

Fifteen-year-olds put surfing on hold following their discovery of an ancient secret that could lead to unimaginable wealth or a tragic and untimely end. Their quest becomes a dangerous obsession, ultimately forcing the choice between fortune and friendship.

BAD LATITUDE - A Jack Rackham Adventure

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# **Bad Latitude – A Jack Rackham Adventure**

**David Ebright**



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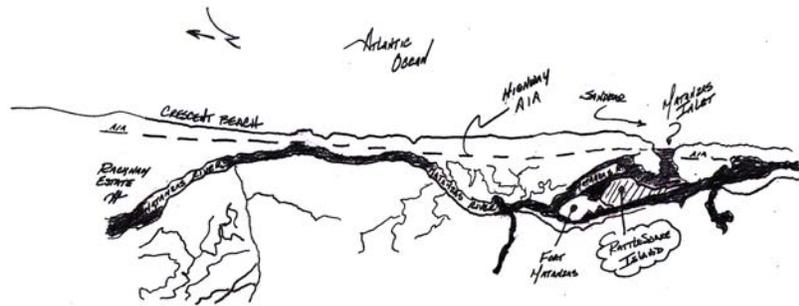
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# **BAD LATITUDE**

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## **Prologue**

**24 September 1696**

There was no escaping the hurricane's fury. Disaster struck when the center mast snapped, toppling with a thunderous crash as the doomed ship listed hard to port, exposing its massive keel. The hull's planking splintered inward from the pounding of the raging seas, flooding the cargo holds, forcing the crew and passengers to scramble from the shelter below into the teeth of the violent storm. Solomon Cresson, a stout member of the crew, was the last to climb the twisting ladder to the deck above. With the Captain of the ship missing and presumed lost, Cresson took charge. He shouted above the gale, ordering all aboard to stay with the ship for as long as there was a structure to grasp. The listing vessel was aground in the shallows, beam to sea, being smashed by fierce waves and buffeted by driving winds as the passengers clung to the fallen

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rigging, struggling for survival against the rushing flood, and collapsing timbers.

By first light, it was over. Those not drowned or washed to sea were greeted with the spectacular view of a white sandy beach, two hundred yards from their wrecked merchant ship, *The Reformation*. Twelve souls had been lost. The survivors, battered, bloodied, and exhausted, salvaged what they could from the ship. A single long boat, lashed to the bow, was all that remained of the original four, the last hope to cheat death once more. The crew heaved it overboard and shuttled passengers, bodies and a meager supply of provisions ashore. Cresson made the last trip alone, carefully concealing a wooden crate containing a fortune in gold and gemstones, the property of the shipping company. He had planned the theft long before the ship left port.

Rowing toward shore, with thirty yards of surf to conquer, he stared in horror as a band of Jobe tribesman rushed upon the stranded castaways. As the small boat scraped the sandy bottom, Cresson tossed the box carelessly into the shallows and charged into the center of the skirmish. Knowing they were in Spanish territory, he roared at the attackers, mixing fluent Spanish with intimidating gestures. The ruse worked and the Jobes abandoned the survivors to return to their village. With the reprieve, the crew and passengers prepared for the long night ahead while Cresson secretly retrieved the treasure from the sea. Hidden from the others, he buried the gold behind a dune, which aligned with the broken masthead of the listing ship.

As darkness fell, the warriors, led by their *Cacique*, returned. Unable to resist, the outnumbered survivors were herded to the tribal village, stripped of all possessions, and held captive. Killing the stranded travelers was not an option for the

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Indian King, as the Spaniards controlling the area would view such a slaughter as an act of aggression.

For weeks the group was routinely beaten, degraded, and deprived of necessities by their captors. Despite being a prime target of the cruel treatment, Solomon continued his attempts at intimidation, using demanding tones, and threatening antics. Seeing the swaggering Cresson as a potential danger, the King ordered him to leave the group and proceed northward to St. Augustine, where the largest Spanish colony had been established. The remaining captives would be released an agonizing week later. This decree played into Cresson's hands, allowing him to collect the gold before starting his journey toward the massive fortress, *Castillo de San Marcos*.

