Status report . . ."

As Captain Jonn barked out orders to his mermen, Yeri took a second to choke out the last bits of water.

"The next time Jameson asks me to cover his shift," he said, moving to his hands and knees, "the answer will be undeniably 'no!'"

He slowly climbed to his feet, trying to orient himself, but it proved to be difficult. The only thing separating the ocean from the bridge were sheets of glass divided up by iron beams. Through the glass he could see a 360 degree panoramic view of the underwater ocean. Yeri walked slowly toward the view. Powerful fortress lamps cast an indigo light, making the water look smoky and melancholic. If there was some kind of underwater threat out there, he couldn't see it.

"Release the lumens," Captain Jonn said. "Eighty-five percent."

"Releasing the lumens," several voices repeated the order.

*Click, click, click*, came the sound of hatches opening below deck. Thousands of jellyfish, as small as apples and as bright as the noonday sun, shot from the fortress into the dark waters. The ocean bloomed with the lumens, making it look like a sea of stars. They lit the underwater plainly. Yeri could see mountain ridges and their canyons to the east, a forest of kelp running along the cliffs to the west, and a hundred yards away two waterdragons staring back at them.

Yeri whimpered.

The water dragons were unlike land dragons in that they were wingless and had an eel's body. But they were like land dragons in that they shared the same wicked faces with their sliver black eyes and hyena shaped head. Also, they breathed fire.

The waterdragons's nostrils looked to be lava pits, and their teeth resembled the gates to the very heart of Mount Kenova. The waterdragon on the left seemed to have blue fire in its craw, while the dragon on the right had yellow fire. Dujinnin were saddled on the back of the beasts. They wore a breathing contraption and held reigns harnessed to black metal helmets with goat shaped horns. Those horns must have been what smashed into the fortress earlier.

Yeri turned to Captain Jonn to inquire about a bathroom *immediately*, but the captain could not be found among the chaos. What he did see were several Merrow officers rushing around. One officer stood in the middle of the bridge gripping a wheel. Above him large pipes dropped from the ceiling to several unmanned stations. At the far end were stacks of barrels lashed down, and an assortment of different shaped canons and projectiles. Several hatches, merways, and portholes went to un-descript places.

Two cylinders with the words "engines" painted on the front, lay parallel to each other. Directly behind the engines



and outside of the fortress two gargantuan-sized propellers churned up the water.

Captain Jonn appeared behind Yeri with a short, freckle-faced officer.

"Sir," the officer said to Captain Jonn. "We have the Dujinnin at bay for the moment. Ensign Thrikly executed a repealer. A well executed hex if I do say so myself. Should give us enough time to escape if the furnaces are held to maximum."

"Tell me, Quartermaster Tiggs," Captain Jonn said. "Was Ensign Thrikly on his fourth harjuice of the evening?"

Quartermaster Tiggs slowly opened his mouth, and then closed it. He looked like a beached fish.

"Then he performed a terrible hex and we have minutes before they break through."

"We could try for a phantom hex and be gone before they know it," Quartermaster Tiggs offered.

"Prancing and parlor tricks," Captain Jonn shot back. "We must *kill* the waterdragons."

Quartermaster Tigg's eyes grew. "Very—very well, sir. I know we've got a humling on board, but we cannot—" He glanced quickly to Yeri, then back to the captain. "We cannot do it dry. We're too slow, sir. These contraptions are good for politicians, not battles."

"On that you are correct," Captain Jonn said, looking at their automalegs. "We need to flood the compartment. Very sorry, Yeri."

"Excuse me?" Yeri looked to Quartermaster Tiggs and Captain Jonn.

"We must be able to swim freely to fulfill our duties," Captain Jonn said. "Our automalegs are no good in an underwater battle. We will need to fill the bridge with water."

"But I cannot breathe underwater!" Yeri said.

Captain Jonn looked to a station to his left, "Flood the bridge!"

The officer nodded and spun a wooden wheel several revolutions. Tiny holes from floor to ceiling opened up and showered the compartment. The merways and hatches erupted with water.

"Sir!" Yeri called after Captain Jonn, already walking through a foot of water. "I am without gills!"

Quartermaster Tiggs trudged away and quickly returned with a small chest. It bobbed up and down in the rising water.

"What say you, Captain Jonn," Quartermaster Tiggs nodded to Yeri, trying to yell over the spraying water. "Migarees?"

"I don't think he could stomach the pint of larvae worms," Captain Jonn said.

The water licked at Yeri's calves.

"Jellied troll fat?" Quartermaster Tiggs said, opening the chest and rummaging through it.

"Afraid not Tiggs. Doesn't have the build for it," Captain Jonn said. "His heart would blow up to the size of a pig's bladder."

