

Episode 9  
Southern Coast of Cuba  
Early Afternoon, March 11th, 1885

“His signal is strong and stationary; that ship should be within sight. So, where is it?” Tesla mumbled a couple of hours after noon.

“Damn!” Wouda said as he looked ahead through his telescope.

“Damn, what?” Colin asked.

“Two Spanish warships with their sails stowed six miles ahead. They are anchored about two miles off the coast.”

“See for yourself,” he handed the telescope to Colin.

“Do you think we found that base!” Colin inserted.

“It is pointing inland. Freeman is behind these hills.”

“We need to look like Cuban anglers, floating free,” Wouda said as he cut all power and grabbed the fishing poles. The Cayman current was still strong enough to keep shoving them eastward.

Colin removed his shirt, climbed onto the bow, and cast his line. They had seen far more fishing boats than Wouda expected.

It took Nicola several minutes to disconnect all the wires running through his lab coat. He removed it, then his shirt. He grabbed another pole and then joined Colin on the bow.

“Damn, boy!” Colin, who owns Columbus’s only boxing gym, said once he saw Tesla’s seriously ripped body.

“How the hell did you do that?” Colin asked.

“Do what?”

“Build that body, man!”

“I exercise in water; I created a device that magnifies the effects of Benjamin Franklin’s water workout. I call it non-kinetic exercise.”

“Uh-huh,” Colin said with a yawn.

“I used to swim under the Scioto River.”

“Well, good for you,” Colin said, rolling his eyes. “I installed a water workout pool in that new ORPH to build our strength while traveling.”

“Where? I did not see a pool on anywhere.”

“It takes no space.”

“A pool that takes no space?”

“The top of the engine water storage tank slides back, turning the tank into a heated pool. I will show you how to work out in it when we head back.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Colin said as he flexed his arms.

“I build powerful bodies. You know I was a pro boxer; I still train young fighters at my club.”

“Oh, I did not know that. I noticed you beating sandbags at the Navy station yesterday. I thought you were angry after your girl ran off with a handsome billionaire.”

“The first time we met was at my boxing club three years ago. You arrived with Hayes in his war coach.”

“I remember spending a day in that wild thing, but I don’t recall meeting anyone,” Tesla lied for self-amusement.

Wouda yelled, “There is an inland waterway a mile ahead!”

“How can you see it?” Colin asked.

“No. But small boats are moving out from the beach.”

“Yeah. We’re close enough; we need to avoid being a target,” Wouda said.

He then swung the water taxi around to a westerly heading.

“This ocean is the moat around Cuba, so their defenses would mainly face the sea.”

“Certainly,” Tesla agreed.

“So, we must hide the boat, then recon that complex from land.”

“How do you hide a boat?” Tesla asked.

“Give me a minute, and I’ll show you,” Wouda answered as he headed toward a wide drainage rut they had just passed. This natural crack cuts through about 100 feet of sandy beach to heavy vegetation. “We’ll hide her in those trees.”

From about 300 feet out from the beach, Wouda aimed straight for that fat-flooded crack and then applied full power.

Just as they entered the beach, Wouda pulled a lever that lifted both propellers (steam and electric) above the water. The water taxi then coasted most of the way to the thick vegetation.

However, they had stopped about ten feet short of the jungle. “Now we push. But first, remove your boots, or they will fill with wet sand.”

Seconds later, all three barefoot men tried to shove the water taxi the remaining distance. However, there was not enough water under it to budge. They were stuck in plain sight.

Tesla climbed back aboard, then tossed a rope to Fred. “Tie it around that tree,” he said while pointing at it.

Tesla attached the other end to the dynamo’s shaft, allowing his dynamo to wench their boat into the bush.

“In a couple of hours, high tide will let us float right out of here,” Wouda said as all three put their shirts and boots back on.

“Fred, how do we walk down this beach without attracting attention?” Colin asked.

“We don’t,” he replied, retrieving a machete from the boat. We’ll cut a path through the jungle.”

