

# SANDOKAN

*The Pirates of Malaysia*

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**Emilio Salgari**

Translated by Nico Lorenzutti



***Sandokan: The Pirates of Malaysia***

By Emilio Salgari

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# **Part I**

## **The Tiger of Malaysia**

# Chapter 1

## The Young India

“Mister Williams, where are we?”

“In the heart of Malaysia, my dear Kammamuri.”

“How much longer before we reach our destination?”

“Bored, are you?”

“No, just in a great hurry; the *Young India*’s barely moving.”

Mister Williams, a forty-year-old American sailor, just over five feet tall, looked at his companion in dismay. The man in question was a tall, dark Indian about twenty-four or twenty-five years of age, with noble, almost refined features, naked to the waist, save for his earrings and several gold neck-rings that rested gracefully above his broad chest.

“What!?!” the American cried out indignantly. “Barely moving? That’s an insult, my good Maratha.”

“For those in a hurry, Mister Williams, a cruiser flying at fifteen knots would be advancing at a crawl.”

“By the devil, why such haste?” asked the quartermaster, scratching his head. “Off to collect an inheritance?”

“Hardly! If you knew...”

“Well then, don’t keep me in the dark, young man...”

“Pardon? The wind makes it hard for me to hear...”

“Ah, playing deaf now, are we? You’re hiding something that much is obvious! That young woman with you...”

“Back to my original question, Mister Williams. When are we going to reach port!?”

“Which port, my friend?”

“Sarawak.”

“It’s up to Fate. You never know what can happen at sea. A typhoon could come bearing down upon us at any moment; or a gang of pirates could board our ship and send us to the devil with a kris between our ribs and two lengths of rope round our necks.”

“There be pirates in these waters?” smirked the Indian.

“You’d best believe it. And they’re every bit as dangerous as those stranglers you have in India.”

“Really?”

“Look over there, towards the bowsprit. What do you see?”

“An island.”

“It’s teeming with pirates. That’s Mompracem, my friend. Makes me shiver just saying the name.”

“Why’s that?”

“That little patch of land is home to a man that’s bloodied the waters of Malaysia. Have you ever heard speak of Sandokan?”

“No.”

“Sandokan, the Tiger of Malaysia, and the name isn’t given lightly. He’s ferocious, merciless! If we fell into his hands, he’d slay us without a second thought.”

“And the British haven’t moved to crush him?” asked the Indian, surprised.

“Destroying the Tigers of Mompracem is no easy feat,” replied the sailor. “Several years ago, back in 1850, the British assembled a powerful fleet and stormed the island. They captured the Tiger after a tremendous battle, but before they could reach Labuan, the pirate mysteriously escaped.”

“And returned to Mompracem?”

“No. For two years there wasn’t so much as a peep out of him, he’d vanished from these waters, but then, early in 1852, he reappeared at the head of a new band of pirates, Malays and Dyaks, fearless to a man. Af-

ter slaughtering the few English colonists fool enough to settle in his former lair, he retook his island and began to rove the sea once more.”

A whistle sounded from the bridge, as a gust of wind rattled the masts.

“Uh oh!” said Mister Williams, quickly raising his head. “Looks like things are about to take a turn for the worse.”

“What do you mean?” the Indian asked nervously.

“See those dark clouds? They sure don’t mean clear sailing.”

“Are we in danger?”

“The *Young India*’s a solid ship; she’s weathered many a storm. Now, to work, the sea’s getting restless.”

Mister Williams had not been mistaken. The water had turned leaden and the sea, until then as smooth as glass, had begun to toss and roll.

In the east, towards the large island of Borneo, an enormous cloud as black as tar slowly shrouded the setting sun. Albatross cried out nervously as they flitted about the climbing waves.

A dead calm followed that first gust of wind; claps of thunder rumbled in the east, filling the sailors with apprehension.

“Clear the deck!” bellowed Captain MacClintock, gesturing for the passengers to be taken below.

Everyone reluctantly obeyed, going down through the hatches along the bow and stern. One man, however, had remained behind, the Indian Kammamuri.