The water had risen to Yeri's waist.

"Ah. mulmouse venom for sure," Quarter Master Tiggs said.

"The shakes and the vomiting would take an hour at least. We do not have the time."

"You are right, of course," Quartermaster Tiggs said, "Besides I believe he is partial to his fingernails. They are well manicured. I don't think he'd like them melting off. Might I suggest obmorcrabs then, sir?"

"How do you feel about obmorcrabs?" Captain Jonn yelled to Yeri over the spraying water.

"Oh quite tasty, sir," Yeri nodded, the water now to his chest. "Especially smothered in laromi sau—"

"Good," Captain Jonn said as he grabbed the back of Yeri's head, reached into the floating chest, and raised up the belly of a living obmorcrab.



Yeri flinched. Its underside had two roaming tendrils, two throbbing suckers, and a mass of smaller tendrils near its belly.

He shoved the crab into Yeri's face.

Yeri thrashed in the rising water as the obmorcrab wrapped around his head. Two cold tendrils slithered down his eardrums, and the suckers sealed around his eyes, making it impossible to blink. The mass of smaller tendrils ran down his mouth and nose. He choked from the feeling of hundreds of worms filling his chest. He thought swallowing salt water was bad enough, but now his lungs were being filled with crab appendages.

Captain Jonn yanked Yeri underwater and, strangely enough, spoke to him, "Breathe, Yeri. Just breathe."

Yeri tried to rip off the crab but it squeezed harder. His arms flailed, and he reached for the surface only to find that the bridge was completely flooded. Finally, with no other alternative, he took a breath.

It might as well have been a spring day in Gromwell village. He could breathe deeply and fully. In fact, the bridge looked and sounded even better than before. The only difference was it felt like all gravity had been removed, letting him float around.

"Obmorcrabs were born without any senses or ability to breathe under water," Captain Jonn said. "But their food sources dwell ocean below. They use host bodies such as land mammals and you humlings to travel through the ocean. For the Merrows's sake, they make it much easier for you to breathe underwater and communicate with us, as I am doing now. No worries, Yeri. It is not permanent."

Yeri turned his crab face to Captain Jonn. "But it's horrifying, isn't it?"

The captain smiled, unbuckled his automalegs, and swam to his captain's chair. Lir quickly zipped out of a merway and asked the captain for a status report. While they were conferring a ring of light flashed outside the fortress.

Captain Jonn looked up. "And our only outer defenses just went away. As I said, Officer Thikly's repealer was useless. Helmsman Fraymouth. Mark your head."

"Two, five, three," said an olive-skinned merman.

"Dive sixty feet, mark two, five, six," Captain Jonn said. "Comm. Alert the fortress. We're going full submersion."

The waterdragons tucked back and sped outside the lumens' light.

"Look, Captain," Yeri said with a touch of hope. The waterdragons flee."

"They do not flee," Captain Jonn said. "They join."

"Joi—?" Yeri started to say when the waterdragons reappeared twisting around each other like two ropes. They were rushing the fortress.

"Brace for impact!" Captain Jonn said.

Horns and snouts slammed the glass. The fortress shuttered but the glass remained intact. The waterdragons whipped around and disappeared a second time.

"Not enough to break through," Yeri chuckled to himself.

"They were testing our defenses," Lir explained. "trying to assess our hexes. We have fourteen currently active ones. But they're not done with us. The waterdragons travel with their mates for a reason. The male's fire is blue, the female's yellow. Separately, neither fire can penetrate our hexes, but when they join their fire together, the sun itself would be hewn in two."

Two points of light were spinning around each other in the distant ocean, a blue and a yellow one. The lights increased in size until Yeri could see the flames. The waterdragons were breathing fire as they spun. Blue flames rolled into yellow and yellow whipped into blue until the flames were a fiery emerald.

"Left full rudder, helmsmen," Captain Jonn said.

"Left full rudder," helmsmen Fraymouth repeated. The sound of bending metal came as the fortress leaned heavily to the left.

"Tactical. Speak to me," Captain Jonn said.

"Distance to collision," Officer Thrush called out. "Starboard. Five hundred yards."

The combined dragons' fire cut a swath through the horde of lumens, igniting the jellyfish like firecrackers on midsummer's eve.

"Weapons. Ready sirenchaffs," Captain Jonn said.

"Readying sirenchaffs," called a sailor.

"Distance to collision," Officer Thrush said. "Two hundred yards."

Yeri could now see a ring of bubbles around the dragon fire; it boiled frenetic and angry.

Chaff ready, sir," called a sailor.

"Distance to collision," Officer Thrush said. "Thirty yards."