Colin chopped down enough vegetation like a machine to cover the boat before cutting their path.

It took about an hour to reach a rusty wire fence atop a 130-foot hill.

Colin popped a steel saw/file blade from his boot. Thirty seconds later, he had cut through the fence.

It only took several more steps to overlook that immense industrial compound that wrapped around the southern part of the hidden bay.

The entire complex was hidden behind a row of flat-top hills along the shoreline. The place was far more extensive than they expected. Tesla whipped out a pencil and paper and sketched a quick map.

The canal that reached the sea was about seventy feet wide. It ran about 800 feet from the sea before doglegging to the east for about four hundred more feet, where it entered the hidden bay.

Just inside the canal's dogleg, far enough to remain unseen from the sea, sat a 120-foot-tall crane. It had three massive legs, one of which extended into the water.

The monster crane served several purposes. First, when the agents arrived, it was hauling a 20-person "sky-car" back and forth across the canal. Its second use was lifting extreme cargo, weighing up to 40 tons, to or from ships.

Six old red brick factories lined up along the bay's far side, about a mile and a half to their east. In between those factories stood the compound's largest and strangest-looking building.

Both engineers intuitively knew it was a power plant, delivering kinetic energy to all six factories.

Extended from that powerplant were three giant shafts, each spinning two massive pulleys. Each belt drove a huge shaft on the front of each factory. These belts extended up to

A narrow water channel ran under the power plant; Tesla thought it had something to do with cooling.

Beyond the factories, further inland, were hundreds of flimsy shacks.

About 500 feet past that giant crane, a hillside amphitheater was erected above a small boat dock. Its bench seats were cut into the side of the hill, and the stage was constructed on that small dock.

About a dozen 24-foot, steam-powered fishing boats were also moving around the hidden bay.

The structure right below them, directly across from that massive crane, was a guard shack smaller than a one-horse garage. Beside it was the landing for that crane-powered sky car.

Ten rows of barracks stood about fifty feet north of the guard shack, a little to their left.

The following structure north of the barracks was a quality stone building with a green copper roof. It was the command center since it was the only quality building flying flags.

One flag was blue with that white ‘X’ cross, and the other was Spain's. They did not know Spain’s flag; they only flew here on special occasions. It was flying today because several Spanish admirals were set to arrive for a weapon demonstration.

Farther north of that command center were three large ship docks. Each dock accommodates two enormous (300-foot) ships. The Lady Sara was the only ship there when they arrived.

Beyond those ship piers sat an unusual building with umbrellas and tables on its roof. It looked like a tropical cantina (saloon). Just beyond that tavern sat a large marina with three “L” shaped docks packed with about five hundred more fishing boats.

“Holy Ship!” Wouda said when he noticed an old, rusted derelict anchored in the bay a couple of thousand feet east-northeast of them. “The Virginia! The lost Confederate Ironclad!”

“They sunk it off the Mississippi coast when the war ended to keep it away from our navy.”

“It must be the only ship scuttled and recovered twice!”

“Scuddled?” Colin asked.

“It was originally the USS Merrimack. The North scuddled it in 1861 when the South seized the Norfolk Naval Base.”

“The Confederates raised it, added the iron armor, and renamed it “The Virginia,” Wouda explained.

“They say, “The third time is the charm,” Colin remarked.

A micro-second later.” A cannon blast echoed around the valley.

As the echoes reverberated, a voice loudly announced, “No se permite la pesca ; Vete inmediatamente o muere!”

“They stole my sound amplifier from my notebooks!” Tesla snarled.

“What did they say?” Colin asked.

“No fishing here; run or die,” Wouda replied.

They could see several more fishing boats near the canal entrance.

“Good thing we walked over,” Colin added.

As they pondered their next move, Colin pushed, “We used Lemont to find this place; let’s get him, then leave this place for the navy.”

However, Tesla and Wouda felt that figuring out what was happening here was more critical than rushing to save Lemont. As they discussed

their next move from that hilltop, another ship, which looked nearly identical to The Lady Sara, arrived.

