



***THE
BAHAWRE
LEGEND***

CHRIS MEYERS

AUTHOR NAME

The Bahawre Legend

Chris Meyers

Copyright © 2017 Chris Meyers

All rights reserved. No portion of this work can be reproduced either in written or electronic form without the express permission of the author.

Full book can be found at: <http://a.co/4HsvoaN>

The Bahawre Legend ISBN: 1542966264
ISBN-13: 978-1542966269

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people deserve thanks for this book.

R. J. Thesman – for coaching, editing and helping me believe in my own art.

My wife, Becky – for setting aside money we didn't have so I could pursue my wild ideas, and for encouraging me every step of the way.

My family (parents, kids) – for reading, re-reading and being left so frequently to wonder what happens next. Thanks for offering encouragement and catching my mistakes.

My extended family and friends – for getting excited about a book (or at least pretending) with no idea what kind of writer I was.

Most of all, thanks to God for his gifts and patience with me.



PRONUNCIATION

Aeo – **ee** oh

Bahawre – ba **ha** ree

Boman – **bo** man (like a bowman)

Eyric – **eye** rick

Onor – **oh** nor

Tyriel – **tee** ree el

Zille – zeel (like zeal)

PROLOGUE

Unknown Island, 600 years ago

Caedmon hated the jungle.

It was not the first time he had seen a jungle, nor was it the first time he hated one, but he hated this particular jungle more than any other.

The suffocating heat and humidity made him feel trapped in his own skin. His stomach growled and he groaned yet again. This was ridiculous. He shouldn't be here.

The plants were wrong. The colors seemed backwards, like the plant he was currently hacking his way through whose large, peach-colored leaves grew in clumps like tall grasses with wide blades. Some grasses bore spherical, semi-transparent fruit about the size of his fist, while others just stood proudly in his way.

The other plants he had seen thus far followed in a similar vein; wrong and in his way.

Caedmon stopped to look around, nearly losing his balance for what seemed like the hundredth time. Something was wrong with the ground. Somewhere on the spongy side of solid, it provided much needed comfort to his feet, but it made him wonder about his sobriety. Did he lose some blood?

Squish. He looked down to see a greenish yellow puddle nearly the size of his boot. Probably used to be a beetle. A huge one.

Something squawked. He turned his head to see a green crow-sized bird that sat several paces beyond the reach of his machete. Its wings seemed far too small for flight, though he had seen one fly earlier. It peered at him with its front facing eyes in a way that made him wonder if it was planning its next meal.

He sighed. He really shouldn't even be in this situation. He should have been sailing aboard the Bahawre with his portion of the treasure on his way home to spend it. On his way to prove to his father that he hadn't run off on a fool's errand.

That dream sailed away when his infamous captain decided to brave uncharted waters in an attempt to get

home in a hurry. He remembered the wee hours of the morning when the ship slammed into the rocks after being forced to turn away from unnatural forces. He shuddered as he remembered what appeared to be sentient waterspouts.

“Infamously stupid,” Caedmon cursed his captain as he hacked at another plant clump he couldn’t identify.

“What’s that?” came the familiar voice of Barbad, who was just off to his right, hacking at plants in a much calmer, more methodical way.

“Oh, I’m just mad we’re here. Why couldn’t the captain sail the normal route? Why are we hacking our way up this hill to make the same stupid attempt to light a fire with the same plants that won’t catch fire on the beach?”

“Because he’s infamously stupid.”

“Ha. Ha. I’m laughing.”

Barbad didn’t laugh either. Instead, he smirked. “If you waste all your energy being mad, you’ll have nothing left for whatever is at the top of the hill.” Then he nodded toward Caedmon’s left. “Besides, you don’t want to be like him do you?”

Caedmon followed Barbad’s gaze to where Rolf stood, haphazardly hacking at foliage. He had started whining again. “When’s the last time someone

sharpened this thing? It won't cut anything!" This was followed by an arcing swing that barely nicked its intended target and nearly knocked Rolf over.

Caedmon laughed. Rolf was a strange character. While Barbad's wizened old face and leathery appearance exuded a sense of all-knowing, been-there-done-that patience in any circumstance, Rolf was the flip side of that coin. Always reactionary and rarely satisfied, Caedmon could always count on him to complain in nearly any circumstance - even when things went his way.