The glass began to steam with the dragons' heat. The metal braces whined, threatening to unsnap and shatter the glass. Yeri looked to Captain Jonn, whose right hand bobbed in the water as his hair wormed freely. What was he waiting for?

"Distance to collision," Officer Thrush said. "Thirteen yards. Ten yards. Eight ya—"

"Launch sirenchaffs," Captain Jonn ordered.

"Launching sirenchaffs," the sailor called back.

Three cigar-shaped iron pods with small propellers ejected from somewhere below and toward the waterdragons. The mechanical decoys emitted a low, melodic sound, almost putting Yeri to sleep instantly. The musical decoys swept just past the head of the waterdragons, who immediately curled around and followed after. The Dujinnin riders tried to steer their beasts back on course, but they wouldn't be altered.

"Sirens are waterdragons' main source of food," Quartermaster Tiggs said. "Their song might as well have been a call to dinner. Our phono-recorded ones make a fine alternative."

The waterdragons continued to spin toward their own tail. So taken by their decoy they forgot to stop breathing their green fire. The flames cut right through their tails and ran up



their backs. While they were thrashing wildly, the two Dujinnin riders tried to eject, but weren't quick enough.

Captain Jonn released a long held breathe, "I think that will —"

A leviathan appeared.

Yeri's stomach melted away as gasps swept from around the bridge.

"Dear Möon," Captain Jonn said.

The great sea monster filled the entire view at the rear of the ship. Lumens cast thousands of lights across its face, which was armored in a boney plate. The plate was made up of thousands of incisor teeth. It had a large midsection that edged the ocean floor and water surface. Bolted into its cranium was an enclosed iron carriage. It seemed to be a deck from where the Dujinnin controlled their beast. Yeri could see several men holding reigns that were harnessed to its head, arms and legs.

"Reverse engines!" Captain Jonn yelled. "Full reverse!"

Sailors and officers exploded into action. Mermen swam by and water swirled as the bridge did everything they could to put some distance between fortress and the impossibly large monster.

Quartermaster Tiggs swam past Yeri, saying to himself, "Monster will just crush us against the cliffs."

The engines moaned as they were put into full use. The fortress turned sharply and the leviathan's face angled away as its orbish eyes tracked their movement.

"We must abandon ship, Duke," Captain Jonn said.

"We cannot leave this ship," Lir said. "You saw what the foulds did to my brother-in-law and sister. They will not stop until we've all been infected."

"Then what are your orders?" Captain Jonn said.

Lir paused, and then said to himself, "We'll be the decoy. Bearing three, two, nine, helmsman. Dive twenty-three feet, then rudder amidships. A straight line away. Let it chase us."

Helmsman Fraymouth confirmed the order and sent it down. The fortress was surprisingly nimble for its size. Within moments they were quickly out of the lumen's light range and in the dark open sea. They could only hope the leviathan was of the slow sort.

"May I, captain?" Lir said, pointing to the captain's chair.

"The most decorated captain of the nine seas? Of course, Duke," Captain Jonn said. The men traded places.

Lir swung his chair and faced the churning propellers. He called out, "Ensign Prymus, bow lights. Let's see if it's chasing us."

Twenty lamps flickered on and Yeri could see the wicked reflection of the leviathan's eyes between the propellers. The monster was keeping steady . . . he changed his mind. It wasn't keeping steady, it was gaining on them.

"They've got a quick one," Captain Jonn said.

"Good," Lir said. "Engine room. Prepare for Jasper maneuver."

The sailors stopped their activity for a moment, the tension palpable, but then resumed. This was Duke Lir after all.

The leviathan's snout came into view, and the lamplights shined off its boney shell. The shell's teeth edges were covered in barnacles and mollusks.

"Distance to collision," Officer Thrush said. "Fifty yards."

"Engine room," Lir said. "On my mark, invert propellers twenty degrees. We must time this right, mermen."

"Distance to collision," Officer Thrush said. "Twenty-three yards . . . twenty-one yards . . . eighteen yards . . . seventeen, sixteen, fifteen, fourte—"

"Invert propellers!" Lir commanded.

A dull noise came from the engines and the propellers turned toward each other. The whirling bubbles now concealed the bottom part of the leviathan's jaw but its black eyes still peered over the churning water.

"Nine yards," Officer Thrush called. "Eight. Seven. Six."

Lir pounded his fist. "Eject propellers!"

Two sailors gripped floor levers and pulled with their entire body. Both propellers burst from the rear of the ship and flew out like runaway buzz saws. The leviathan flinched upward to move away from the projectiles, but all it did was expose its neck. Its head shredded away and the beast spun in a greenish bloom of its own blood.