“That is her sister ship!” Wouda explained.

“It was not finished or named when I read about it.”

“It’s Spain’s King Alfonzo’s travel craft.”

“Alfonzo must be meeting with Cross,” Tesla suggested.

“That would explain the Spanish warships sitting out there,” Wouda replied.

Minutes later, they watched Alfonzo’s ship back into the south side of the dock holding The Lady Sara.

“La Cielo” was the name painted on the King’s ship. “What is La Cielo mean?” Colin asked.

“The Heavens,” Tesla answered.

They also verified that most of the base workers were wearing Confederate uniforms. They did not know this had more to do with money than politics.

After the Civil War, Cross Shipping still had 21,000 Confederate uniforms in a Florida warehouse.

It was now past 4:00, and the tide was rapidly rising. “We only have about three hours of daylight left,” Wouda announced.

“I think attempting his rescue before informing the navy what is hidden here is a mistake.”

Colin responded, “I have years of covert work, and my teeth can tell you what I find. You two get back to sea. After dark, I’ll figure out what is happening here and see if I can slip Lemont out of that ship.”



“That’s a plan. But how are you going to fit in?” Wouda asked.

“I’ll just become one of them. “In the morning, plan on picking us up on the beach, where the boat is right now.”

Both Wouda and Tesla thought his plan was ambitious. However, it covered both goals, so they agreed.

British intelligence informed President Lincoln that Spain planned to supply 2000 cannons to the Confederacy in 1862 secretly. To seem uninvolved, Spain had begun building copies of Pakistani cannons, which were to be smuggled to the Confederacy through this same base.

King Alfonso canceled this secret project after Lincoln sent him a question asking him why he was building ornate Pakistani cannons.

Twenty years later, Washington was still looking for the opportunity, or plot, to kick Spain out of Cuba.

Nicola and Fredrick made it back to the taxi undetected. The high tide had it freely floating, allowing much easier departure.

Meanwhile, in La Cielo’s throne room, King Alfonso told Max Cross, “I don’t need to board your daddy’s old boat again for a presentation; Have him join me aboard my newly improved version.”

“We were just expecting Admirals for the demonstration, but my father was delighted to see you and the La Cielo arrive.”

“Don’t play with me, Max.”

“You know my new ship makes your daddy dry heave. He is a man of extremes. He must be and have the best of everything.”

“You know him well, You’re Majesty.”

“We had no clue that you would show up for the demonstration. However, he spent most of this morning setting up a presentation for your admirals on his Maximus V.” (Max would never call it any other name)

“He will come for your banquet tonight; he will try not to look tortured,” Max said while admiring the turquoise inlays on the gold-gilded ceiling.

“You and father played as children. You know this ship is driving him crazy.”

“Ah, Ha, Ha, Ha, yes, indeed. I had the Italians add one foot to your daddy’s blueprints to play with him. Mine is bigger and better!”

“This will be fun to watch.”

“Yes, let's have some fun,” the king said.

“After I leave tomorrow, tell him I shared this with you,” Alfonso said as he opened a copy of the Maximus VI blueprints.

“Tell him the La Cielo Grandiose will commence construction as soon as the Maximus VI is launched.”

“No one plays with his head better than you.”

“He ordered these VI blueprints when he heard you were building this Ship.”

“A new and improved copy! Ty can’t tolerate being second; that makes him so fun to screw with.”

“We both know he threw a tantrum when he heard you were improving on his Max V.”

“He spent over two hundred thousand dollars just having number VI engineered a year ago; Hâ, ha, ha.”

“Ha, ha, ha! He was furious!” King Alfonzo agreed.

“Oh, he will love this. A couple of weeks ago, I traded a box of cigars for a complete copy of his Maximus VI plans. Ha-ha-ha. Ha-ha-ha.”

“I love Tyberious.”

“He loves you too.”

“All right, you convinced me. I’ll come over for his presentation, and then we can all enjoy my grand banquet here.”

