KINTANA and the CAPTAIN'S CURSE

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KINTANA and the CAPTAIN'S CURSE



Illustrated by
JENNY CZERWONKA

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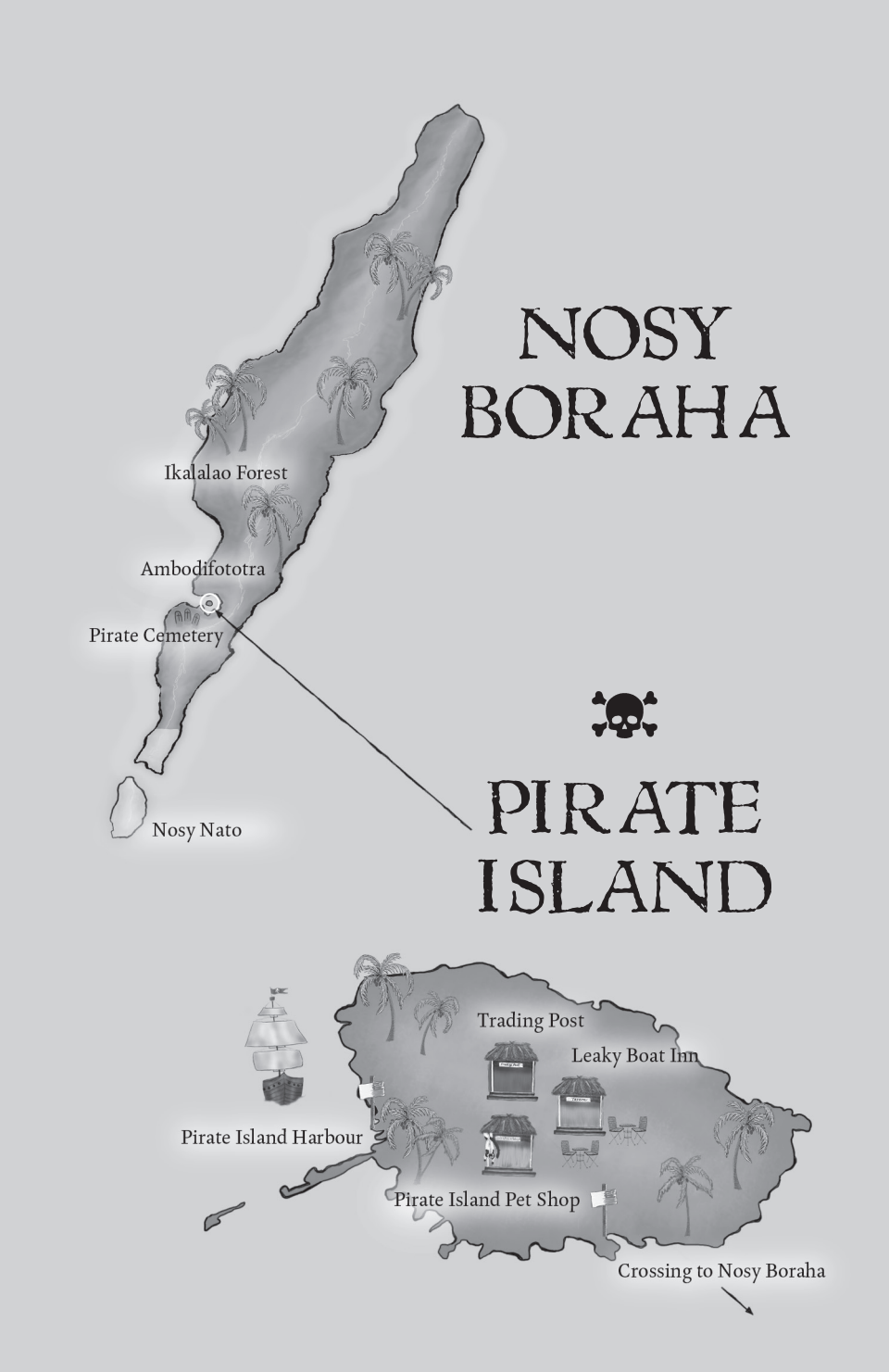
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For Max


NOSY BORAHA
Ikalalao Forest
Ambodifototra
Pirate Cemetery
Nosy Nato
PIRATE ISLAND
Trading Post
Leaky Boat Inn
Pirate Island Harbour
Pirate Island Pet Shop
Crossing to Nosy Boraha

