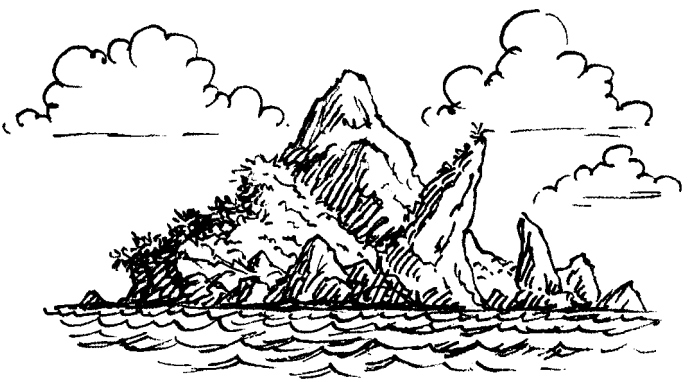
SAM SILVER: UNDERCOVER PIRATE

Skeleton Island



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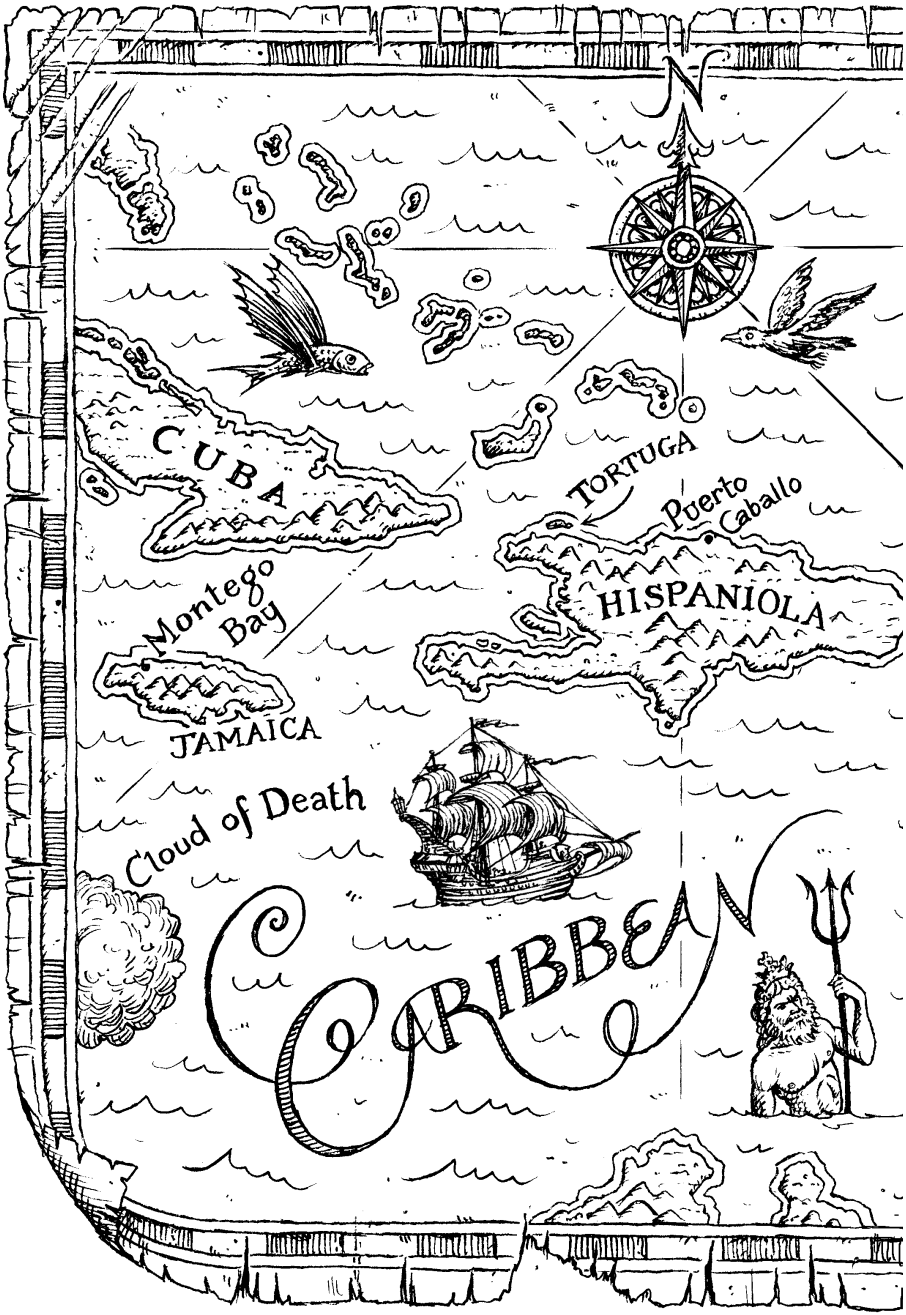