“Excellent, Your Majesty!”

“Your daddy will try to get revenge when he picks up VI.”

“Yes, he will! You know that Seville will be his first stop so that he can dock beside this slice of heaven.”

“Ha, ha, ha! No doubt about it! I’ll have something prepared.”

“Your Majesty, his presentation will only take ten minutes.”

“I would not do this for anyone else.”

“He loves you too.”

“Of course he does.”

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Before leaving the water taxi, Colin put a canteen, two communicators, four batteries, and two fish cans into a burlap bag. The hard Doctor’s case was too small and awkward to drag along.

Before they captured Lemont, Colin talked him out of five (of his 21) darts by telling him, “They’ll likely take your belt away.”

Colin had not mentioned that he lost that fine Webley six-shooter. So, he only had his blowgun, a blade, a saw, and two quick fists.

“Chatter my teeth after you are back on the water.”

Colin sat on the hilltop as the two geniuses returned to the boat, formulating a plan that Colin would never use.

Colin reloaded one dart into the buckle (shooter) and slid the other four into the belt’s secret compartment.

Colin’s teeth received “At sea” hours before sunset.

About ten minutes later, another announcement boomed through Tesla’s hijacked loudspeakers, this one in English: “All Gladiators, Knights, Sharks, and Crews beware. The demonstration starts at 5:30; all boats must be securely tied by 5:20.”

While waiting for nightfall, Colin watched dozens of small boats (and that sky bus) move well over a thousand men to the far side of the amphitheater on the other side of the canal.

Not everyone wore Confederate uniforms; Lady Sara’s crew wore white shirts, blue bell-bottom pants, and hats that matched the ship. La Cielo’s staff wore colorful formal uniforms from the Spanish Navy.

Colin watched lifeboats from both ships transport their officers to that small pier under the amphitheater's stage, a couple of thousand feet away.

Anchored about a half-mile to his northeast, the rusted ironclad (The Virginia).

Since almost everyone, including both ship crews, had just moved to the far side of the canal, Colin changed the plan. “Screw the darkness; I may never get a better shot at saving Lemont than right now!”

Fortunately, his side of the hill had just become shaded. So, he angled downhill in a southerly direction to arrive behind that guard shack beside the skycar landing. He reached it undetected.

He snuck up under the shack’s rear window and then peeked inside. It did not have glass windows, just wide-open storm shutters.

The napping guard’s feet were on his table as if his superiors had all left. After Colin heard him snore, he popped the blowgun from his buckle. Then, with only one of his five darts, he kept that guard in dreamland.

He then slid through the window and borrowed the guard’s uniform. He used his belt to tie his hands behind his back.

The guy was nearly a foot shorter than Colin yet a few inches wider around the waist, so these trousers looked more like Confederate knickers.

He noticed a duffle bag with a thick shoulder strap hanging in the shack, which could keep his hands free. He dumped it out and put his burlap sack and pants into it.

He shoved the guard’s Colt 45 under his belt and tossed a box of bullets into the bag.

Next, he gagged the guard with his filthy, then dragged him up to the hilltop, behind the shack; then he tied the guard against a fence post using his old trousers.

Sitting momentarily, Colin pulled out Lemont's receiver and tried contacting him again, to no avail.

However, the needle continued pointing at The Lady Sara.

He sent Lemont the message that he was coming for him, hoping he would receive it.

Moments later, Tesla tapped in, "Spain patrols coming - must leave range - return around sunrise."

Now dressed as a Confederate clown, Colin tossed the Colt into his bag and slid back down the hill. Next, he casually strolled toward the beautiful ships like a tired worker after a long day.

Three guards stood guard watch before Lady Sara's gangway halfway down this dock. Six Spanish sentries guarded Le Ciel's entry about 20 feet farther.

Colin casually strolled down the dock between both sets of guards as if he does this daily. He offered a tired smile and soft nod as he walked past, apparently on his way to the end of the pier.