“I said clear the deck!” thundered the captain.

“Captain,” said the Maratha, advancing determinedly, “Are we in danger?”

“You’ll know once the storm has passed.”

“I have to get to Sarawak, Captain.”

“And you will, provided we don’t sink.”

“I have to get to Sarawak! It’s important!”

“Mister Williams, get this man out of here! I have no time for this.”

The Indian was dragged away and forced down the nearest hatch. A strong wind blew from the east, roaring through the ship's rigging. Thunder rumbled incessantly as the black cloud stretched across the sky.

The *Young India* was a magnificent three-masted schooner that bore her fifteen years well. Her light but solid construction, her enormous sails, her strong keel, reminded one of those daring blockade runners that were to play an almost legendary role in the American Civil War. She had set sail from Calcutta on the 26th of August 1856, bearing a cargo of iron rails for Sarawak. She carried fourteen sailors, two officers and six passengers; blessed by favourable winds she had arrived in Malay waters in less than thirteen days, or more precisely, she had arrived within sight of the dreaded island of Mompracem, home to the fiercest pirates in the South China Sea.

By eight, they were in almost total darkness. The sun had disappeared behind the clouds, and the wind roared with ever-increasing intensity. The sea raged about them; mammoth swells collided and disappeared in a spray of foam as enormous waves broke against the shores of Mompracem, its sinister mass looming menacingly before them.

The *Young India* raced forward, pitching over the waves, hurtling into troughs and climbing mountains of water, her masts tearing at the clouds.

Barefoot, faces drawn, their hair whipped by the wind, the sailors grumbled as they went about their tasks. The scuppers could not keep pace, and the decks streamed with water, making each manoeuvre more difficult. Commands and curses mixed with the cries of the storm.

By nine, the three-master, tossed about like a toy, had arrived in the waters off Mompracem.

Mister Williams held the wheel with all his strength, but despite his efforts, the *Young India* was dragged so close to the reefs and shoals ringing the island, the crew feared she would be dashed to pieces.

Much to his horror, Captain MacClintock sighted several fires burning along the shore. A flash of lightning illuminated a tall man standing at

the edge of an immense cliff that towered over the sea. Arms crossed, he stood motionless as the elements swirled violently about him.

The man's eyes flared like burning coals and were fixed upon him strangely. For a moment it appeared to the captain that the man had waved in friendship, but he could not tell for certain, for darkness returned within seconds, and a gust of wind quickly tore the *Young India* away.

"May the Good Lord save us!" exclaimed Mister Williams, who had also sighted the man. "That was the Tiger of Malaysia."

His voice was stifled by a powerful clap of thunder, the start of a deafening symphony. The heavens erupted in flames, bathing the storm-tossed sea in a sinister light. Lightning streaked the air in a thousand patterns, tearing through the sky, darting about the ship and slicing beneath the waves, as frightening roars filled the air.

The sea, as if not to be outdone, swelled to enormous heights. Waves grew into mountains, sparkling gold in the light, as they climbed towards the heavens. The wind, too, added its voice, roaring furiously as it drove clouds of warm rain across the sky.

Pitching wildly, the *Young India* battled fiercely to stay ahead of the elements. She groaned beneath the onslaught of waves; she climbed, she dove, thrashing the waters with her bowsprit, as she was dragged north, then south, against her helmsman's will.

There were times when the crew thought the ship had begun to sink, so large were the waves rushing over the decimated bulwarks. Then, without warning, the harsh north wind shifted and began to blow her towards the east.

The ship could resist no longer. To sail against the typhoon was sure death. Though the crew had not sighted so much as a trace of land in the west, except for the dreaded shores of Mompracem, Captain MacClintock had to acknowledge defeat and attempt to escape with all the speed the *Young India* could muster from her few remaining sails.

Two hours had passed since the ship had tacked about; however, the waves had not relented, as if determined to sink her.

The lightning storm had almost passed, only a few flashes appeared from time to time; the darkness had grown so thick the crew could see no more than two hundred paces before them. Suddenly, a menacing roar reached the captain's ear.

