

# NIKOLAS & COMPANY

## Audiobook Adventures



Episode One

THE MERMAN AND THE MOON FORGOTTEN

# NIKOLAS & COMPANY



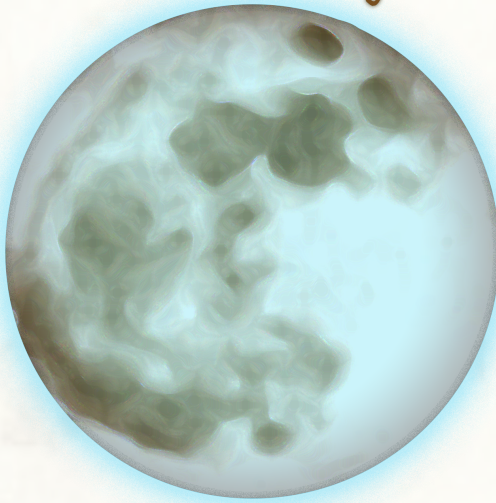
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## Chapter Two



A long time ago in a world  
not so far away...



THE WORLD OF MÖON. EYNCLAENE  
PROVINCE.  
GROMWELL VILLAGE.



uron and haggelburrs!" Yeri swore . . . well, judging by his mother's standards.

The stagecoach wheel had nearly slipped, threatening to throw driver and passengers to the frothing sea below. Yes, Yeri had taken the stagecoach driver's oath to "guide passengers through every hazard and peril." Still, he didn't have to enjoy it, especially when a devilish creature with red-pronged eyes gave chase all the way from Gromwell village on one of the foggiest nights of his illustrious stagecoach driving career. When the fog had thickened so that Yeri couldn't see its red eyes, or his own nobbly hands for that matter, he could rely on the smell. The monster reeked of rotten onion.

He looked up in time to see a black shape envelop him and screamed, "Aaah!"

He opened his eyes and patted his frock coat. No teeth ripping flesh from body. No blood being dispensed from its human vessel.

"Just a misty mirage, ol' boy," Yeri chuckled to himself.

"Grauhh!" came a blood-curdling roar. The horses jerked away from the noise.

"That was no mirage," Yeri said, trying to steady the horses. But their nerves got the best of them, and they darted left, forcing the stagecoach wheels to skate across the cliff face again. Just when he thought they would descend to their briny death, wheels grabbed rock, and the stagecoach righted itself. Yeri was one of the more able drivers, but if they did



not reach their destination soon, either cliff or creature would win this race.

Of course, he was sufficiently capable of driving the horses above a scamper, if it wasn't for the double stagecoach. Mr. Fungman was always trying to save a sulmare and so devised the double stagecoach, allowing him to charge twice as much for every driver. Well, Mr. *Fungman* didn't have to steer these monstrosities around every sheer drop.

A pounding fist came from the front stagecoach. Yeri thought to ignore the passenger's need, but that was another oath he had taken. Maybe he should stop taking so many oaths.

Yeri pulled the reins and the horses whinnied to a stop. He scrambled from the stagecoach, pulled out a key, and grasped the iron latch. Then, he changed his mind.

"Please, sir," Yeri tried to control his gasps. "For, uhm—er—your safety, it's best we continue."

"Let me out, driver."

Yeri's eyes darted from the stagecoach door to highway and back to stagecoach door. Come to think of it, he had never met the passengers, being charged with them at the very last moment. The previous stagecoach driver had come down with squatters. Jamison's face was covered in budding, orange flowers.

The key spun past tumblers, and Yeri swung the door open. Lamplights washed away any view of the passengers, but what Yeri couldn't see, he could hear. There were gears on gears turning and belts locking into place. Slowly, something that looked like a collection of spokes and cranks crafted by a mad clockmaker emerged from the coach. The gears turned out to be legs—automaton legs, an invention and wonder used only by the wealthy.

*The man must be a cripple*, Yeri thought.

Leather gloves reached out to the edges of the stagecoach door, and the man pulled himself out.

Yeri gasped.

The passenger didn't have two gnarled legs, but one long, iridescent fishtail. It bent where knees should bend with a wide fin and a line of sharp, bony protrusions outlining the dorsal. The automaton legs seemed to be a near extension of the man's upper body.

"Thank you, driver," the passenger said. "Unable to hear over the horses."

"Dear me. Ve—very sorry sir." Yeri removed his hat. "Jamison was sick, and I was unaware, of—er—your handicap, sir. I took zoology, of course, but it was only for extra credit, and my teacher was a blunderbuss of the highest ord—"

"Do not concern yourself, driver. It is no handicap. Now please, silence."

"Forgive me, sir. One should be of more assistance, Mister?" Yeri said with eyes locked on the passenger's fishtail.

"Lir," the merman sighed. Evidently, Yeri's curiosity was greater than Lir's need for silence. "My name is Lir Anu Palus, and this is Nia Menweir Palus. We are the Duke and Duchess of all Eynclaene coastlands."

The woman he called Nia pushed her head out and offered a smile.