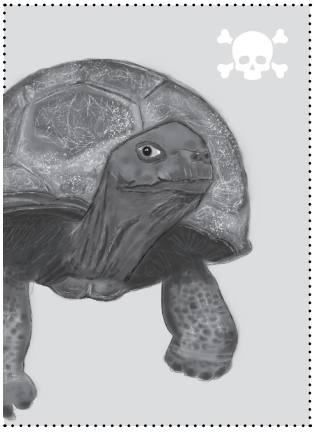
THE ANIMALS OF THE ISLANDS



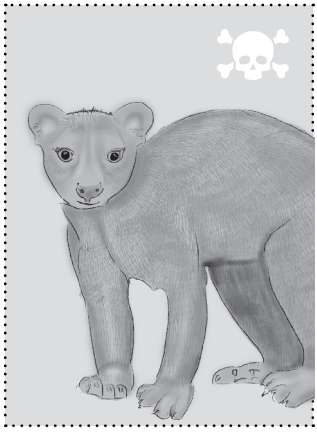
MOUSE LEMUR



INDRI LEMUR



GIANT MADAGASCAR TORTOISE



FOSSA



ELEPHANT BIRD



GIANT MALAGASY JUMPING RAT



GREATER VASA PARROT



AYE AYE



Pirate Island
Nosy Boraha
Madagascar
1733



Chapter One

A NEW RECRUIT

KINTANA PANNED PA'S SPYGLASS ACROSS THE TALL ship's sails. A black flag fluttered on the mast! *Pirates!* She nearly toppled off her ladder with excitement. She pictured herself on board the ship fearlessly slashing at enemies in a ferocious cutlass battle.

Kintana gave the pet shop sign another quick wipe and scooted to the ground. She tightened her bandana over her black braids, then ran inside to a cacophony of squawking, hooting and howling and the familiar smell of grass bedding and animal feed.

"There's a ship entering the harbour," Kintana shouted to Pa. She had to get a closer look! How could you grow up on Pirate Island and not crave a life on the sea? She wanted sea monsters and shipwrecks, typhoons and treasure, not mucking out and feeding time. "I could sell some animals to the crew."

"I thought you'd agreed to steer clear of pirates, Kintana."

"But we need the money, besides you're a pirate, Pa!"

"An ex-pirate," he corrected.

It was true, Pa was a pet shop owner now, but he still looked like a pirate! He wore a blue bandana over his scruffy blond hair and was dressed in a white shirt, open from his pale pink neck to his navel, and yellow trousers that were cropped short above the knee so you could see one hairy leg and one wooden one.

"We haven't sold an animal in weeks – I have to try," said Kintana. "They might take the fanaloka." She gazed at the sleeping striped civet. "I'll tell them it is an excellent mouser. I could take some of those tenrecs too before they breed any more! I've a feeling our fortune is going to change today."

"Ooh, perhaps that means someone will finally buy that pygmy hippo?" said Pa, leaning against the shop counter.

"You hope so." Kintana picked up a cabbage and tossed it into the hippo's pen. "If he doesn't sell soon, he'll eat us out of house and home *and* shop. I thought we'd agreed to only sell small species!"

"He *is* small, Kintana, for a hippo."

"Very funny, Pa. But seriously, if we don't make more sales soon, we won't be able to afford food for us *or* the animals."

Pa sighed. "All right, but we have to finish tidying first, in case we do get some customers."

Kintana squealed and hugged him tight. Then she raced from one cage to the next, like a whirlwind, emptying water and food bowls in one move, refilling them in the next.

The birds sang, the rodents squeaked, and the lemurs waved their long black-and-white-striped tails at her.

Pa rubbed his sleeve along the counter. Crumbs of nuts, seeds,

crackers and biscuits fell to the ground. He scurried around to the other side; his wooden leg rarely slowed him down.

Kintana started to scoop the mess up, "Oh! Pa! I'd already done the floor."

He grinned, revealing a smattering of teeth. "Had you? Sorry, Kintana." He took the handful of rubbish from her and threw it out the window.

Her mouth fell open. "I'll clean that up, too, shall I?"

"I'm in the way, aren't I? Let me fetch you the hand cart," said Pa.

Kintana nodded and set about selecting which other creatures to take to the harbour. The night heron, a panther chameleon, a pair of day geckos, and some more small mammals – a bokiboky, the vontsira and half a dozen big-footed mice. One by one, she lugged their cages into a pile.

"You had better take some animal food, too," said Pa, wheeling in the cart. "I imagine the crew has lots of pets already so, even if they don't want to buy another animal, they might still want food and treats."

Kintana gathered sacks of seed, corn and fresh leaves to take and began to stack them on the cart. "Are you coming with me?"