"Look off the bow!" he thundered, his voice booming over the wind and waves.

"Reefs!" yelled a voice.

Captain MacClintock rushed towards the bow, grabbed onto the fore-stay and climbed up onto what remained of the bulwarks.

Though all was dark and the wind howled about him, the roar of the backwash was unmistakable. There could be no doubt. A chain of rocks stood a few cable lengths from his ship, perhaps an extension of the reefs that defended Mompracem.

"Ready to tack!" he cried.

Mister Williams gathered his strength and pulled mightily on the wheel. Almost simultaneously, the ship struck something hard.

The collision, however, had little effect. Only a small part of the false keel had been torn away by the reef. The wind continued to blow them east as waves pushed the vessel forward.

Despite the danger, the crew managed to maintain an extraordinary sangfroid and perform the manoeuvre. The *Young India* came about, tacked two hundred meters and escaped from the perilous waters. For a moment it appeared all would end well. The sounding line had been cast immediately and measured a depth of fourteen fathoms off the bow.

Thoughts of salvation had begun to spread among the crew, when, suddenly, the sound of backwash thundered before the boom.

The sea swelled with even greater violence, signalling a new danger.

"Helm hard up, Bill!" thundered Captain MacClintock.

"Reef below bow!" yelled a sailor that had gone down to the bowsprit.

His warning did not reach the stern. A mountain of water thundered down upon the starboard side of the three-masted vessel, knocking her violently to port, dragging down the crewmen that had been clinging to the braces and smashing the lifeboats against the winch.

There was a formidable roar followed by the sound of splintering wood as a sudden collision shook the masts from bow to stern.

Crashing against the reef, the *Young India* had been gutted with one blow; six sailors, torn from the ship by the waves, had been tossed against the rocks.

## Chapter 2

### The Pirates of Malaysia

The final hour had sounded for the unfortunate *Young India*. Wedged between two rocks, her frame torn, her keel shattered, she was little more than wreckage soon to be scattered by the waves.

Rumbling incessantly, the sea bubbled furiously about the ship, smashing her repeatedly against the reef, dragging away lifeboats and sections of the bulwarks, frame, and deck, tossing them about with a loud roar.

Aboard her, the survivors, mad with terror, ran from bow to stern, looking for shelter, yelling, cursing, and praying for help. One sailor scrambled up the ratlines, another attempted to reach the crow's nest, while a third sought refuge upon the crosslets. Some raced about haphazardly, praying to the lord and the Madonna, as others tried to don the nearest life preserver, or grab hold of anything that could float, as they prepared for the vessel to wrench apart.

Captain MacClintock and Mister Williams, who had been through worse, were the only two that managed to retain their composure. Realizing that the three-master would not break free, they rushed below deck. Any last hope of setting sail was quickly dashed; the hold was full of water.

"Poor darlin'," said Mister Williams, moved by the scene before him, "she's breathed her last!"

"I'm afraid so, Bill," replied the captain, even more shaken than his quartermaster. "This'll be the *Young India's* final resting place."

“What’ll we do?”

“We’ll have to wait ‘til dawn.”

“Think she’ll weather the storm?”

“We can only hope. The reef cut through her frame like an axe. I doubt she’ll come free.”

“We should inform the crew. They’re scared half to death.”

The two old salts went back up on deck. The sailors and the passengers, their faces twisted in terror, rushed upon them; anxiously showering them with questions.

“Is it over?” asked some.

“Are we sinking?” asked others.

“Are we going to survive?”

“Where are we?”

“First, we must remain calm,” said the captain. “There’s nothing to fear.”

Kammamuri immediately stepped forward.

“Captain,” he asked calmly, “Can we still make it to Sarawak?”

“I’m afraid that’s impossible, Kammamuri. The *Young India* will never leave this reef.”

“My master is there, Captain.”

“He’ll have to wait.”

The Indian’s face grew sullen.

“May Kali protect him,” he murmured.