Sailors jumped up from their posts with cheers and shouts as the monster and its bridge sunk down into the darkness. Yeri thought he saw something shoot out of the sunken bridge, but he was overtaken by a very happy Quartermaster Tiggs.

"Engage auxiliary engines," Captain Jonn ordered, then turned to Lir. "Fine work, sir, fine work indeed."

"I only wish we had another option," Lir said. "Without our propellers we're dead in the water. Only our auxiliary engines to limp along by. And there's still a foul on board."

"Right," Captain Jonn said.

"I saw them," Lir said. "More were on the bridge of the leviathan. So was their leader. We're trapped in our own fortress."

"Right," Captain Jonn said again. "We still have the steward of Huron."

"And a way to reach him," Lir turned to Yeri. "Our stagecoach driver could get word to him."

"I could what?" Yeri said.

"The fous cannot smell you, Yer—"

Suddenly, there was the sound of glass breaking, the lights went out, and then the cries of joy turned into screams. Near where the propeller had been ejected Yeri could see the shattered bridge window and the shadow of some hulking monster with thousands of red eyes. It looked like the same shadow that had chased them from Gromwell village.

"We've been breached!" Captain Jonn yelled. "The fous made their way in after all. Quarantine the bridge. Seal all exits!"



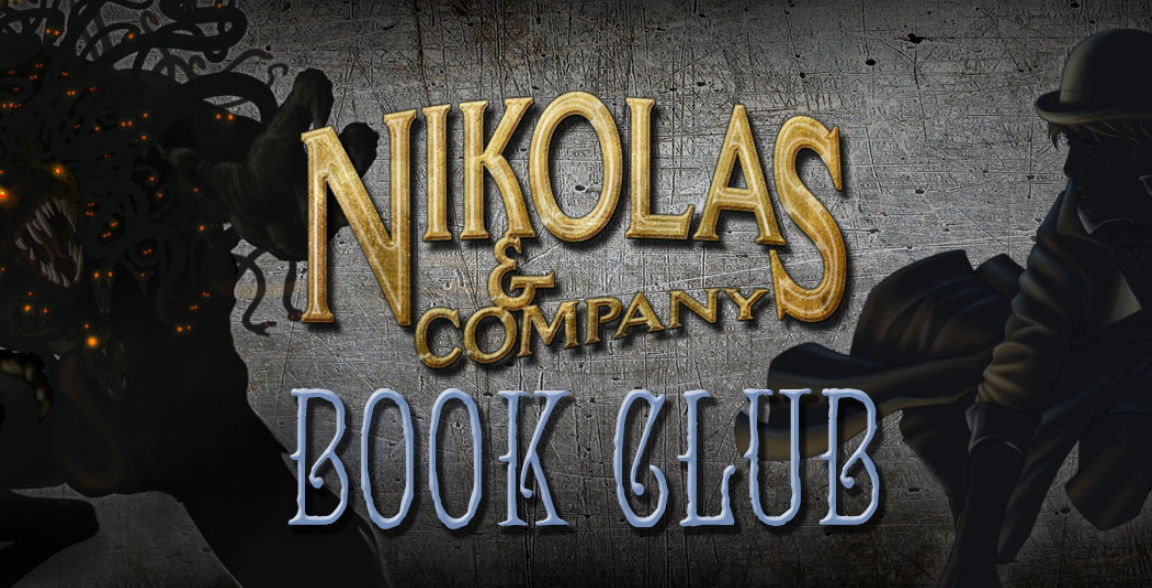
Mermen were screaming and clawing at their skin as the shadow moved toward the front of the bridge.

"Get Yeri out of here before he sees this," Lir said. "He must take the oath first. Take him to the Duke's chamber."

Before Yeri could make out the creature, Captain Jonn spun him again and locked eyes. "I don't know if I will ever see you again, stagecoach driver. So I will say this. I can see the goodness in your heart. You must save us, Yeri. You must help us get word to the outside. We need the steward of Huron."

Captain Jonn yanked the obmorcrab off Yeri's face and pushed him down a merway again.

All along the way he heard the captain's words: "*You must save us, Yeri. You must help us get word to the outside. We need the steward of—*"



# NIKOLAS & COMPANY BOOK CLUB

## Book Club Questions

- The monster that is chasing them - what do you think it is?
- Yeri is pushed into a dangerous situation. Have you ever found yourself in a dangerous place? What did you do about it?
- What creature's attacked the ship?
- How did Sir and Captain Jonn respond to the attack?
- At the end of the chapter, Captain Jonn says they need Yeri to help them. Has anyone ever needed you to help them with something important? How did that make you feel?