After listening to Rolf's latest rant, Caedmon teased. "You're not too hot, are you?" He took a few more whacks at the plants in his way.

Rolf replied expectedly. "What do you think? Look where we are. I hate this place!"

"At least we're not on cargo duty," Barbad pointed out as he turned to look down the hill at the beach.

Caedmon and Rolf stopped swinging their machetes long enough to turn and look down the hill at the miserable souls who were stuck unloading cargo from the heavily damaged ship.

As Caedmon watched the endless stream of sailors going in and out of the ship to deposit their treasure in piles on

the beach, he shook his head in disapproval. Of course Milo thought saving the cargo was more important than lighting a fire. What would anyone do with treasure here? Maybe shove it down Milo's throat.

Sitting uselessly in ever-growing piles on the beach, the mass of gleaming jewels and gold forced him to squint a bit. This cargo would be of legendary value back home. Home. Rescue. He sighed as he pondered returning to his task.

Then he caught sight of the bodies lined up along the far end of the beach; just a portion of the dead, really. The others were at the bottom of the sea or in some creature's belly.

His gaze turned next to the injured sailors who had been gathered under a makeshift tent made from the sails. Bandages and splints now adorned the gashes and broken limbs caused by the early morning catastrophe. Yeah, it could be worse.

The infamously stupid Milo sat among the wounded barking orders and making a general nuisance of himself. A loathsome, sad excuse for a man, the crew only tolerated him because of his wicked skill with a sword and his immense wealth and connections. Injured today, he was clearly in too much pain to

do any of the work.

Caedmon knew all too well how much louder and crankier the captain would be as a result. Even from his distance up the hill, he could hear him barking obvious or redundant orders at the crew who usually replied with some form of "I'm already doing it!"

He shook his head. At least he had managed to avoid that mess. Time to get a fire going. Without a fire, there was no hope of rescue, and even with a fire, hope would be slim at best. It had already been several hours since the wreck. If they could get a fire going, then maybe the other ships might still be close enough to see it. If the waterspouts didn't get them too. If they weren't too afraid to turn back and help.

He couldn't help but look around as he resumed his work. Even though this island was nowhere near where he wanted to be, it was easily the most beautiful place he had ever seen. Facing away from the shipwreck and the growing pile of cargo on the beach awaited a scene of stunning beauty. Lush, multi-colored vegetation as far as the eye could see coupled with a warm, moist breeze in a nearly cloudless sky comprised all the elements of paradise.

The scene was a surreal blend of colors compared to the other lands he had

visited. Not all the plants had green leaves. In fact, over half of them ranged somewhere between dark red and orange. Many of them produced flowers and fruit of so many varying colors and shapes he could have spent hours just taking in all the new and unique sights.

One particularly common plant on the island had wide, man-sized, peach-colored leaves. Each of them was tipped with a dainty, thin-petaled flower which varied from variegated blue/orange to bright yellow. He bent over to smell one and wrinkled his nose. Some things don't smell as beautiful as they look.

Just beyond it was an example of the most common tree on the island. It was the size and shape of a palm tree, but with large, dark-red leaves and yellow fruit about the size of a coconut. Its light green, bark-less trunk grew to about the diameter of the ship's main mast.

But this only reminded him of the task at hand, and that the most common tree on the island presented a serious problem. Caedmon hadn't found many dead ones, and cutting down the live ones had rendered non-combustible branches.

He scowled. In his mind, he had attributed the feeble efforts from the early morning to simple exhaustion from the shipwreck. But now his expectation of

encountering the same plants at the top of the hill was beginning to weigh on him. He didn't expect his luck to improve much.

Choosing to ignore his own predictions for now, Caedmon decided to focus on his orders and resumed hacking a path up the hill. Regardless what he thought, they had to at least try.

Suddenly, from the top of the hill, the trees and brush moved. It was a quick, subtle movement, and although he could see tiny glimpses of dark blue within the foliage, he couldn't make out who or what was there. He glanced at Barbad and Rolf, who also wore surprised expressions, peering ahead into the thick foliage.

But there wasn't enough time for conversation, for only a few seconds after he saw movement, a burst of flame came surging down the slope, burning up everything in its path and stopping a scant few paces in front of Caedmon, who was the farthest up the hill.