“All is not yet lost, Kammamuri,” said the captain.

“We’re not going to sink?”

“Not as long as we keep our heads. Come dawn, we’ll get our bearings and assess our situation.”

The captain’s words appeared to sooth the troubled spirits of the crew, and they began to hope in the possibility of rescue. Those that had begun making rafts abandoned their work; those that had climbed up the masts, after a brief hesitation, slid back down. Order soon returned to the deck of the shipwrecked vessel.

The sea continued to rage. Giant waves attacked the reefs, crashing down upon them with frightening noise. Pounded from bow to stern, the *Young India* groaned helplessly as the remains of her bulwarks and shattered keel were swept away. Sometimes she would shake so strongly the crew feared she would be torn from the reef and dragged in among the waves. Fortunately, she held fast, and the crew, despite the imminent danger, managed to grab a few hours sleep.

At four in the morning, the sky began to clear in the east. The sun rose with the rapidity common to the tropics, its arrival heralded by a magnificent red sky. The captain, standing in the crow's nest on the mainmast, Mister Williams at his side, kept his eyes fixed northwards, where he had sighted a dark mass less than two miles away.

"Well, Captain," said the quartermaster, angrily chewing some tobacco, "Recognize that bit of land?"

"I believe so. It's still dark, but... see those reefs?... There's no mistaking it, that's Mompracem."

"Great God!" murmured the American, grimacing. "What a bad place for a wreck."

"Looks like it, Bill."

"Call it what it is, Captain; a pirates' lair. The Tiger of Malaysia has returned."

"What!?" exclaimed MacClintock, starting slightly. "The Tiger of Malaysia is back on Mompracem?"

"Yes."

"That's impossible, Bill! It's been years since that scoundrel disappeared."

"He's back, I tell you. Four months ago, he attacked the *Arghadah*, and she just barely escaped after a gruelling battle. A sailor that had fought against the bloody pirate once before, told me he had spotted him on the bow of a prahu."

"Then we're done for. He'll attack us."

"By God!" yelled the master, suddenly turning pale.

"What's the matter?"

“Look, Captain! Look over there!”

“Prahus, prahus!” yelled a voice from the bridge.

Having turned as pale his quartermaster, the captain cast his eyes towards the island and sighted four large Malay prahus rounding a cape just three miles from them. Light, trim, and low keeled, the ships flew over the waters with surprising speed, their large sails bulging with wind.

The captain immediately recognized them for what they were: pirates! With a few words, he quickly informed the crew of the new danger; stubborn resistance was their only hope.

Unfortunately, the ship’s armoury was not well stocked. There were no cannons, and though they carried enough rifles to arm the crew, most were in disrepair. There were, however, several boarding sabres, slightly rusted, but still serviceable, a few carbines, a few revolvers and a good number of axes.

Having armed themselves as best they could, the sailors and the passengers rushed towards the stern, which now, underwater, would likely be the boarding point. The American flag rose majestically to the peak of the mainsail, and Mister Williams nailed it in place. They would fight to the death.

The four Malay prahus continued to advance rapidly. Now no more than seven or eight hundred paces away, they prepared to attack the poor three-master with all their might.

The sun was rising on the horizon, allowing those aboard the *Young India* to clearly make out their attackers.

There were eighty or ninety of them, bold, well-built men, naked to the waist and drawn from the various tribes of Asia: Bugis, Macassars and Javanese, olive skinned Malays, handsome Dyaks with copper bracelets adorning their limbs, and several Chinese, their shaven heads distinguishing them even from that distance.

They were armed with stupendous silver carbines inlaid with mother-of-pearl, large parangs, scimitars, poisoned crises, and kampilangs, huge cudgels they wielded like sticks. Weapons waving menacingly, that vast

legion of men kept their eyes fixed upon the *Young India*, filling the air with ferocious cries to frighten those aboard her.

When the vessels were four hundred meters away, a cannon blast thundered from the first prahu. A cannonball smashed the bowsprit, splitting it in half and plunging its tip into the sea.