Following torturous weeks of lonely perseverance, Cresson, feverish with infection, and suffering with painfully blistered flesh, finally caught his first glimpse of the Spanish settlement. Emaciated, and pathetically weak, he confronted a new dilemma, realizing that the Spaniards would steal his fortune upon arrival. Pain, hunger, and exposure would be endured for yet another night while he devised a plan to protect the treasure he had labored to carry.

Choosing an area of heavy brush, at the edge of a clearing where three rivers converged, two miles south of the outpost, Cresson made camp. Fear of discovery overwhelmed his need for the warming benefit of a fire. The sacrifice of comfort ultimately saved his life.

Beneath an orange colored midnight moon, nearly one hundred natives from the Timacua tribe assembled at the river's edge and marched to within yards of Cresson's hideout. He was startled from his restless sleep by their approach. Quickly and silently, he crawled deeper into the snake-infested thicket, desperately stifling his panicked gasps for breath with one callused hand. From his new vantage point, he could see that the

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natives were giants, all standing at or near seven feet tall. His pulse quickened and his body trembled, certain that death was imminent when he realized that the fortune he had hefted for so many miles lay partially exposed at the edge of the clearing. Its discovery would surely bring about his end.

Cresson watched as a secret tribal ritual unfolded. Hoisted upon a litter of palm fronds and pine branches was the body of a leader of great importance. With menacing chants, five holes were dug, one in the center of the clearing, and four just beyond. While the fierce looking warriors surrounded the center gravesite, the corpse was gently and reverently lowered into the pit and arranged as if seated. The four given the privilege of carrying the body, silently completed the honorary duty of filling the grave. Cresson could never have anticipated what followed.

The pallbearers, showing no trace of fear or sadness, climbed into the four remaining burial pits, assumed sitting positions, and calmly folded their arms. Once properly situated, the tribal elders proceeded to bury the men alive as the rhythmic chants changed to sorrowful high-pitched wails. Two hours following the start of the eerie ceremony, the Timucuan marched off in a somber procession to waiting canoes and paddled south through the darkness.

Solomon Cresson, using only his bare hands, buried his stolen prize in the freshly dug soils of the gravesite, at the feet of the noble warrior, silently vowing to return one day to retrieve it.

More than three hundred years later.....

# 1

## **Southbound Yankee**

Jack Rackham spent summers with his grandparents in the ancient haunted city of St Augustine Florida. Through the years, his grandfather shared with him endless stories and legends of pirates, ghosts, and long lost riches. Learning everything possible about treasure hunting was their primary hobby, spending visits together trying to outdo one other with their knowledge and collection of tales and related oddities. Jack thought Pop cheated, by making up wild yarns that couldn't be traced to history. He never minded. Pop's tales were always outrageously entertaining.

Pirates and lost treasure were a part of the family's heritage and had motivated Pop to work through a maze of difficult clues, leading him to his first discovery of a fortune in gold coins and artifacts. The resulting wealth made it possible

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for Pop to retire and pursue his love of treasure hunting and storytelling full time. Jack benefited from Pop's good luck, sharing the pleasures of sun, sand, and surf while investigating stories and mysteries that he hoped would someday lead to his own successful search for gold. At the age of nearly sixteen, he had found his passion.

It was the night of June 14th and Jack was flying the red-eye to Jacksonville Florida. His flight would not arrive at JIA until one-thirty-five in the morning. It was late for his grandparents to have to pick him up, but he knew they wouldn't mind. Chances were he and Pop would sit up until dawn trading outlandish stories anyway.

"Please fasten your seatbelts as we prepare to land." The long awaited message came over the intercom. "We will be on the ground within ten minutes."

Jack rummaged through his carry-on and found a black doo rag and eye patch. He would greet his grandparents in style. There was no doubt they would laugh, they laughed all the time. After touchdown, he tied the bandanna in place and slipped on the patch. They went well with the heavy gold hoop in his ear, but he wished he had more than just the light blonde stubble on his chin to make his appearance more authentic. It would be the start of the non-stop teasing that would go on for the next ten weeks. He couldn't hold back the smile as he exited to the concourse.