His mind and body were suddenly out of sync. His body fled in terror. His mind tried to explain to him the futility of his action, since it was not until the flame had ceased that he had actually started fleeing. But by the time he had worked this all out, he was already down the hill, as were Barbad and Rolf.

Last to arrive at the bottom of the hill, Caedmon ducked behind a group of large boulders near the base of the slope and joined the other two. As they attempted to catch their breath, several of the other crew members ran to meet them. All of them were silent for an uncomfortably long moment before someone finally asked the obvious in an appropriately exclamatory manner. "What was that?!"

Silence followed yet again as breathing took time to slow to a normal rate before the crew began debating what had just happened.

"They've got a fire-breathing apparatus!" shouted one of the stranger crew members.

"Yes, a fire weapon!" corrected another.

"It's the One punishing us for our greed!" claimed the religious one. Caedmon was unable to suppress a half-smile while a few crew members laughed. He knew firsthand this was not the most savory crew, nor had they acquired their cargo as legitimately as they usually claimed. Not piracy, as such; just coercion and unfair deals.

"It's a dragon!" claimed yet another, who was smacked by at least three of the men closest to him.

Not long into their debate, Caedmon noticed the result of the flame and

started back toward the hill. "Look," he said, pointing at the burnt chunk of jungle. "Whoever it was, they helped us out." Hesitantly continuing toward the hill, he spoke again. "See?" He pointed to the spot where they had been. "It stopped just before it got to us. We only have a few whacks left and we can reach the top."

The others seemed skeptical. "Are you crazy?" Several voices rang out in near unison.

Caedmon shook his head. "The flame stopped before it got to where we were. If they were trying to kill us, they would have. I think whoever is up there is helping us. I'm not sure why they're helping us, but it sure seems to me they are."

He looked around at the incredulous looks on their faces. "It's this or stay on the beach for the rest of our lives. With the kind of weapon they have, we don't stand a chance against them anyway. Besides, we need someone to start a fire for us. We've had no luck."

Not waiting to hear further argument, he turned and started back up the slope.

"Hold up," came Barbad's voice from within the now murmuring crowd. He stepped away from the others and moved quickly after Caedmon. "I'm coming with you."

Caedmon paused.

Once Barbad had come closer, he winked as he said in a low voice, "I swear, I'm getting too old for this, but I'll lose my reputation if I let you do something crazier than me!"

Caedmon laughed. "Yeah, I guess they all think we're a bit crazy anyway. Why disappoint them?" He glanced back at the others, knowing they fully expected another burst of flame to finish the job.

"What do you suppose that was?" Caedmon asked as they started up the remaining stretch toward the top of the hill, now wondering if the others might be right.

"I have plenty of ideas," Barbad replied mysteriously, "but I don't like guessing. Let's just find out and get it over with."

Instinctively, Caedmon adjusted his grip on his machete as he imagined what he might encounter.

But Barbad's voice interrupted his preparations. "Put your machete away, son. It won't do you any good against the natives up there, and it might make you look hostile."

Caedmon hesitated, taking a hard look at his one remaining piece of protection. Wouldn't he need a weapon? But he reluctantly sheathed it after seeing Barbad do the same thing.

“Okay,” he said, then peeked through the burnt edges of the remaining foliage. Nothing sinister seemed in their way, and just as he was considering taking the next step, he felt Barbad’s strong hand on his back.

Barbad’s firm shove forced him through the remnants of jungle into the charred remains. “We don’t have all day.”

Cautiously, he took a few steps into the blackened and still-steaming hill, followed directly by Barbad. He felt a little relief as he realized it would be a much easier climb with most of the vegetation burnt up.

Neither of them spoke as they navigated the black, unsteady ground. In fact, this was the quietest they had been thus far, every sight and sound bringing a questioning glance or a raised brow. They paused a few times, and when they were finally about to take those last few steps to the top, they stopped and looked at each other again.

It’s funny how the simplest of things can take an eternity, but sometimes a little hesitation occurs when one is about to risk his life on a guess.

Caedmon was sweating even more than previously as he anticipated his next steps. He nodded at Barbad, who nodded back. After a deep breath, Caedmon watched Barbad step through the

vegetation near the top of the hill.