“Take heart, men,” thundered Captain MacClintock. “Fire a broadside!”

Several rifle blasts followed that command. Ferocious cries emanated from aboard the prahus, a sure sign the lead had not gone to waste.

“Well done!” yelled Mister Williams. “Those wretches won’t have the courage to attack us. Ready! Fire!”

His voice was stifled by a series of formidable discharges. The pirates had begun their attack.

The four prahus began to smoulder as they unleashed a relentless rain of iron. Cannons, firelocks, and carbines fired in unison, smashing, felling, and destroying everything in their path with mathematical precision.

In less than an instant, four castaways lay lifelessly on deck. The foremast, severed beneath the crow’s nest, came crashing down, dragging yardarms, sails and cables along with it. Triumphant cheers gave way to groans of agony and cries of fear. Retaliation was impossible; that hurricane of steel was destroying the ship with frightening speed.

Realizing that all was lost, the castaways emptied their muskets and fled towards starboard, attempting to take shelter behind what was left of the lifeboats. Many had been hit, and cries of agony filled the air as blood poured from their wounds.

Less than fifteen minutes later, with cannon fire covering their advance, the pirates arrived beneath the vessel’s stern and prepared to board it.

Captain MacClintock and three other men immediately rushed to repel the attack, but a volley of grapeshot stopped them in their tracks.

A terrible cry filled the air, “Hurrah for the Tiger of Malaysia!”

The pirates threw down their carbines, picked up their scimitars, axes, clubs and kris and began to board, grabbing onto the bulwarks, back-

stays and ratlines. Several had rushed to the peak of the prahus' masts, running along the yardarms before diving onto the rigging of the three-master and sliding down onto her deck. In an instant, the few remaining defenders, now outnumbered, fell along the bow, stern, quarterdeck and forecastle.

Only one man remained alive, standing by the mainmast, armed with a heavy, wide-bladed boarding sabre. Defending himself with the courage of a lion, the Indian Kammamuri hacked away at the onslaught of enemy weapons, striking blows in all directions.

“Help! Help!” the poor man howled hoarsely as he fell to the ground.

“Stop!” thundered a voice. “Quarter to the brave. That Indian is a warrior.”

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Tiger of Malaysia**

The man that had shouted those life-saving words appeared to be between 32 and 35 years of age. He was tall, with white skin, fine aristocratic features, and light blue eyes. A black moustache lined his smiling lips. He was dressed with extreme elegance: a large hat of Manila hemp, a brown velvet jacket with gold buttons, brocaded pants, and long boots of red leather. A large sash of blue silk was wrapped about his waist. A magnificent Indian carbine was slung over his shoulder, and a scimitar with a hilt of gold, inlaid with a diamond as large as a walnut, hung from his side.

He gestured for the pirates to make way then advanced towards the Indian, who had not yet even thought of standing up, such was his surprise at finding himself still alive. He looked the man over for several minutes, carefully taking in every detail.

“So, what do you have to say for yourself, young man?” he asked happily.

“What?...” exclaimed Kammamuri, surprised at finding a European in command of those ruthless pirates.

“Surprised to be alive?”

“It seems like a miracle.”

“There’s no doubt of that, young man.”

“Why did you spare me?” the Indian asked.

“Well, you aren’t white for starters.”

“You hate whites?”

“Yes.”

“Aren’t you white?”

“Good Lord, I’m pure-blooded Portuguese!”

“I don’t understand, then why do you...”

“Stop there, young man; don’t ask for an explanation.”

“So be it. Well then, why did you spare me?”

“Because you’re a warrior, and, I admire warriors.”

“I’m a Maratha,” said the Indian proudly.

“A noble race. I have an offer for you: care to join us?”

“Me? A pirate!”

“Why not? By Jupiter! You’d be great.”

“If I were to refuse?”

“I’d no longer be responsible for your head.”

“Well then, consider me part of your crew.”

“Good man. Hey, Kotta, see if you can find a bottle of whiskey. Americans always keep a good supply on board.”