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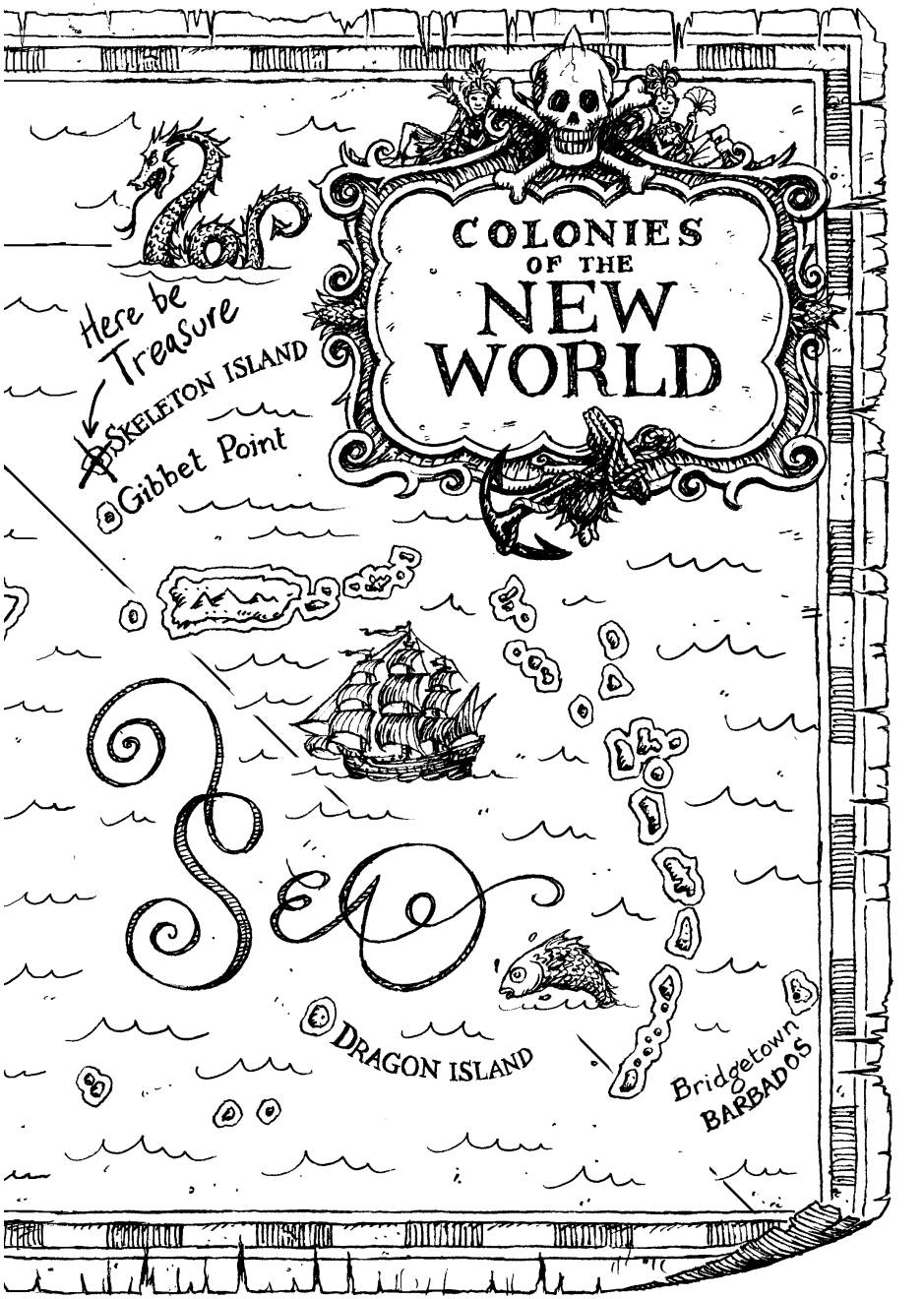
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For Thomas Vogler.
With love from your mothers.