"And miss out on selling that pygmy hippo? No, I'll stay here. Besides you're twelve years old now – you don't need me holding your hand any longer."

Kintana swallowed. She and Pa did everything together, but recently she'd pushed for more freedom. Now she was being granted it, she suddenly felt a bit nervous.

Kintana had been nine when Mama died after a short illness. Right up until the end, she had insisted on braiding Kintana's hair.

Now Pa looked after it, did the cooking, bought her clothes and listened when she was upset or worried.

Pa's right. I am old enough to look after myself, she realised. *So why do I feel I'm the one that needs convincing?*



Kintana didn't have far to walk before she reached the harbour but dragging a heavy cart full of pets for sale made it hard work. She took off her lamba and draped it over the cages. The animals would prefer the shade under the shawl.

The Nine Sails was enormous! A beautiful brigantine. 90 foot long with two masts, furled sails, and a seahorse figurehead.

Kintana looked up at the crow's nest, there was no tell-tale flag now but *The Nine Sails* was definitely a pirate ship.

The crew on deck wore brightly coloured shirts, breeches and bandanas. Flintlock pistols on silk ribbon dangled around their necks while cutlasses – short swords, ideal for fighting in tight spaces – hung at their waists. Others were stripped to the navel, as they groaned and cursed while cleaning the seaweed and barnacles off the hull.

Suddenly, her view was blocked. A pirate with bronzed skin, eyes like jet and wiry grey hair worn in a plait had stepped in front of her. He wore a blue jacket over a green waistcoat, dark trousers and a red bandana. She winced at the pong of dirt and stale sweat.

"My name's Gangrene, Quartermaster of *The Nine Sails*." He pushed out his chin proudly. "We need supplies, especially fresh food. What've you got hidden on that cart, boy?"

"I'm not a . . ." Kintana hesitated to correct him. She needed a sale.

"Somethin' bothering you?" Gangrene asked, breathing a repulsive stench over her.

She grimaced. "No, sir."

"Huh." The pirate lifted the lamba and peered inside the cages.

"I'm selling pets."

"I can see that." He grunted. "We've got all the pets we need, too many in fact."

"Don't you like animals?"

"Did I say that?" he scowled, "No, I just mean they need a lot of lookin' after – they're not all as well behaved as my Snuffles." The man opened his waistcoat to reveal a small rodent. It had short grey fur, long pink ears and a pink, ribbed tail like a worm.

"A baby votsotsa!" she exclaimed.

"He's not a votswhatsnot, he's a Giant Jumpin' Rat," said Gangrene, rolling his eyes.

"Oh, we have a different name for them here," Kintana smiled. "He's adorable."

Gangrene's face softened. "Isn't he? I found him abandoned, poor mite." The pirate kissed his pet on the top of its head, "You love your daddy, don't you, Snuffles?"

Poor Snuffles, the sight of that kiss made Kintana feel quite queasy.

"What about a lovely chameleon?" she asked, hopefully. "You won't even notice it on board!" she joked. "Get it? Chameleons blend in with their surroundings . . ."

"I *told* you, we don't need more blinkin' animals. We're only here to quickly restock, repair and recruit. Captain Tortuga has heard a big merchant ship is heading this way and he means to attack within days. I need crew not creatures."

Kintana grabbed his arm. "I'm a pirate! Hire me!"

"*You?*" Gangrene scoffed. He stroked Snuffles's head.

"I am!"

"Hmm . . . I bet you'd faint at the sight of a nosebleed. You're too scrawny and weak to be of much use. What's your name?"

"Kintana."

"What kind of a name is that?"

"It's Malagasy. It means star." Her cheeks flushed.

"Well, Kintana," he leaned forward and scanned her from head to toe. "You fancy yourself as a cabin boy, do you?"

Kintana couldn't look at his face. The quartermaster wouldn't give her a job if he knew she was a girl. Some pirates thought women were bad luck on ships, even though there had been female buccaneers like Mary Read and Anne Bonny.

"I'm good at lots of things," Kintana insisted. "I am very organised; I prepare the animals' food and water, I clean their cages and treat them if they get sick."

"Really? Perhaps there is a job suitable for you." Gangrene spat on the floor; a big, green lump of phlegm just missing Kintana's shoes. "Well pirates aren't very different to animals. As cabin boy you would assist the cook, run errands for the captain. Scrub decks, mend sails . . . and I suppose you could assist with the captain's collection."

Kintana's eyes widened as big as a mouse lemur's. "Yes, sir!"

Gangrene wiped his nose on his sleeve. "You're hired. Get your belongings . . . be here at dawn, we set sail tomorrow."