About thirty feet beyond the guards, just as Colin thought he had made it, someone poked his back with his bayonet. "Where do you think you are going?" he asked.

He slowed his words to sound sleepy and southern, "Cuse me. I finished too late to take a boat over there. This dock. I did not think you would care."

The guard looked at Colin's half-length sleeves and legs, then down the dock.

"As you were," he said as he turned and returned to the gangway.

“What’s he doing?” His lieutenant asked.

“He just wants to watch another ship get blown up.”

“I’ll bet he is new,” the lieutenant replied as they watched Colin slowly walk out to the end of the dock. “Supply is running out of uniforms.”

As Colin reached the end of the dock, he looked over the bay like a tired guy expecting to watch fireworks.

After several minutes, he faked tightening his bootstrings to glance back between his legs to see if they were watching him.

They found something more interesting.

About five minutes later, Ty Cross opened the show with kind words about his guests, five Spanish Admirals, and their nation’s twelfth, King Alfonzo.

Ty’s voice boomed over Tesla’s stolen loudspeaker design. However, Colin used his musically trained ears to separate his words from the echoes bouncing off the hills.

Ty directed attention to the only boat still moving in the bay. It was about a mile north of that iron-sided rust relic (about a mile north of the stage).

While pointing at that distant boat, saying, “Avengers are so simple to operate; my son Max will demonstrate one, all by himself.”

“You may not see it yet, but an Avenger is approaching that unsinkable ironclad. There it is!”

The audience (and Colin) cheered as Max remotely guided that breadbox-sized Avenger in circles around the old iron ship.

Max then brought it to a complete stop on the amphitheater side of Virginia. It slowly turned, then charged straight at its iron haul.

**KABOOM! KABOOM! KABOOM! KABOOM! KABOOM! KABOOM!** Echoed off the hills as a JIGGILLIC-sized hole appeared in the side of Old Ironside.

Seconds later, a violent 10-foot wave slammed into the docked ships.

Colin held the rope that secured Lady Sara's stern (rear) to the dock. As almost everyone aboard both ships picked themselves back up, Colin shimmied up the rope about thirty feet. He climbed just high enough to peek over the top deck.

Five sailors were standing only several feet away. However, before he decided what to do with them, they turned and walked forward. He realized that they had also watched the demonstration. Now, they were returning to their stations.

After walking about fifty feet away, Colin slithered over the safety rail and hid behind an enclosed stairway several feet away.

Before he opened the door, something entirely unexpected came over the loudspeakers. He heard the Buckeye Beauties performing 'Big Daddy' from 'Ladies Come First.'

He glanced back at the stage; all six beauties were dancing on it.

"She sure sounds happy."

"I need to thank her for keeping those horny turds over there!" Colin thought as he slipped into the stairwell. "They cleared this place out!"

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Several hours earlier, when Ty discovered the king had popped in, he asked Sara, “Would you mind doing today’s rehearsal on stage?” “Spain’s king, some of his admirals, and a couple of thousand men will be there.”

“When?”

“An hour before sunset, right after a quick weapons test.”

“Weapons test!?” The suddenly concerned Sara responded.

“It’s nothing, my dear. All world leaders hold weapons tests for respect; the stronger they look, the more peace they keep.”

“What kind of weapons?”

“We are just going to blow up an old boat. We do things like this all the time around here.”

“He (the king) is not putting anyone aboard, is he?”

“Of course not. This is just a party.”

“Since the planet’s finest entertainers just happen to be here, already rehearsing, I had to ask.”

“But this is entirely up to you, my dear.”

“Audiences are far more fun than rehearsals. I doubt the girls will complain; they are dying to show off their new dresses.”

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Once in the stairwell, Colin tried contacting Lemont again, but still no response.

The needle showed the ship's bow (straight forward), then he tipped the locator sideways. He noticed that caused it to point somewhat down.

“Ah, I'll bet he is in a brig, on the bottom of the ship.”

He glanced through the round window on the first level down and noticed a set of very ornate double doors into the room across the back (stern) of the ship, just a few feet away.