N
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Cloud of Death
CARIBBEAN


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OF THE
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Here be
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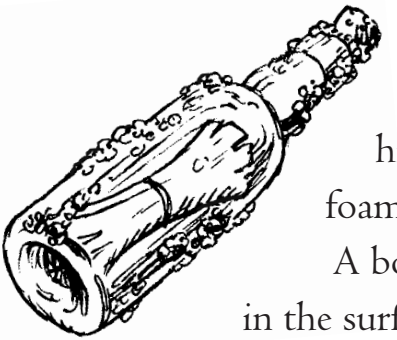
Chapter One



Sam Silver raced across the empty beach, football at his feet. He dodged a pile of seaweed, swerved round a sandcastle and blasted the ball at the cliff.

"Goal!" he shouted. "Sam Silver wins the World Cup – again!"

He ran through the waves, saluting his imaginary fans. *Clunk!* His foot caught



on something hard, sending him sprawling in the foam.

A bottle was bobbing in the surf. As Sam scrambled to his feet it rolled back towards him, spun a couple of times and lodged itself between his trainers. He pushed his wet hair out of his eyes and picked it up. It was green and sand-pitted with a blackened cork.

"Cool!" he said. "I've never seen a bottle like this. It's perfect for my collection."

Sam's treasure collection was the best in Backwater Bay – at least he thought so. His bedroom shelf was heaving with wonderful finds from the beach. He had a razor shell as long as his arm, a gnarly stone that could be a sailor's finger bone, and a gold ring that must have come

from some sunken Viking hoard. His most prized possession was a pirate's peg leg. Dad said it was probably from an old table dumped in the sea, but Sam knew it had belonged to a swashbuckling buccaneer.

"That'll be a message from a castaway!" exclaimed Sam.

The cork was stuck fast. There was only one thing for it. He'd dash home, force the cork out, read the message and phone the coastguard to rescue the stranded sailor.

He bounded up the stone steps to the high street and sprinted along to his parents' shop – The Jolly Cod, Best Fish and Chips in Backwater Bay. The warm smell of cooking oil wafted into the street as he flung open the door.

Ducking under the hatch in the counter he came face to face with a tray of fish

fillets. His mum was glaring down at him over the top.

"Why are you soaking wet?" she demanded. "And what's that? Not another find for your collection."

"It's a bottle with a message from a castaway on a desert island," Sam panted. "He needs rescuing."

"No one sends messages in bottles any more," said his mum, grinning. "Now get out of those wet jeans and T-shirt."

Sam sped upstairs. He didn't have time to change. Every second counted. He prodded the cork with a paperclip but the cork didn't move. He tried levering it out with a pencil but the lead snapped.

He needed something stronger. He found his mum's nail file and dug the pointed end into the cork, twisting with all his strength.

Pop! The cork flew out. Sam knew his mum wouldn't be pleased about her nail file, which was now bent, but she'd forget about it when he was on the cover of the *Backwater Bay Gazette* for saving someone's life. And his friends would be dead impressed.

He stuck his finger into the bottle neck. A thin scroll of crinkly brown paper appeared. He unrolled it, excitement bubbling in his stomach.
The writing was faint and difficult to make out.

The year of our Lord 1705

"1705!" Sam exclaimed. "That's more than three hundred years ago. It's a bit late for a coastguard rescue."

He read on.

I am shipwrecked alone on this island. I will soon be dead of a mortal fever so I must write of what I have found.

Treasure! It is no good to me now but I want my kin, my own family, to have it.

I know not where this cursed island lies. We had sailed two full days east from Tortuga when we were blown well off course by a tempest. We were wrecked on a rock that looked like a giant shark fin rising from the waves.

You will find a gold coin in the bottle. This doubloon is from the treasure and I swear a pirate's oath on it that what I write is true. It will lead you to the riches if you use your wits.

I charge the sea to deliver this letter to my kin and none else.

Joseph Silver, Captain of the Sea Wolf

Sam gawped at the letter. The writer was a real live pirate – well, he'd been alive three centuries ago. And he had the same surname as Sam! Captain Joseph Silver had told the sea to deliver the bottle to a member of his family and it had delivered it to him, Sam Silver.