He followed, and before he had a chance to see for himself, he saw Barbad's stance relax. Instead of a hilltop, he found himself in a small, flat clearing with yet another hilltop beyond. Feeling both relief and disappointment, he shook his head.

Having expected his next step to be the moment of truth, experiencing the opposite was all at once disappointing, relieving and maddening. He took a few deep breaths and looked at Barbad expectantly.

Barbad mirrored Caedmon. They had one of those silent conversations, mentor and protégé, each of them known for pushing limits, each deciding there was no other choice. Still, Caedmon wondered if this would be the time they pushed too far.

Shrugging in unison, they started up the new hill. Even though this stretch hadn't burned, it was fairly easy terrain with only sparse vegetation. As they neared the top, Caedmon could see it was completely exposed. He frowned. He didn't like being exposed. Of course, the natives were probably already watching, so what was the point of worrying? And since Barbad didn't seem to be slowing down, he pressed on without a word.

As they reached the top

Nothing.

Well, something, but no dangerous or hostile natives. Only a rocky hilltop almost completely exposed to the elements except for a large cluster of dense palm-ish trees near the top of the opposite slope.

After a moment spent carefully scanning the area, Barbad shrugged. Caedmon shrugged back, then set about gathering anything woody he could find along with kindling. Might as well do something. It was anyone's guess when the fire-wielding inhabitants of the island would return, and their only chance of rescue was to get the attention of any lingering ships nearby.

As was the case earlier, there was naught but green wood, and the only dry kindling he came across appeared to be the same sort of plants he had found on the beach. He and Barbad stacked the wood and kindling anyway, finding a few sticks that might be appropriate for sparking a flame.

Although he had never failed to light a fire before (sometimes, he tended to light them when he shouldn't), the plant life on the island was different in many ways. Not only was it difficult to find woody pieces, the kindling didn't want to kindle, which made the term a bit of a contradiction.

“You start on that side and I’ll try over here,” Barbad instructed. “Hopefully one of us can get a flame going and we can use it to light the rest.”

Caedmon nodded and began trying to light the two driest looking sticks.

Apparently, someone found this situation quite amusing, as a low-pitched chuckle emanated from within the cluster of trees. It was the deep, airy laughter one would expect from a very large man.

Instinctively, Caedmon dove behind the pile of sticks he had been trying to light. He felt cowardly until he noticed Barbad had done the same.

“Who’s there?” Barbad finally asked after an awkward pause, bringing yet another chuckle from the voice within the trees.

Caedmon looked to Barbad for direction, who glanced at his machete, which made Caedmon do the same. But both machetes remained sheathed after the obvious futility set in. Barbad gave Caedmon a shushing gesture and mouthed the word, “Wait”. Caedmon started to speak, stopped the words in his throat as the mysterious voice finally replied.

“Friend or foe. Whichever you prefer,” the deep, airy voice offered. “I am the master of this island and you are trespassing. I see you are apparently

shipwrecked pirates, and your captain seems to be the greediest one I've seen. From whence do you come?"

Caedmon and Barbad exchanged glances. Not only was the native's voice heavily accented, similar to the accent of the Far Islands, but there also seemed to be a bit of a speech impediment. The "s" and "f" sounds seemed to consume more air than they should, as if his teeth were too far apart. Not to mention, he used the archaic word "whence".

Both men hesitated.

"Speak now or we will be forced to destroy you." The voice did not give them time to contemplate anything.

"We're not pirates," Caedmon blurted out. "We're merchants from Zille."

"Ah, merchants," the voice replied as Barbad shot Caedmon a rebuking glance. "Same thing as far as I'm concerned. And now I suppose you want to light a fire to catch the attention of the other ships and be rescued?"

Caedmon kept his thoughts to himself this time, not wanting another rebuke from Barbad, so it was the latter who replied. "That was our intention, yes. But this wood refuses to light."

Yet another chuckle came from the voice within the trees. "Yes, I noticed. And you shall be needing a fire tonight, but not for the reasons you think. No ship

will be coming within any reasonable distance to see your fire. All that try will meet the same fate as you. Indeed, two of your other ships sank in their attempt to find you. The others have already given up the search.”