"Well, if it ain't Cap'n Kidd," said Pop. "Maybe next time you could pick a later flight."

Nan squeezed her way past to reach her grandson. "At least let him get to the house before you start your nonsense. Jack, you can't possibly get any bigger or better looking."

It was true. He was a good-looking kid with bright blue eyes, a perfect smile, and thick blonde hair touching the top of

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his shoulders. Standing tall at six feet two inches, he had broad shoulders and a well-defined upper body that tapered to a thin waist. It was common for girls to stare and smile.

“Hi Nan. You too old-timer. I half expected to see you with a peg leg by now.”

They hugged tightly before marching off toward the baggage claim. As the doo rag and eye patch were tucked into the carry-on, Pop asked if maybe the earring should join the rest of the costume, earning Pop a quick poke to the ribs and a wink from Nan as he mumbled the suggestion.

“Next year you’ll have your license and I plan on leavin’ a car at the airport so you can drive yourself. I’m gettin’ too old to be keepin’ up with your crazy flight arrangements,” announced Pop. “A man doesn’t stay this good lookin’ for this long without plenty of shut eye.” Pop never passed on the opportunity to offer an exaggerated opinion of himself to his grandson.

The man was in remarkably good shape for his age. Favoring cargo shorts, tee shirts and flip-flops, he carried a deep year-round tan to go with his craggy features, while the ever-present baseball cap, with logos describing tropical locations, helped hide his thinning hair. Pop’s goatee, now pure white, combined with a pair of intense aqua blue eyes, made him appear intimidating despite being a shade less than six feet tall.

Jack laughed at the thought of either of his grandparents admitting to getting old but played along. “No problem you ole geezer, but I want to know ahead of time what kind of car you plan on leaving for me. A new red Jeep would work.”

“After that geezer crack you can bet it’ll be somethin’ real nice, maybe a Ford Pinto with faded paint and mismatched hubcaps. Geezer indeed. I can still run circles around you, and don’t you be forgettin’ it.” Pop was trying not to grin as he

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worked to gain the advantage. Jack wasn't fooled by the bark. The smile never left Pop's eyes.

The ride from the airport took less than an hour. Pop had set the cruise control at eighty-five and they were running with the truckers. "We drive faster down here than the dad gum Yanks from up your way."

As they passed through the gates to the estate, Jack noticed that all of the lights were burning throughout the house. Pop complained that he didn't own the electric company but Nan would never leave her home looking dark. It had to appear warm and inviting for her grandson's arrival. While pulling the Escalade into the garage, Pop grouched, to no one in particular, about the bugs splattered on the grill and windshield. He was meticulous about the care of his vehicles.

Nan dismissed the grumbling. "Don't worry; you'll have it cleaned before anyone is awake tomorrow."

"That's beside the point. Why I let you talk me into buyin' a black vehicle, I'll never know," complained Pop. "Nothin' but work. You just can't keep the blasted thing clean."

As they entered the kitchen, the coffee pot started to brew as if on cue. "Looks like I misjudged the trip by a few minutes. I was wantin' a fresh cup of high test waitin' for me when I hit the door. Well, I suspect, my dear Jackson that you've managed to make up some tall tales chock full of the usual blarney and I'll have to listen and pretend to believe 'em." Pop always used Jack's real name when getting down to business.

"Blarney my eye. I've uncovered cold hard facts that will lead me to one of the biggest salvage operations ever seen around these parts. It'll make your find look like something picked up by a weekend beach walker with a metal detector."

"That's great news. When you're filthy rich, us geezers won't hafta drive all the way to Jacksonville to pick you up."

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“We weren’t called geezers, you were. Don’t include me,” Nan scolded. “Jack, can I fix you something? I’ve stocked up on all of your favorites.”

Despite the late hour, Nan looked like she was ready for a day out with friends. Her blonde hair, never out of place, helped give her the appearance of someone fifteen years younger. Pop joked that her youthfulness cost him three hundred bucks a month.

“Unless you have some of that datil pepper cornbread sitting around somewhere, I think I’m in good shape.”