"I've got pirate blood in my veins!" he gasped in delight. "Avast there, you scurvy knave!" Sam stashed the letter in his pocket and struck a fierce pirate pose at his reflection in the mirror. "No one dares fight Sam Silver, greatest buccaneer that ever lived."

"Sam!" It was his mum from downstairs in the shop. "I need help on the till."

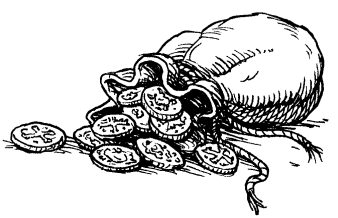
"Coming." Sam made for the door, then stopped. The letter had mentioned a gold doubloon. He shook the bottle and a piece of dirty cloth fell out. Inside was a dull brown coin. It didn't look like gold. He spat on it and gave it a quick rub on his sleeve.

All at once his bedroom walls began to spin! Sam tried to grab hold of his bed



but he was lifted off his feet. His telly and wardrobe were whirling with him. He felt as if he was being sucked up by a giant vacuum cleaner. Sam shut his eyes as he spun round and round.

Suddenly everything stopped and he landed with a bump. He opened his eyes. He was pleased to see that the walls had stopped spinning. Then he realised they weren't his walls. His bedroom had completely disappeared!



Chapter Two



Sam found himself in a small dark room, lit only by a lantern swinging from the ceiling. The air was hot and stifling. There was a thick column like a tree trunk in the centre of the room and coiled ropes everywhere. It looked as if he'd landed in a cupboard – but the floor was rocking!

"Where am I?" he mumbled dizzily.

He stared at the coin in his hand.

Everything had gone weird after he'd given it a rub. He thought about his mum. She'd be wondering why he hadn't come to help her.

The door burst open and a boy strode in. He wore a tattered waistcoat and dirty knee-length trousers and his feet were bare. He was a bit older than Sam with long hair that was wild and curly. A bright bandana kept it out of his eyes. In an instant he'd grabbed Sam and pushed him against the wall, his dark eyes glaring at him suspiciously.

"Who are you?" he growled. He spoke with a foreign accent.

"I'm Sam," said Sam. "You're not going to believe this but I was in my bedroom, Mum was yelling from the fish and chip shop, and my telly and everything started . . ."

"Fish and chip shop? Telly? What mad talk is this?"

"Fernando!" came a shout. "We're waiting for that rope."

"Aye, aye!" the boy called back. He waved a dagger in Sam's face. "You're coming with me. Do not think of escaping for I can throw this blade quicker than you can blink."

He swung a coil of rope on to his shoulder and pushed Sam up a narrow staircase.

Sam stumbled out onto a wooden deck, blinking in the bright sunlight. He could see barrels and rigging and rows of cannon and the deep blue sea beyond. He was on a ship! And one thing was certain. He wasn't in Backwater Bay. The weather was far too hot and there was no land in sight. The ship looked splintered and battered as if it had been in a fight. Men, dressed like the boy behind him, were busy on the long, narrow deck, mending sails, sawing wood and painting things with tar. Three towering masts, their sails billowing, rose above him. A flag fluttered in the wind from the highest mast. It was black, with

a picture of what looked like a snarling dog's head over a pair of crossed bones. Sam knew a pirate flag when he saw one!

"Captain Blade!" yelled Fernando, his dagger still pressed into Sam's back. "I found this boy below."

A tall man strode up to them. He wasn't dressed like the others. His long coat had deep cuffs and shiny brass buttons. His hair and beard were braided with threads, and on his finger a ring with a blood red stone glinted fiercely. Leather belts bristling with guns and knives lay diagonally across his chest.

"By the stars, a stowaway!" he declared, his hand on the hilt of a vicious-looking cutlass. His voice was deep and commanding. "How did you slip on board, boy?"

"I have no idea," said Sam, bewildered. "I just found myself in your cupboard. Hang on, is this a TV programme? Where are the hidden cameras?"

"He keeps gabbling nonsense, Captain," said Fernando, pushing Sam forwards. "He's pretending he doesn't know how he got here but I'm not fooled. His clothes are wet. He swam."