"Duke and Duchess?" Yeri's mouth widened, and then he quickly bowed. "I am Yeri Willrow, senior stagecoach driver for Fungman, Zedock and Josiah Stagecoach Company. And at your utmost service."

Even with the fog's white plumes rolling past, Yeri could see that Lir was strong, with commanding features and bluish grey eyes. He wore gentlemen's leather gloves and a red silk frock. Oddly enough, though his hair was deep silver, he had the features of a young man. Yet, Nia was the one who captured the gaze of the stagecoach driver. She had a quiet, slender frame and the kind of crystal eyes that would liquefy the heart of any man.

Yeri had no doubt they were a Duke and Duchess for both were garnished with jewelry more valuable than the whole of



Gromwell village. Yeri felt his own stark contrast. He was orphan-thin except for a gourd-shaped midsection, a nose like an elbow, and lips that couldn't fully close. More so, his wilting hat and tattered knee-breeches didn't speak of a man who would come into his fortune anytime soon.

"Is—Is it painful?" Yeri said. "Not being near water and all?"

"I have not lost my humling nature," Lir laughed.

"Please understand, sir." Yeri took off his hat. "I have never set my eyes upon a mermaid, aside from a few schoolbooks."

"Yes, indeed," Lir said, "which explains your lack of anatomical observation."

"Sir?" Yeri wrinkled his brow.

"I am no maid. I am a merman. But anyway, we are called Merrows."

"Merrows," Yeri mouthed the word. His eyes darted to the second coach. "The passengers—in there. They're Merrows, too?"

"Yes," Lir said, glancing back at the stagecoach. "My brother and sister-in-law. We were taking a well-needed rest after months of patrolling the coast of Eynclaene. Now, afraid I'll still need that moment of silence."

Lir raised his ear to the fog. Slowly, he sidestepped to the coach, opened the door, and retrieved what Yeri could only describe as a small harpoon attached to a handheld catapult.

Yeri turned his own ear to the night sky. "Can't hear them coming before the devils are upon you. Quiet as anything and fast as death, you know."

Lir held his hand up, signaling silence. "I am able to hear a sea urchin sneeze forty knots out to sea if I wish."

"Are they after the horses you suppose?" Yeri said. "Or are they hungry for man flesh?"

"No," Lir said. "They pursue me and my kin."

"You?" Yeri said. "Why you?"

Lir shook his head, "The answer to that would change the course of your life forever, driver. Afraid I cannot tell you . . . Oh, and you are correct. They are fast."

"Pardon me?" Yeri said.

Lir's automaton legs spun him around. "To the horses, now!"

Yeri, bug-eyed, grabbed the rail. He pulled himself up, buttocks last. With a bit of squirming, he found himself up right.

"Lift me up." Lir held a hand out.

Yeri hooked his foot to the railing and reached over. With a grunt, Yeri heaved the merman onto the passenger seat. The automaton legs slipped off Lir and clattered to the ground.

"Get going you lame muck snipes!" Yeri cracked the whip like a runaway windmill. The horses kicked dirt and leapt into a gallop. As a rule, he didn't like to yell at his horses, but now was not the time for rules.

Something shook the rear of the second stagecoach. Yeri turned to see claws shoved into wood, slowing the coaches down. The merman raised his harpoon and whispered something. The harpoon blazed with fire just as it sprung from the catapult.

"Raiiggh!" The creature lit into a ball of flames and tumbled into the mist.

He retrieved the harpoon by a thin cord. Several more cries came from everywhere, from nowhere.

"There are more?" Yeri said.

"Do you have anything useful?" Lir's voice competed with the grinding wheels. "A charm or maybe jynn'us?"

"No charms, sir, and no useful weapons . . ." Yeri's voice trailed off.

"Jynn'us?" Lir said. "Do you have jynn'us?!"

"Well, I—I can make toys come to life," Yeri offered, "which would explain Mum's ban on any and all toys since the age of eight. Lonely years, as you can imagine. I do



wonder if things would've turned out different for me and Agatha if Mum afforded me but a few toys . . ."

"Thank you, Yeri." Lir pounded the roof.

Nia tried her best to lean out the window.

"The door prize," Lir said.

"It was for Mother," Nia contended.

"We are two breaths from death, dear," Lir shouted. "Might we save our domestic disputes for some other life-threatening circumstance?"

Nia disappeared and then leaned out, holding a tin box with an 'L' painted on top. "Here. Do be careful!"

"There you go, Yeri." Lir shoved the box into Yeri's hand. "That's a Ludwig. No better display of toymanship."

"A Ludwig—the famous toymaker? And this is his?" Yeri licked his chops as he slid the top open. "I've always wanted a Ludwig."

"It's a Roc. Very good," Lir said.

Yeri's left eye quivered. "Oh, sir. There must be a better way to rid ourselves of these monsters. It's a Ludwig, for Pete's sa—"

"Yeri," Lir warned.

"Really, sir, Rocs are a beast of burden. It would be cruel to send such a creature into the grips of batt—"

"Yeri!"