“That must be Cross's office!” He knew.

He might never get a better shot, so he darted in for a quick look.

Alone on a table beside the desk, he saw a folder titled “Liberation Day.” As he reached for it, he heard voices at the door.

He dove under Ty's desk a split second before Max and several servants entered.

Max thought after sinking Old Ironsides. “I've seen enough of Father's bitches.”

So, instead of heading to the hillside theater, he tied up to the ship's tender landing. Then he rushed inside to prepare royal refreshments for Alfonso's stopover.”

Typically, modern ships have two or more built-in docks, called tender landings.

However, when Ty reviewed the ship's blueprints, he thought they hurt its lines. So, he had his architects place only one tender across the stern, several levels below this office.

Colin heard Max tell his servants, “They'll be here in ten minutes; have everything ready in nine.”

Moments later, Colin was relieved to see Max and the servants rush away to retrieve things.

He threw that binder into his bag, then slipped out to grab Lemont. But the workers had just cleared that table off for refreshments.

“That Turd took the folder with him,” Colin incorrectly assumed. One of the servants had moved it to a bookcase.

He knew he only had seconds to leave, so he dashed for those double doors. But just as he reached for them, he heard men laughing on the other side.

He ducked into a closet beside those double doors just as Ty, Max, King Alfonzo, and five Spanish Admirals walked in and sat down.

The closet was full of supplies. In addition, all the doors on this ship were spring-loaded to keep them closed on rough seas. This combination made it nearly impossible for Colin to listen.

He cracked it open for about half an inch and held it in place with his boot. Unfortunately, they mainly were speaking Spanish. He had learned a few Spanish words, but no one said “tacos, burritos, or enchiladas.”

Finally, in English, he heard, “I never imagined a toy boat could sink a warship! This will change everything.”

“Alfonso, my great friend,” Ty proudly said.

“By the time they figure out what sunk their fleet, they will have bigger issues to contend with, and our problems will be solved.”

He then heard, “Show me phase two.”

“Well, that is the cannons we spent a decade smuggling in.”

“Combined with our wireless technology, we will destroy their inland defenses before they know they are under attack.”

“My Knights have hidden devices under every vital railroad bridge. With the push of a button, these bridges will become useless from ten miles away.”

“If losing their ships and trains is not enough, phase three is the final nail.”

“Tell me?”

“100 exquisite awards are already inside homes and offices of America’s leaders. Each hides an incredibly powerful remote controllable bomb that we can fire from ten miles away.”

Suddenly, loudspeakers drowned Ty’s words, screaming “intruder Alert” repeatedly.

“It’s probably a false alarm,” Ty told the suddenly alarmed King.

“Does this happen here often?”

“Rarely; that blast probably triggered it,” Ty responded.

Colin heard enough to know they were planning to attack some nation, likely the USA. So, he clicked his teeth to tell Tesla, “They plan to sink warships using remote-controlled toy boats packed with explosives; they call them, “Avengers.” But unfortunately, Tesla was still beyond range.

As the alarms continued, Animus walked into the office. “We’ve been penetrated; a guard was just found stripped and bound.”

Before Ty could respond, Spanish guards rushed in and escorted the King and his admirals back into the La Ciel.

While the king traveled, his travel ships were always warm (ready to launch) when docked or anchored. This allowed Alfonso to make rapid departures without waiting, if necessary.

His ship was always backed in for rapid departures.

Animus told Ty, “You should also return to the sea until I find the intruders.”

“Are you sure that guard was not stripped and tied by some of our men playing around?”

“We found this on the guardhouse floor,” Animus said as he dropped a little yellow dart on Ty’s desk.

Ty turned to his secretary, “Tell Funk to get us out of here!”

“What heading?”

“I don’t care; tell him La Teja.”

As Dump ran off, Ty asked Animus, “Are these the same darts that Mc-something used on guard at Crosswinds?”

“Same darts.”

“Do you think he followed us here?”

“He could not have followed us. No other vessel could keep up.”