More pirates were gathering round. A short, stout man stomped up, his wooden leg thumping on the deck. He pulled at Sam's T-shirt with its picture of a Formula One racing car, and peered at his jeans and trainers. "Stap me! They be strange clothes."

"Not as strange as yours!" laughed Sam.

"Maybe he's a spy for the governor," sneered Fernando.

"Or a thief," called a gruff voice.

"Throw him overboard," shouted the short, stout man.

"That's right, Mr Hopp!" said Fernando. The crew pressed forwards. To Sam's horror, he suddenly found himself bundled onto the rail and staring down at



the deep water below. This joke wasn't so funny any more.

"Avast!" barked Captain Blade. "We'll hear his story first."

"Aye, Captain," said Harry Hopp, with a nasty grin. "The sharks won't mind waiting."

"Look," said Sam. "I don't know what's going on here. I'm Sam Silver and—"

He was interrupted by a gasp from the crew.

"Set him free!" ordered the captain.

Sam was pulled down onto the deck. Harry Hopp patted him on the back.

"He must be Joseph Silver's kin," someone whispered. "A grandson perhaps."

"Joseph Silver was the finest pirate in the Caribbean," added another. "We can't harm one of his family."

"Why are you here, Sam Silver?" asked the captain.

"I know why the lad's come to us," said Harry Hopp. "Stands to reason. Our ship's named the *Sea Wolf* now we've got Silver's figurehead. We didn't steal it though," he said quickly to Sam. "We found it in the sea after his ship was lost last year."

"Last year?" exclaimed Sam. "Don't you mean three hundred . . ." He stopped. The amazing truth had begun to dawn.

"What year is it?" he asked slowly.

"The year of our Lord 1706, of course," said Captain Blade. He looked hard at

Sam. "Are you ailing, lad? You've gone green around the gills."-

Sam had to think this out. His ancestor's letter had said the gold coin would lead him to the treasure. When he'd rubbed it he'd landed on a ship with men that talked like pirates, dressed like pirates and acted like pirates. Clearly he'd travelled back in time to a real pirate ship three hundred years in the past. No wonder they thought he was so strange!

The crew were looking at him as if they were waiting for him to do something. The letter had told him he must use his wits – that meant his brain.

"Joseph Silver, my ancestor . . ."

"Your grandfather, you mean," said Harry Hopp.

"Er . . . yes, that's right, my grandfather," said Sam quickly. After all, Joseph Silver *was* his grandfather in a way – there were just lots of 'greats' in between. "He sent me a message

when he was dying." He dug in his pocket for the letter and thrust it out towards the captain. "There's a pile of gold on an island with a shark fin rock. I'm here to find it."

Captain Blade snatched the crumpled brown paper.

"What's it say, Captain?" called the crew eagerly.

"The boy's right," Blade told them. "Silver came upon a great treasure hoard."

"Well, I'll dance a jig on the bowsprit!" exclaimed a large pirate with a jolly face. "We could get more weapons if we had gold."

"True, Ned," said another. "Blackheart and his scurvy crew took nearly everything we had in that last fight."

"But we're still alive, aren't we, lads?" cried Ned, and the crew gave a ragged cheer. "Though Blackheart wants us dead and the ship sunk."

"We won't be going after this gold," announced Captain Blade firmly.

"But we always go after treasure, Captain!" exclaimed Harry Hopp as the crew shouted angrily.

Boom! Blade held a smoking gun in the air. The pirates fell silent. "Joseph Silver writes that the treasure should go to his kin and that's Sam here. We'll not go against his last wish."

"We can share the treasure," said Sam. "I'm sure that's what my . . . grandfather would have wanted."

"Don't trust him, Captain," cried Fernando.





Sam quickly showed them his coin. "Joseph Silver sent me this from the hoard."

Harry Hopp gasped. "'Tis a Double Eagle doubloon. Pure gold."

"I swear a pirate's oath on this coin," Sam said, feeling like a proper pirate. "I'm Silver's kin and I'll share his treasure with you all."

The crew cheered, huge grins splitting their grimy faces.

"Agreed," Captain Blade shook his hand. "Welcome aboard the *Sea Wolf*, Sam Silver."

"To Shark Fin Rock!" cried Sam, punching the air as the crew cheered again.

"There be only one problem," said Harry Hopp, scratching his bald head. "We've never heard of Shark Fin Rock!"