"Very well." Yeri resolved himself. He gently unwrapped the toy from its velvet bed. It looked like a horned eagle with tattered wings, and its neck was featherless.

"Simply brilliant," Yeri mourned. He covered the toy with his right hand. Smoky, bluish-light sifted between his fingers.

"Ouiww!" Yeri howled and pulled his hand back. With a leap, the Roc hovered eye level before its audience. "Little troglodyte bit me!"

"Yeri. Aren't they a mite bigger?" Lir said.

"I said I could make a toy come alive, not change its size," Yeri said.

The finger-sized Roc turned its head toward the red-eyed assailants and roared. It leapt into the foggy wall.

Silence.

"Aiihh!" a monster cried.

"Raaishhh!" the Roc responded.

Combative cries rang down the cliff side.

Lir held out a hand. "The whip, good man. The horses know what to do."

Without a word, he pushed the whip into Lir's hands. The merman held out the whip in his left, the fiery harpoon gun in his right, and closed his eyes.

"I could throw a shoe at it."

"Shh. I cannot hear them if you are spea—"

The whip shot across Yeri's nose.

"Greeow!" the mist cried. Lir reeled in a black mass with hundreds of red eyes. The harpoon tore through its stomach, and the creature burst into filthy smoke as it tumbled over the cliff, leaving an acrid smell in its wake.

"What are they, sir?" Yeri said. The monster had been so close he could have hugged it, yet the fog hid its shape.

Lir looked ready to speak, but his mouth stayed shut.

Hundreds of red eyes appeared before them. Lir cocked the whip. Suddenly, another creature grabbed the whip from behind and Lir was dragged to the back of the coach. At the last moment he anchored himself into an exposed ribbing.

"Gaah!" Lir cried. His tail was being shredded by the stony ground.

With the whip still in his hand, the merman's muscles exploded from neck to shoulder as he flung the creature ahead of the stagecoach. Monstrous screams were cut short by the solid end of a spruce tree.

Lir righted himself on the seat and pointed to an outcropping. "Just beyond Constance Cove, that's our destination."

"Lesterton's Point sir? But—"

"Trust me, Yeri."



The horses swung right and seaward.

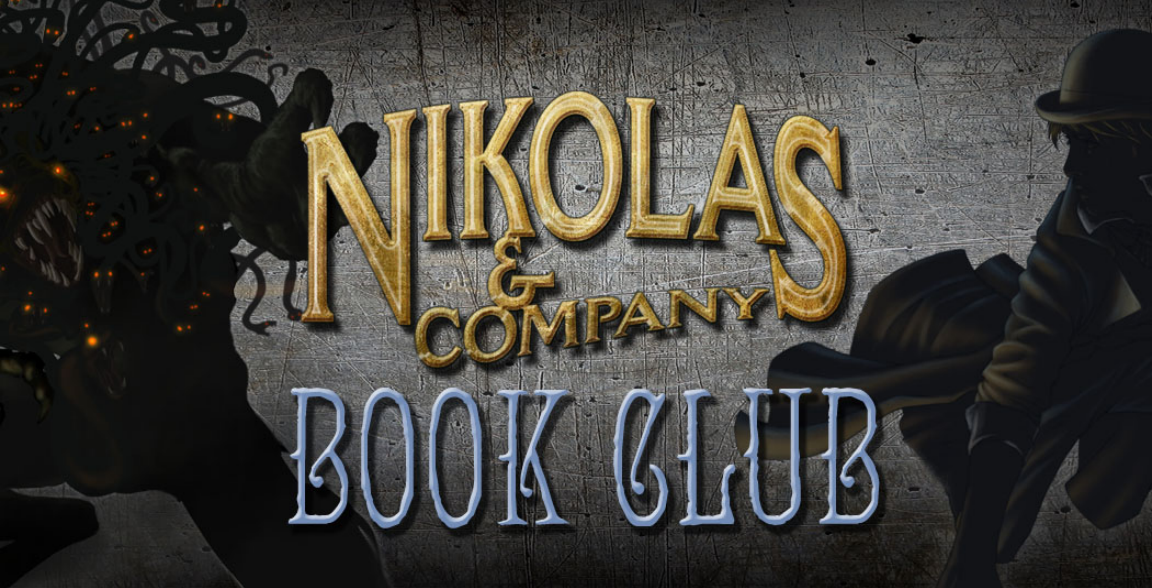
"Sir. There is nothing here but ocean below."

"Ride hard, sir."

"But the cliff?"

"Do not stop!"

The stagecoach leapt into the gut of mist, leaving the cliff behind. The horses' forelegs reached out for ground, for hope  
—"



# NIKOLAS & COMPANY BOOK CLUB

## Book Club Questions

- Who was the protagonist (main character)?
- Who was the antagonist (the main character's enemies)?
- What planet are they on?
- What word did you not understand? Go back and look at the surrounding actions. How can you guess the meaning of the word by the surrounding actions.
- Do you know someone like Yeri—a person that gets nervous in situations? Describe them.