“Boy, you know Nan already has that cornbread baked and ready for you to inhale. I’ve been tryin’ to get at it since it came outta the oven but had to wait ‘til your sorry butt got here. You’d think you were the king of this castle ‘stead of me.”

Nan sighed patiently. “Don’t pay him any mind. He’s as spoiled as they come. I’ll get you some Jack, and I guess I’ll get some for the geezer here, along with his coffee.” She kissed Pop lightly on the cheek. “How does that sound sweetheart?”

“Awwww I don’t know. I can’t afford to be puttin’ on any weight. Don’t forget, I’m about due for a peg leg any day now, ‘least accordin’ to old Calico Jack here.”

Jack couldn’t help but laugh at the banter. It was always the same and the winks and nods between his grandparents never stopped. They were like kids, totally devoted to one another. There was much to look forward to, old friends, the beach, the ancient city, and most of all, his very own boat, *Bad Latitude*.

True to form, Jack and Pop sat up for a few hours catching up on stories and discussing big plans for a couple of offshore fishing trips. The Kingfish were tearing it up just off the coast and the ten-day forecast was borderline fantastic. Pop thought it best to wait until midweek to *go after the big one*. He knew Jack would want to spend a couple of days looking up

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friends and spending time surfing off Crescent Beach. The fish would be ready for anything tossed their way. Jack trudged off to the boathouse just before daybreak to get some much-needed sleep. He smiled to himself, wondering if Pop would clean the Escalade before hitting the sack.

The home was situated on the Matanzas River, about a mile north of Crescent Beach. It was set back two hundred yards from the very scenic highway A1A, which separated the property from a thin strip of dunes running along the ocean. Pop had built the Spanish style house with an eye on entertaining and had included immense windows, high ceilings, and large spacious rooms with lots of ceiling fans. Nan had insisted on tile throughout with fancy moldings, window treatments, and finishes. The mix of glass, rattan, leather, and tropical themed paintings made each room unique and comfortably elegant. She was very fussy about her *tropicasual* look. The wrap around front porch with its thick columns created an inviting appearance. Behind the house was a huge screened porch where Pop's tiki bar was arranged to give guests a perfect view of sunsets beyond the waterway. A lanai covered the pool, which was surrounded by a series of waterfalls and lush tropical plants.

Pop had added a two-story boathouse and garage off the dock where the toys were kept. There were four hydraulic lifts under roof, used to keep the boats out of the water when not in use. In the outermost lift, Pop kept his thirty-eight foot Donzi that he had named *Laffin' Gaff*. Next to the Donzi was Nan's favorite, a blue and white custom-built Hurricane deck boat. The family used it to cruise the waterway, tow skiers, and anchor in small coves to swim and cook out on remote beaches. A pair of Jet Skis filled the space next to what Jack thought was the most spectacular boat on the water, *Bad Latitude*. It was his

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very own twenty-two foot Cobia center console, rigged with every possible option, including a high performance Yamaha 250 horsepower engine, bright blue T-Top with polished brass rocket launchers and a killer sound system. Pop had insisted that Jack take the Coast Guard boating classes the year before and surprised him with the boat on the very day he had passed the course. Jack's dad had not been amused by the extravagant gift but Nan had smoothed things over, as usual.

Covered inside the garage was Pop's pride and joy, a completely restored 1940 Chris-Craft wooden speedboat. Pop had named the boat *Deb's Temper* to placate Nan when it became clear that she wasn't very happy about the purchase. Through the garage, a set of stairs led to a spacious apartment above. Wood floors and rustic walls accented the space that was divided into a TV/game room, bedroom with bunk beds, and a small kitchen. On top of the boathouse, extending beyond the dock was a deck with picnic tables and lounge chairs made of teak wood. The deck was located out of direct view from the house, providing a hideout for Pop, where he would sneak off and puff his cigars, avoiding Nan's constant reminders of the health hazards of smoking.

It was the boathouse apartment where Jack stayed and hung out with friends. Nan and Pop had accessorized it with a huge flat screen TV, comfortable furnishings, XBox, PlayStation, and plenty of DVDs. Total responsible behavior was the non-negotiable rule for him and his friends to be allowed to use the rooms without strict supervision. This would be Jack's second summer living in the apartment as if it were his own and he would make sure that everyone behaved so that the privilege would not be lost.

