

disobeyed at their own peril. They came to call me *Rahnekallja*, meaning the "Man of Cold Iron" in the Jankan tongue, for the stern, unrelenting way in which I ruled them. I joined in none of their boisterous, drunken revelries, sang no songs to while away the tedium of sea voyaging, partook of none of their games of chance or skill. Well I knew that to hold outlaws of their sort in line they could not simply be led, but needed to be dominated. A hint of weakness on my part would plant a tiny seed of doubt in the recesses of their hearts, which any festering envy, hate, ambition, or outright malice would feed and nurture into full-grown betrayal, if not total mutiny. As I said, I understood them. None dared raise a hand against me, knowing it would be sheared off should they try. In this way I captained the vessel and our coffers ran full.

But my spirit was always restless—always searching, hunting for something; an illusive desire or thought just beyond my ability to recognize and put a name to. Thus I preferred to be upon the sea, following after one course or another, one prize and then the next, in hope that there would come a day when I would find that for which my soul yearned but kept secret from even my own mind.

A CITY OF UNSURPASSED MAGNIFICENCE

"You know of the city Alikornophis, do you not?" she asked.

Great, immortal Alikornophis, whose walls had withstood siege for five centuries, whose harbors had not felt the breach of invasion in well over a millennium. Beautiful Alikornophis of the ancient spires. Sovereign Alikornophis of the Sapphire Throne. Hallowed Alikornophis of the Fifty Temples. Her grandeur had shone as a living monument to the heights of majesty that human hands laboring in union over years and centuries could accomplish.

"Of course," I affirmed with a nod. "It's regarded as the greatest city of the Twin Seas. It has stood for perhaps eleven hundred years, to the best reckoning of any man or woman, and has been unconquered for at least the last half a thousand years.

"Some say 'tis favored of the gods. But I've heard others claim that the wealth and might of the city itself is due to some purity of spirit that