“Maybe Mclaughlin snuck aboard in New Orleans, and we brought him.”

“I chased him away. When this ship returned, I had maximum security on the docks; he could not have snuck aboard.”

Colin heard Ty order, “Set sail for La Teja immediately!”

“They are losing it over one intruder. Every turd on this base is looking for me, and this ship is soon to leave. Sorry, old friend, I’ll have to pick you up at La Teja, wherever that is.”

Thankfully, seconds later, Ty, Max, and Animus left the office to rush the departure from the control room.

Colin slipped out of the closet; then, just as he reached those double doors, they swung open.

“Oh Shit,” Ty had returned for something.

They peered into each other's eyes for a moment. Then Colin blasted the billionaire with a devastating right.

Out cold, Ty landed spread eagle on the hallway floor.

Colin stood over his unconscious foe, pulled the Colt from his bag, and aimed it at Ty’s head, but then he just shoved it back under his belt.

“I wish you were still awake, slimy turd,” he growled before planting his right boot into Ty’s unconscious nuts.

“That’s for Sara,” he said before returning to the stairwell.

He reached the top deck just as the sunset. Five Light Cannons were scouring the compound (from the oceanside hills) as “Intruder Alert” continued blasting from those loudspeakers.

He could still see hundreds of men returning to his canal side and dozens of guards scampering around looking for intruders.

The dock was now swarming with returning men, so his entry down the long boat dock would no longer work as an exit.

As he pondered his getaway, the always-ready-to-go La Ciel left. “What a Cowardly Turd,” Hayes thought of the Spanish King.

He decided to swim towards those small boat docks, then slip into the jungle behind them.

He wanted to avoid attracting attention by not making a splash. Instead of diving forty feet into the dark water behind the ship, from the back of the ship, he tied a rope to the safety rail to slowly shimmy down to the dark water.

First, he slid his boots and newly borrowed Colt 45 back into his Confederate bag. He put its strap around his neck and shoulder so he could tow his things as he swam.

However, he did not reach the water by sliding down the rope. Instead, he landed inside the still-hot fishing boat Max had left tied to the tender landing. “God, I’m glad I didn’t jump!”

Fresh off his first steamboat lesson (one day earlier), Colin leisurely set off for that canal. Once he got away, he would sink this boat. Then, figure out his next move while hiding in the jungle.

The La Cielo was still moving toward the canal right before him. His little steamboat could zip around it, but rushing around would turn him into a target. So, he lined up behind the ship as if waiting for his turn.

While waiting, Colin noticed two Avengers were still tied to this boat's water-level platform. Both floating bombs had shoebox-sized remote controls taped into them. Unlike Tesla's remote controls, these were much larger because they also held batteries.

The light from the five light cannons, moon, and stars allowed Colin to see an arrow and message painted on the Avengers.

The arrow pointed at a post protruding from their bows. The words warned:

**“DO NOT BUMP, TOUCH, OR DROP - AVENGER WILL EXPLODE.”**

“They detonate on contact,” Colin realized.

As the sitting-duck hero waited in line, he pulled one of these Avenger controllers off. Then, he hit the “on” switch, causing its dual propellers to spin.

Its other switch was the first toggle type Colin had ever seen, but fortunately, it was marked “Forward, Right, Left, and Stop.”

He stayed patient as he finally entered the canal, about fifty feet behind the La Ceil. Then, as he thought he might make it out, he heard someone yell, “There they are!”

Seconds later, six bullets slammed into his boat.

He dove down on the rear deck beside the Avengers, hoping the little boat would stay on course to the sea. Then, several dozen bullets slammed around him, nearly hitting an Avenger.



Assuming he would become fish food if a bullet hit one, he pulled the knife from his boot (in the bag), cut the Avengers loose, and then shoved them into the canal.

Still laying as low as possible, bullets continued smashing around him. He grabbed that controller and guided an Avenger toward the only target he could see while lying on the platform.

The front leg of that towering crane (the one with the underwater foundation) was about thirty feet away from that still-running Avenger.