## Wave Riders

Jack left the house at eleven-fifteen following a huge breakfast and a *let's review the rules* chat with his grandparents. Wearing his favorite Billabong trunks, a sleeveless T-shirt and a pair of Reef flip-flops, he hustled out to the dock and hopped aboard a bright yellow Jet Ski. In a matter of minutes he was blasting south through the Matanzas Inlet into the ocean, and hooked a left turn north along the shoreline. At the midway point of his favorite surfing spot, he gently nudged the small watercraft into the shallows and secured it at the edge of the beach.

After vainly scouting the area for friends, Jack pushed the Jet Ski into the surf planning to run a few miles north toward the pier at St Augustine. As he climbed onto the watercraft, he was suddenly grabbed from below the surface,

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causing him to lose his balance and splash backwards under the waves. He was released just as his hands touched down on the sandy bottom and scrambled to his feet, coughing and sputtering on the salt water.

Jack was startled to find his best friend Kai, leaning casually against the Jet Ski with one arm draped across the seat. Kai carried a smug look as water cascaded down his face.

“You idiot,” laughed Jack. “You almost gave me a heart attack.”

“Yeah right, almost. Were you headin’ somewhere lookin’ for someone like me to pester?”

“I was hoping to avoid your ugly mug for the whole summer. How’ve you been Kai?”

Kai’s parents, former professional surfers, had chosen the unique name leaving him the constant and annoying chore of explaining the pronunciation, which rhymed with sky.

“Things have been good Rackham. Can’t complain any. Nan told me you were ridin’ this way so I waited ‘til you anchored up, so I could hide out and scare the crap outta you. I’m glad to see I haven’t lost my touch, but you always were a wuss.”

“Yeah right, so I’m a wuss. Where’s everybody hanging out?”

“They’re all up at Pelican Point, near my house. You wanna take a run up that way and get this party started?” Kai didn’t wait for an answer and climbed onto the back of the Jet Ski.

“Sounds good to me.”

They jetted through the surf until they reached the St. Augustine inlet, where Jack took a slight detour. Turning into the bay, they cruised alongside the ancient Spanish stronghold known as *Castillo de San Marcos*. The fortress was built in the

1600s by the Spanish to protect the city's citizens from attack during the days when Spain controlled Florida. Navigating through the maze of sailboats moored in the calm harbor, Jack noticed a girl with shiny blonde hair walking along the outer seawall of the fort, close to the water's edge. She was the prettiest girl he had ever laid eyes on and he couldn't help but gawk and smile. Her movements were graceful and carefree. She wore a strapless white outfit that showed off new tan lines, and, as the Jet Ski passed by, she offered a shy smile of her own and a tiny little wave, using only two fingers, acknowledging his attention.

"Look out you moron!" yelled Kai.

Jack faced forward just in time to see that they were on a collision course with a large wooden sailboat. A quick correction and too much throttle almost landed Kai in the bay.

"How 'bout I drive while *you* check out the scenery. I'd kinda like to live long enough to graduate. You can't drive with your head in your rear end."

"Did you see her?" stuttered Jack, oblivious to Kai's ranting. "Didja?"

"You mean the blonde walkin' along the wall? The one watchin' you makin' a total fool of yourself? Geez, I guess you're in love 'cause she smiled. How do you know she wasn't smilin' at me?"

"Why would she smile at a runt like you with those dreads and shabby shorts? You're even getting a blubber gut to go with that flabby looking chest."

There was nothing flabby about Kai, but Jack knew which buttons to push when he wanted to irritate. Kai was nearly a half-foot shorter but had a muscular build. Having lived on the island his entire life, his skin was deeply tanned and his dirty blonde, bleach streaked hair was curly enough to be

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mistaken for dreadlocks from a distance. His green eyes matched the color of the surf.

“I don’t have an ounce of fat on me butthead. Let’s go back and see who she was wavin’ to.”

“Nah, let’s cruise to the point and see who’s around. Like you said, let’s get this party started.”