This came as quite a blow. Their whole purpose in climbing the hill was to light a beacon in the hope of rescue. Caedmon’s mind was now racing for any possible hope, though finding it difficult not to focus on the mysterious voice.

“How do you know this? And who are you?” Barbad asked, then added quickly, “Although I’ve only heard one voice so far. Are you one or many?”

Suddenly the trees began rustling all around them as the voice spoke yet again, “I have more with me than you are capable of dealing with, sir. I would suggest you find a way to appeal to my pity rather than my anger. We are the native inhabitants of this island and we keep it safe from foreigners and pirates such as yourselves.”

“Sir,” Caedmon took his turn to speak, “we mean you no harm nor insult. We are merely trying to get ourselves rescued. Please do not harm us. Tell us what we need to do and we will do it.”

Barbad frowned, but gave no indication of a rebuke.

“Rescue is out of the question,” their

deep-voiced host replied. "At least the kind of rescue you're seeking." This did not sound like a threat, surprisingly, but more a general statement of fact. "None can come close because of the currents, whirlpools and fog banks. And none have ever set foot on this island besides you. But enough talk. You have enough to think about already. I suggest you inform the rest of your crew that unless they come up to higher ground they will die. And do not try to bring the treasure. It is of no use here and will only be a hindrance."

"Why did you help us?" Caedmon couldn't restrain himself from asking.

"Watching you was getting exhausting," replied the voice. "We simply do not have all day to wait on you."

Caedmon looked offended and Barbad chuckled.

The voice continued. "In the meantime, we'll help you with your fire if you would be so kind as to step away from the wood pile."

The "pirates" glanced at each other, and although the words had not yet struck fertile soil in Caedmon's mind, he saw the alarm on Barbad's face, who had already scrambled to his feet. Caedmon did the same, and they both managed to bumble a safe distance away from the

pile of wood.

“And no more questions,” the voice added. “We will speak again tomorrow.”

The trees rustled again, then a strange hissing sound preceded a burst of flame that lit the pile of wood, turning it into a large, warm fire that quickly settled to a hot glow and then a sort of invisible heat. Certainly, it made a terrible beacon, and the warmth it provided was stifling in the late afternoon heat, though the voice promised they would be wanting it by nightfall.

As Caedmon and Barbad started back down the hill, they exchanged a knowing glance. Their story was not going to sit well with everyone else, especially not the captain. And Caedmon was hoping Barbad would volunteer to be spokesman.

“How are we going to tell the others about this?” he finally asked the obvious. “I don’t see them believing us and I don’t see Milo taking kindly to anyone else giving orders.”

Barbad chuckled and shook his head. “Oh, he’s going to be very put out, to say the least. But I won’t let that stop me. I’m going to do what these ...” He paused and glanced back up the hill. “... people told us to do. Until we know what this weapon of theirs is, we have no choice.”

As they reached the bottom of the hill

and came to where the others had been hiding, they were immediately bombarded with questions. "Where's the fire? Who was up there? What was up there?"

Most of these questions were posed by their tyrannical captain, who had finally managed to limp over to the large boulders everyone else was hiding behind. He would not be satisfied with anything less than every detail. Barbad calmly answered all of Milo's questions, adding detail where it was demanded.

However, Milo eventually turned his attention to Caedmon and asked, "Well, what happened next? Let's hear from the lad now." Of course, this was nearly the end, which left the most interesting news for a reluctant Caedmon to tell. He just shook his head and looked carefully at the expectant faces of the others before turning to the captain. "They have a rather interesting demand."

The results were amazingly predictable.

"They demand!?" Milo was incredulous, shaking his head and nearly foaming at the mouth. "Just because they have some sort of flaming weapon doesn't mean they can start making demands. I only saw one flame. That may work against three men when they're surprised, but not against the whole

crew. They can't demand anything."

"And how many of them do you suppose there are?" Barbad cut in.

"Not enough to take us," Milo seemed to have anticipated the question.

"How could you possibly know?" Barbad was also ready with a response. "And how do you know they didn't have something to do with the waterspouts that drove us here? You don't."

"Well we're not giving up this treasure and we're not giving up getting ourselves rescued." Milo limped toward Barbad. "Are you suggesting we allow ourselves to be imprisoned by these ... these ..."