A Malay, about five feet tall, with strong, powerful arms, went down into the cabin of the late Captain MacClintock and returned minutes later with a couple of glasses and a dust covered bottle.

“Whiskey,” said Yanez, reading the label. “These Americans are truly men of taste.”

He poured two glasses, offered one to the Indian and asked, “What’s your name?”

“Kammamuri.”

“To your health, Kammamuri.”

“To yours, Mr. ...”

“Yanez.”

They gulped down the drinks in one shot.

“Now, young man,” said Yanez, always in good cheer, “time to pay a visit to Captain Sandokan.”

“Who?”

“Good Lord! The Tiger of Malaysia.”

“You’re going to take me to him?”

“Certainly, my friend, he’ll be more than happy to receive a Maratha. Let’s go, Kammamuri.”

The Indian did not move. He appeared slightly embarrassed. He cast his eyes upon the pirates then focused them upon the stern.

“What’s the matter?” asked Yanez.

“Sir...” said the Maratha uncertainly. “I have a favour to ask.”

“Ask away, my friend.”

“There’s a woman with me.”

“A woman! White or Indian?”

“White.”

“Where is she?”

“Hiding below in the hold.”

“Bring her up on deck.”

“You promise no harm will come to her?”

“You have my word.”

“Thank you, sir,” said the Maratha, deeply moved.

He ran to the stern and disappeared through the hatch. A few minutes later, he was back on the bridge.

“Where is she?” asked Yanez.

“She’ll be here shortly. Do not speak to her, sir; she’s mad.”

“Mad! Who is she?”

“Here she is!” exclaimed Kammamuri.

The Portuguese turned towards the stern.

Wrapped in a large white silk cape, a woman of exquisite beauty had suddenly emerged from the hold and halted near the base of the mizzenmast.

She was around fifteen years old, elegant, attractive and graceful with delicate, rosy skin, large black eyes, and a small thin nose. Her lips were as red as coral and bore a charming smile that revealed small white teeth. Her hair was parted in the front by a clip studded with large diamonds and fell to her shoulders in a shower of midnight curls that reached all the way to her waist. Her eyes swept over those armed men and the

bodies strewn among the wreckage, but not a trace of fear upset her gentle features.

“Who is she?” asked Yanez, clutching Kammamuri by the arm, his voice a hoarse whisper.

“My mistress,” replied the Maratha. “The Guardian of the Temple of the East.”

The young woman did not move. Yanez took several steps towards her and studied her fixedly.

“What a resemblance!” he exclaimed, turning pale.

He quickly returned towards Kammamuri, grabbed his arm once again and whispered, “Is she English?”

“She was born in India to English parents.”

“How did she get like that?”

“It’s a long story.”

“You’ll tell it to the Tiger of Malaysia. Time to set sail, my good Maratha. Men, strip this vessel of her valuables then set her ablaze.”

Kammamuri approached the madwoman, took her by the hand and led her into the Portuguese man’s prahu; she did not offer the least bit of resistance, nor did she utter a single word.

“Let’s go,” said Yanez, as he took hold of the rudder.

The waters had calmed, but at times a few large waves still broke upon the reef. Guided by those skilled, intrepid sailors, the prahu sailed past the rocks, bouncing about the swells like a rubber ball, sailing off with fantastic speed, her bright wake lighting the playground of several enormous sharks.

In less than ten minutes, she had reached the furthest point of the island, rounded it without reducing speed then headed towards a large bay. Twenty sturdy longhouses lined the shore, protected by tall palisades, deep moats bristling with spears, and a triple line of trenches equipped with large cannons and numerous firelocks.

A hundred and fifty Malays, naked to the waist and armed to the teeth, came out of the trenches and rushed towards the shore, filling the

air with savage cries as they waved their axes, pikes, kris, scimitars, carbines and pistols.

“Where are we?” asked Kammamuri uneasily.

“This is our village,” replied the Portuguese.

“Is this where the Tiger of Malaysia lives?”

“See that red flag? He lives up there.”