Jack gunned the Jet Ski along and whizzed past the fort and the moored boats, cutting across the small bay. He was smiling, thinking about the girl walking on top of the wall. His first priority of the summer would be to find out all about her. If he had his way, it wasn’t going to happen with Kai anywhere nearby. Hopefully she wasn’t a tourist getting ready to return home.

Arriving at Vilano, the boys secured the watercraft on the bay side of Pelican Point and walked the short distance to the ocean. It didn’t take long for Jack to be surrounded by a group of his old friends, all making suggestions about the best way to fill the rest of the day. Surfing topped the list and Kai jumped in a jeep with his buddy Caz to run back to the house to grab a couple of boards. Since Kai’s parents owned the biggest surf shop on the island, he always had the latest and most high tech custom boards available. When he returned, Jack borrowed the Ocean Arrow and they kicked out to join the others. The waves were nothing special but the water was a warm eighty-four degrees and the sun was doing its best to burn through five layers of skin.

For three hours, it was like old times. The surf was crowded and there were plenty of decent rides. Between sets, they hung out on the boards, making jokes and busting on one another with good-natured insults.

Grant, a gangly sixteen-year-old, paddled over to the group. Jack was busy describing the girl at the Castillo to his longtime friends, Valerie and Nina. “We’re gonna roll down to

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Crescent Beach later. You guys are gonna to be there, right?" interrupted a hopeful Grant as he eyed the girls.

Kai spoke up for everyone. "Yeah, 'round seven o'clock, we'll be there."

"I can't make it until later. I'm going to see if a friend of mine can come," answered Val.

Nina looked puzzled. "What friend are you talking about?"

"I think Talia might want to party with us, but she already told me she was going to be busy until about nine."

Jack was curious. "Who's Talia?"

"Nina, we have to get going or we're gonna miss our ride," giggled Val. She paddled away, totally ignoring his question.

Jack shrugged it off. "Kai, these waves are starting to suck. I need to get going anyway so I can get the Jet Ski back. You stopping by the house or are we meeting at the beach?"

"I'll meet you at the beach. I'm gonna hang for a little longer. Throw the board in Caz' jeep for me." Kai was staring in Val's direction as she stroked her way toward shore.

Jack carried the board to the Jeep and carefully leaned it against the padded roll bar in the back. He walked around to the point, hopped on the Jet Ski, and was on his way down the coast. Thirty minutes later, he docked on the floating platform below the boathouse and climbed the ladder.

After a quick shower, a change of clothes, and a couple of sandwiches, Jack walked down the brick pathway toward the garage. Sago palms, banana trees, and tropical plants of all shapes and colors lined the walk and patio. Nan took great pride in her gardens. They provided plenty of backdrops for her photography hobby. Several of her photos had been published in local and national magazines. Jack recalled a time when she

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captured a pygmy rattler in a juice container, to get close up shots of its markings and colors. She sent the pictures to one of Jack's cranky aunts when the aunt was trying to mooch an invitation for a visit. The talk of a visit ended abruptly, much to Nan's relief.

Pop was in the garage tinkering with his fishing tackle while secretly puffing away on what he would call a collector's item cigar. Jack didn't know much about cigars, only that they smelled lousy and Nan complained whenever Pop lit one up.

"What's up Pop?"

"Just tryin' to make sure that everything's ship shape so we're not out on the water pokin' 'round searchin' for the one rig that might snag this year's big one pal."

Jack chuckled. He knew Pop was all talk about the *big one*. The truth was, Pop wasn't much of a fisherman, despite the fancy equipment and rigging. His grandfather always enjoyed taking friends and family out, but spent most of his time aboard playing captain and first mate so everyone else would have fun. When teased about his normally bad fishing luck, he would offer a myriad of excuses before grudgingly admitting that it was Nan who had the real knack for the sport.

"Pop, I was studying some stuff about the massacre at the Matanzas Inlet back in 1565 and I think there's a good chance there may be some shipwrecks nearby. The French were trying to get control of St. Augustine and this guy Jean something..."