"People?" Caedmon suggested helpfully.

The captain glowered at him, but spoke to Barbad. "We fight or we die. We don't cave to island natives without a fight."

"I'd rather live to fight another day," Barbad replied. "We know nothing about this place or what we've gotten ourselves into with our haste."

Caedmon smirked, as did several of the other crew members. Some of the chucklers immediately tried to hide behind other crew members.

The infamous Captain Milo turned his infamous shade of red and the crew began to back away in anticipation of his temper.

However, Milo took a few deep breaths and looked around at his crew for a moment. "Fine," he said. "We don't have time to stand here arguing. We can resolve this tomorrow. The real crew of the Bahawre will stay on the beach tonight. We will finish removing our cargo from the ship and we will begin discussing how to get out of this hell hole."

Focusing his attention on Barbad and Caedmon, his eyes narrowed. "Everyone else can follow these two pansies to the top of the hill to cower before the greatness of the island natives. All who follow this path will be considered deserters. No, worse. You will be considered mutineers."

That got everyone's attention. Caedmon could tell immediately who was staying and who was going. Those who had decided to stay wore accusing scowls as they looked around for anyone who might be defying the captain's wishes. Those who wanted to hike up the hill were already on their way to stand behind Barbad and Caedmon.

Barbad glanced at a small group of people still sitting on the beach near the infirmary. "What about the passengers?"

Milo seemed briefly surprised by the question, but shook his head dismissively. "They're not part of the

crew. They're of no use to me here. If we find passage off this cursed place, they're welcome to come along if there's room. Just no mutineers."

Exchanging a nod with Barbad, Caedmon made his way over to the passengers to explain the situation.

"Now begone with you!" Milo scowled one last time at Barbad, then turned toward the remaining crew members. "We've got work to do and less hands to do it."

A barrage of shouts followed from those staying on the beach. Things like "Just trying to get out of doing the work!" and "Pansies!" and Caedmon's favorite "You forfeit your part of the treasure!"

In the end, a third of the crew decided to go with Caedmon and Barbad, though a few actually turned back at the mention of forfeiting their portion of the treasure. It was a short time before Caedmon managed to help the passengers gather whatever possessions remained and lead them over to the base of the hill to join the "mutineers".

Meanwhile, Barbad countered the crew's insults in his calm and steadfast manner, something Caedmon had always admired about him. "Pay no heed, people. You made the right choice. Only a fool feels compelled to hurl insults at decisions he doesn't understand."

Finally, the time came and the final call was made for any who might want to climb the hill. Barbad went to the front of the group and Caedmon to the rear.

Milo sneered and called out to the defectors, "If you come back tomorrow, I may show mercy and let you back into the crew. But only after Barbad and Caedmon are hanged for their mutiny."

"If you are still alive in the morning," Barbad called back, "we will plead your case to the natives of this island."

Caedmon chuckled, knowing full well what Milo's response would be even before he said it.

"You'll plead my case? Who do you think you are?" Milo fumed. "I should have you hanged now!"

"I wasn't talking to you," Barbad replied. "I was talking to the rest of the crew."

Turning to the group who decided to follow him, Barbad simply said, "Come on."

Ignoring Milo's ensuing tirade, Barbad led the people up the hill, never turning around to acknowledge the captain's threats.

Caedmon, however, paid closer attention and kept his hand on his machete as he stayed toward the back of the group to help the passengers and slower members of the group. Some of

them were wounded. He knew they would have a difficult time with the terrain.

It was a long day. Waiting, wondering if Milo would attack, wondering if the crew on the beach would really die. The suspense took its toll on Caedmon and the rest of the people at the top of the hill. At Barbad's direction, he tried to keep them busy gathering wood and collecting some of the edible-looking fruit.

As dusk approached, Caedmon nestled between a few trees and watched the people in Milo's camp finish their work and gather near the makeshift infirmary for the evening. Once he was satisfied they were settling in for the night, he returned to the fire where Barbad had gathered the others.

He found a comfortable enough spot propped against a tree and watched the people. They diverted themselves with small talk, trying to guess what sort of plant this or that was, wondering how the wood could produce heat with barely a glow.

A few others gathered farther away from the "fire" looking for familiar constellations in the darkening sky. Some of their conversation grabbed his attention.