The Maratha raised his head. Atop a giant cliff that towered over the sea, stood a large hut defended by thick, sturdy walls. A large red flag emblazoned with the head of a tiger fluttered majestically from its rooftop.

“Are we going up there?” he asked nervously.

“Yes, my friend,” replied Yanez.

“How will he receive me?”

“In the manner becoming a warrior.”

“Will my mistress be accompanying us?”

“Not just yet.”

“Why not?”

“Because she resembles...”

He fell silent. A strong emotion had suddenly altered his features, and his eyes had grown damp. Kammamuri noticed the change.

“You seem upset, Señor Yanez,” he said.

“You’re mistaken,” replied the Portuguese, pulling the rudder towards him to avoid the reef. “We’re here, Kammamuri.”

The prahu dropped anchor, her bow pointing towards the shore.

The Portuguese, Kammamuri, the madwoman and the pirates disembarked.

“Take this woman to the most beautiful hut in the village,” said Yanez, assigning the Guardian to the pirates.

“They won’t harm her, will they?” asked Kammamuri.

“No one would dare touch her,” said Yanez. “On this island, women are respected far more than they are in India, perhaps even more so than in Europe. Come, my friend.”

They headed towards the immense cliff and went up narrow steps cut into the rock, passing sentries armed with carbines and scimitars.

“Why so many precautions?” asked Kammamuri.

“The Tiger of Malaysia has a hundred thousand enemies.”

“Do the men not love their captain?”

“We idolize him, but others... if you knew how the British hate him, Kammamuri. Here we are. Do not show fear.”

They had arrived before the great hut, an imposing structure defended by numerous moats, trenches, gabions, cannons, mortars and firelocks. The Portuguese cautiously pushed against a large door of teak wood strong enough to withstand a cannon blast, and lead Kammamuri into a room carpeted with red silk, cluttered with axes, daggers, European carbines, Malay kris, Turkish jatangs, lace, cloth, bottles, majolicas from China and Japan, bars of silver, piles of gold, and vases overflowing with pearls and diamonds.

In the midst of all that chaos, Kammamuri spotted a man dressed in sumptuous robes of silk and gold, lying on a rich Persian rug in the centre of the room.

He could not have been more than thirty-four or thirty-five years of age. He was tall, well built, with a handsome bronzed face and thick black wavy hair that fell freely about his strong shoulders. He had a high forehead, sparkling eyes, and thin lips that bore an indefinable smile. A magnificent beard gave his features a proud look that inspired fear and respect. One could tell at first glance that he possessed the ferocity of a tiger and the strength of a giant.

When the two men entered the hut, he sat up and fixed a piercing look upon them.

“What news do you bring me?” he asked a slight quiver in his metallic voice.

“Victory,” replied the Portuguese, “and a captive.”

The pirate’s brow darkened, and he fell silent.

“Is this the man you spared?” he asked after a few minutes had passed.

“Yes, Sandokan. Does it displease you?”

“You know I have the greatest respect for your whims, my friend.”

“I know, Tiger of Malaysia. This man wishes to join us. I saw him fight, he’s a warrior.”

The Tiger’s eyes flashed as the wrinkles vanished from his brow.

“Approach,” he said, addressing the Indian.

Kammamuri, still shocked to be standing before the legendary pirate that had bloodied the waters of Malaysia for so many years, stepped forward.

“Your name?” asked the Tiger.

“Kammamuri.”

“And you are?”

“A Maratha.”

“A warrior.”

“Yes, Tiger of Malaysia,” said the Indian proudly.

“Why did you leave your country?”

“I have to get to Sarawak.”

“The land of that dog, James Brooke?” asked the Tiger, not hiding his hatred.

“I do not know this James Brooke.”

“So much the better. What takes you to Sarawak then?”

“My master.”

“And what does he do? Is he one of the rajah’s soldiers?”

“No, he’s the rajah’s prisoner.”

“Prisoner? Why?”

The Indian did not reply.

“Tell me your story,” said the pirate. “There are no secrets among my men.”

“It will require some time, it’s a long story.”

“So much the better, sit down and tell your tale.”