"Ribault" interrupted Pop. "His name was Jean Ribault and he led six hundred men from France to what was then known as La Florida to reinforce Fort Caroline, up there in Jacksonville, so the Frenchys could take over entire the territory from Spain. He was on a mission to attack St. Augustine when a hurricane wiped out his fleet of ships."

“Right, and while the French were trying to attack St. Augustine, the Spanish took over Fort Caroline.” Jack was getting warmed up now.

“I don’t want to bust your bubble kid, but those ships were blown way off course and wrecked near Daytona and Cape Canaveral. Besides, I doubt they would have carried anything of value on an attack mission. The inlet only became famous because of the slaughter. The French soldiers that survived the shipwreck, were on foot tryin’ to get back to Ft. Caroline when the Spaniards intercepted them and massacred them there at the inlet. The word Matanzas actually means place of slaughters. Admiral Pedro Menendez de Aviles led the attack. I’m sure you’ve heard that name before.”

“That’s the name of Kai’s high school, *Pedro Menendez*. Why would they name a school after someone that slaughtered a bunch of people?”

“First of all,” explained Pop patiently, “Menendez was only defending the territory. He was the founder of St. Augustine. The school is named after the founder, not for what happened at the inlet.”

Jack was disappointed. He thought he had picked up a lead on buried treasure and Pop had shot down his theory with some basic history within minutes.

“Jack, it’s like I told you, when treasure hunting, historical clues are studied as part of an entire puzzle. All of the pieces have to fit. Any inaccuracy, even a minor detail, can throw you way off course. You’re not far off the mark though when you suspect that particular area for a stash of loot. Once you had settled in I’d planned on runnin’ an idea past you, to see if you’d be interested in tryin’ your hand at a real search.”

“You kidding me Pop? That’s my all time dream.”

“Well, we’ll have to map it all out and you look like you’ve got somethin’ already planned. Let’s get together in a

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few days when the dust settles. Now, just so you know, my part in this little escapade is to advise only. You're gonna to have to track the clues and do the work. I'm also assumin' you're gonna need some help, so your friend Kai is probably gonna need to be part of this."

"As long as that's okay with you, sure," answered Jack.

"It's okay with me or I wouldn't have suggested it. He's a good kid, even if he does have weird hair. The most important thing to remember is you gotta keep your mouths shut. Don't be blabbin' it all over town or every nerd with a metal detector will be crawlin' all over the place."

"This is totally awesome Pop. How long have you been sitting on this?"

"Oh, 'bout 10 years."

"Why didn't you go after it yourself and why didn't you tell me about this before?"

"I've already had my fair share of adventure and made plenty of money while I was at it. I was savin' this 'til I thought you could handle it. I think you're ready now. It's time for you to get into the Rackham treasure huntin' game. Anyway, you'd better get your butt in gear and get goin'. We'll talk later, when I'm not so busy putterin' around." Pop looked at Jack with a mischievous smile. "Now you know why we live here. I had to keep an eye on your gold."

"Why can't we do it now?"

"You've got somewhere to go and there's a lot of stuff that I'll need to explain."

"I don't have to go. It's just a party on the beach. We do that all summer."

"Okay, then let's just say I want the suspense to build." Pop waved him away and turned back toward the tackle scattered on the bench top, signaling Jack that the conversation was over.

*David Ebright*

Jack knew better than to pry anymore and left the garage to begin his short walk to the beach. Smiling at the thought of his own chance at a real search for gold, he wondered just how long Pop would make him wait before sharing the clues and details.

He reached the access ramp to the beach and walked south past the condos toward an already blazing fire. There were several Jeeps and jacked up four by four trucks parked along the bottom of the dunes. Jack always joked that his friends' rides were *red necked up* because of the oversized tires and loud exhaust systems. As he approached the group, he wondered how long it would take the St John's County Sheriff's Department to pay them all a visit. The sheriffs were usually cool, and, with the exception of a few exercise freaks, the kids would have the beach all to themselves.

Fifteen-year-olds put surfing on hold following their discovery of an ancient secret that could lead to unimaginable wealth or a tragic and untimely end. Their quest becomes a dangerous obsession, ultimately forcing the choice between fortune and friendship.

BAD LATITUDE - A Jack Rackham Adventure

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