"Something is wrong with the

constellations here," a short, thin man said as he pointed. "See? The Bear ought to be nearly straight up by this time."

"And where is the Platypus?" wondered a woman with a long brown braid. She pointed to the western sky. "It should be right there."

As several others also murmured their surprise at constellations they could or could not see, Caedmon and Barbad exchanged glances. Maybe this would keep the people distracted from whatever might be happening on the beach.

As the sun set fully and the first moon rose, it became rather cold, not as in winter where one might freeze to death, but cold enough to be uncomfortable without some cover. Caedmon was glad he was near the fire, and based on the facial expressions he could see, so was everyone else. As the fire provided warmth and a dim glow, it raised some concern for those still on the beach.

"They made their choice," Barbad said. "We can't force them to make the right one."

"He's right," Caedmon nodded. "Nobody will freeze to death tonight. I just hope the natives don't decide to attack them."

With a stern warning from their host not to venture near the beach and no

sign of where their mysterious host might be hiding, the hilltop mutineers had little choice but to agree with Caedmon and Barbad.

The crashing of the waves grew louder as the first moon rose to twice its height from the northern horizon and the second moon began to peek over the eastern horizon.

“I’ve never heard waves so loud!” The round-faced baker’s eyes were nearly as round as his face. Caedmon remembered talking to him about his bakery and the exotic grains he was seeking across the sea. He wondered if this man had ever heard waves on an island in the middle of the sea.

But as others voiced their agreement about the waves, Caedmon’s internal rationalizations faded and he had to admit the waves were definitely louder than they should be.

“Maybe we ought to check on the others,” someone said. Caedmon could not tell who. But nobody made a move to go look.

Getting a nervous look from Barbad, Caedmon knew they needed to find a way to change the conversation and get people thinking about something else. The last thing their camp needed was for a few stupid fools to wander off and give the natives cause to attack them. Waves

and moons. A strange island. Surely something else could grab their attention the way the constellations had.

“Ouch!” He squirmed and plucked a small plant from the ground. “I’ve never seen any of these plants before. I don’t know which ones have thorns and which ones don’t until it’s too late.”

His “ouch” was certainly overstated, but it drew the attention he intended as several heads turned his way. He held out the thorny white flower toward the man to his left, who took it and smiled. “This is no strange specimen. It’s just firethorn. But what’s it doing on a tropical island?”

A plump, blonde woman several feet away perked up. She groaned with the effort of standing, then waddled over to look at the plant. Caedmon recognized her from earlier in their voyage as a planter, one with certifications from the best academy in Zille, and watched with interest as she examined the plant.

“That’s firethorn alright,” she said, shaking her head. She looked at the other plants near Caedmon and shook her head again. “And it’s growing right next to ... is that a fern? I’ve never seen anything like that.”

Suddenly, Caedmon felt a little uncomfortable as several of the others turned to look at the plants near him. He noticed Barbad chuckling, which made

his face redden a little. He quickly turned his head toward the plants to avoid Barbad's teasing.

Within minutes, nearly everyone had gathered into clusters to look at and discuss the plants near them. This naturally led to discussions about the unusually large insects feasting on the plants.

A group formed around the planter as she explained one of the plants near Caedmon. "This is certainly a tropical specimen, though I've never seen it before. You see how succulent the leaves are?" She shook her head. "I don't understand why they're orange, though. They ought to be green."

Across the fire, one of the crew members held a large blue-green beetle between his forefinger and thumb. It was half as big as his hand, frantically trying to scurry away.

Next to him, another passenger pointed up at a tree, marveling about the fruit it bore. "Are they supposed to be blue? Do you suppose they're ripe now?" The man and woman next to him both shook their heads.

A satisfied smile formed on Caedmon's face as he found his way over to Barbad and plopped down beside him. The elder man shook his head and chuckled. "Awfully proud of yourself, aren't you?"

Caedmon nodded. "Yes, actually. I am."

They laughed, but not too loudly. No point distracting the people from their distractions. Caedmon wiggled into a more reclined position against a tree while Barbad leaned forward and watched the people.

Most of the investigations and discussions continued well into the night. Eventually, the conversation died down and exhaustion from the previous day's events took its toll. The volume of the waves made conversation difficult anyway. Most of the mutineers fell asleep by the time the first moon reached its apex and the second moon had covered half the distance to meet the first.

