

Chapter Seventeen

New interests, new talents

You can't teach an old dog new tricks, or can you?

- apocryphal

A mud-caked, naked, ginger savage slipped through the bushes at the edge of the lake. He moved very quietly, and amazingly lightly for a man of his bulk. He muttered under his breath, cursing silently and continuously, as he stared balefully at the slowly widening expanse of water. That and the strip of open turf around the erstwhile shoreline, were all that separated him from the shrinking island supporting the little scout ship.

At this rate, only another fortnight might pass and the ship would be forced to move, and less than that before the lock into the complex was covered. He must make his move soon. He continued to wait, as he had done for the last few days.

The hike over the mountain had nearly killed him. Desperation forced him to try the local berries and tubers, some had been violent emetics, one had caused dreadful stomach cramps. He dared not kill and eat the solitary cow he had stumbled across, in case its loss was noticed. With great care he studied the plants it ate, and in learning he survived.

It was a leaner, fitter, and altogether more ruthless Janus Murdoch who was planning to take off in that little ship, and, as a matter of course, blast to smithereens the petty little town and everyone in it. Just one bomb was all he needed; even the smallest scout was bound to carry some for emergencies.

Few of the pirates would have recognised the wild-eyed savage chewing on the stringy tuber. Even fewer would have ever seen him in quite such a black and vicious mood. As with most of the pirates, Murdoch was a natural survivor; but his technique for survival was unique. Simple, blind, unabated fury drove him past normal limits