The nine nerve-racking seconds to guide it into that massive iron leg felt like an eternity.

**KABOOM!**

A millisecond later, a massive shock wave slammed his boat, nearly flipping lengthwise.

Colin yelled, “Damn! That thing is “still standing!”

Then, the Gatling gun on the hill beside the canal (and above the amphitheater) opened fire. The cannon beside that gun fired a shell that slammed into the little boat’s steam boiler several seconds later.

Colin’s boat instantly became several thousand pieces of burning shrapnel, some soaring above the 130-foot hilltops.

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Less than five minutes later, just seconds after Animus slapped Ty Cross back into consciousness, he muttered, “It’s Colin McLaughlin!”

“Get that bastard; bring him to me alive.”

“I’m going to run him through the meat grinder slowly!”

“How do you know it was McLaughlin? You have never even seen him.”

“It was he!”

“You're too late; he has become fish food. We blasted him into a million bits as he tried to escape.”

“Was he alone?”

“We saw no one else.”

“We must have brought him here.”

As Animus helped him to the infirmary, Ty said, “Do not mention his name. Sara must never know about this.”

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As fifty-caliber bullets began shredding the boat (an instant before that cannon finished it), Colin rolled into the water with his duffel bag strap wrapped around his neck.

He dove deep enough to avoid the firestorm but violently tossed when the boat exploded.

Before Colin and his twin brother became ORPHANs, they often competed to see who could swim the farthest beneath the muddy Scioto River with only one breath.

Colin's muscle memory kicked in as he swam the length of a football field, eight to ten feet deep, towing his bag.

No one saw him roll off that platform just before his boat disintegrated. So, they assumed he had become fish food.

About 30 seconds later, as he surfaced for air, he heard a loud metallic sound screaming behind him. He glanced back just in time to watch that massive iron crane twist and shake.

Then, he watched that massive tower crash across the canal behind him.

Still packed with men returning from the show, the skycar crashed into that guardhouse.

Because that massive crane was suddenly lying across the exit canal, the La Ceil was the last vessel to leave in one piece. Since The Lady Sara was not ready for a rapid departure, it was not going anywhere.

As Colin surfaced again, debris had covered the canal, which hid him long enough to grab eight deep breaths. He only needed to swim about fifty more yards to reach the sea.

Luckily, the now high tide began to recede, causing the canal to flow toward the sea, so he reached the ocean with only one more dive.

After gulping enough air to continue, he swam west along the beach for about a hundred yards.

As he thought he had escaped, more bullets began raining around him. One of the gunners on a Cuban patrol boat, watching the beach, had opened fire.

After about two seconds, another massive blast tossed Colin again; however, the bullets stopped.

Remember that second Avenger that Colin shoved into the canal?

Well, that tide dragged it into the Gulf right behind Colin. Before that gunner could deliver the fatal shot, his patrol boat bumped the detonator.

“Kaboom!”

“Better them than me!” Colin said as he looked back at that boat’s burning carcass.

After swimming west for several minutes, he noticed another wet drainage rut to the jungle. He crawled up this water-filled crack to avoid leaving footprints.

Once in the jungle, he retrieved his boots from the bag and poured the water out before putting them back on. He preferred running barefoot, but not through this snake—and scorpion-infested jungle.

He then ran further west down the path he had cut hours earlier.

Once he reached where they hid the water taxi, he tried to contact Tesla again, but there was no response. He moved inland, thinking Ty’s men would soon search the beach.

“I wish I had Wouda’s machete,” he thought as he popped the 9-inch blade from a boot to cut through the vegetation.

To his delight, that thick jungle became a sandy desert after only a couple hundred feet, allowing him to run farther north.

A half-mile inland, he reached a shabby old shack and barn. Exhausted, he entered, crawled into a straw-filled wagon, and joined a goat. Moments later, he fell into a deep sleep.

Five and a half hours later, his badly needed nap suddenly ended when the butt of an antique musket cracked his head.

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