Caedmon awoke as the sun peeked over the horizon to present a spectacular array of pastels in the sky, varying in shades over wispy clouds and mist. It was the best sunrise he had ever seen. He must have slept a little, because he couldn't remember anything since he saw the two moons coming together sometime in the middle of the night.

Voices caught his attention, and he reluctantly pulled his gaze from the sunrise to the three men gathered around the remnants of the fire. Spotting Barbad, Caedmon stood up and straightened his clothes. He was anxious to talk to him about going down to the

beach.

Barbad saw Caedmon coming and already knew what his protégé wanted before he arrived. "There won't be anything good to see down there," he pre-empted Caedmon's question.

"Well, I don't see any harm in it," Caedmon replied as he arrived beside Barbad. "The waves sound normal again and the sun is up. Our ... host is nowhere to be found, and besides, the warning was specifically for last night. Not today. We can't just sit here and wonder."

"You sound like a school boy looking for a loophole," sighed Barbad, who frowned pensively before standing up with a light groan. "We cannot assume leniency from a captor we know nothing about." He paused briefly, but not long enough for Caedmon to interject. "You're killing this old man, you know, but you're right about one thing. We can't sit here and hope something eventually happens. If the captain's stand on the beach against the natives has been successful, you know we'll be the first to be executed as mutineers."

Caedmon chuckled as he turned to go, having only heard "you're right" out of all Barbad had said. "Exactly. And if we've got a fight coming or if somebody is going to do something horrible to us, I'd rather see it coming and have a chance

to defend myself. But we might be in luck. Who knows? Maybe the rest of the crew mutinied later on. Milo was unusually cranky yesterday.”

The conversation continued in a rather derogatory vein about the captain as they started down the hill toward the landing where they could gain a view of the beach. This caught the notice of several others, who seemed curious, but not brave enough to follow.

Caedmon’s mind had just returned to wondering what they might find on the beach when they cleared the edge of the trees at the bottom of the hill. He was about to curse Milo’s stubbornness yet again, and was preparing his arguments to the inevitable accusations when the beach came into view.

He nearly ran into Barbad who had stopped abruptly, staring agape toward the beach. Caedmon followed his gaze and also stared in disbelief. Nothing was left. No ship. No cargo. No crew. Just a beach littered with shells, seaweed and a collection of stranded sea creatures.

After the initial shock subsided, Barbad smacked his forehead. “The tide! I’ve never heard waves that loud!” He pointed to a spot about halfway down the hill. “See? It came all the way up to there!”

Caedmon slowly shook his head,

struggling to process the terrible sight before him. All of the smaller plants from halfway up the hill had been ripped out by the tide. Only the trees and stronger shrubs remained.

“The moons!” Remembering how they almost appeared to be one moon in the middle of the night. “Have you ever seen the moons like that?”

Barbad shook his head. They stood gawking for a few minutes before Caedmon finally gathered his wits and called to the rest of the camp. “Everybody! You need to come see this!”

Within a short while, the group of survivors stood looking over what had been their camp the day before. Not only had the supplies and ship gone missing, but their crew mates and friends as well.

Among the gasps and wide eyes came the obvious question. “Is there anybody left?”

“Probably not,” said Barbad. “That tide came and went hours ago.” He looked around the hill, then nodded to the tide mark. “If anyone’s alive, they’re probably unconscious and about that far up the hill.”

Barbad instructed some of the crew to search the hill for any survivors. Others were instructed to return to camp and begin searching for food. Although his voice felt numb at first, it gained

confidence as he instructed anyone still standing to return to camp.

Caedmon already knew the answer to his question. Nobody was coming to rescue the crew of the Bahawre. Not that day. Not ever. No doubt about it. According to their new host, the other ships had already turned back, and there was no signal they could send. He turned to look at Barbad, whose expression was now one of determination.

“We have to find the natives,” Barbad said matter-of-factly.

Caedmon nodded and followed him up the hill toward camp.

“This is gonna be a long day.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Meyers is a software developer who decided to write a fantasy book. He loves geekery, gardening, food and tinkering with things. For more information, visit his blog at <http://chrismeyers.com>.