

BlackHeart's Legacy

By Sally Copus

Chapter One

Time-Travel

Midwestern United States – Present Day

The long nails of Trek's feet clicked loudly on the floor tiles as he snorted and sniffed around the back door. Suddenly, he barked and yipped anxiously, turning round and round as the door burst open and Jon stuck his head through the opening.

"Sit, Trek!" Jon commanded. The silver Siberian husky immediately sat down, his tail wagging and whacking the floor. The dog's blue-gray eyes were fixed adoringly on the brown-haired youth.

"We're ready to go, Pappy," Jon said. "I stowed my trunk aboard the *Carousel*." Jon had been studying American history and wanted to travel back in time to Philadelphia, July 4, 1776, to watch the forty-two men sign their names approving the Declaration of Independence. Time travel was not new to the Sinclairs, but only recently had Jon and his grandmother travelled without Alistair, and then only into time periods that Alistair considered safe.

Alistair Sinclair had planned to go on this trip with his wife and grandson, but some urgent matters had come up at NASA that needed his particular expertise. *The two weeks they'll be away will give me the perfect opportunity to work here at the house undisturbed*, he thought. Even though Alistair had retired from NASA recently, they still had need of the astro-scientist's vast knowledge and experience on occasion. This was one of those times.

Jon appeared in the doorway with a grimace on his face. “Grammy’s still upstairs grumbling about the stiff, uncomfortable clothes she’ll have to wear to look the part of an eighteenth-century lady. Could you get her to hurry up, Pappy?” Jon asked.

“Me? You want me to go up there and tell your grandmother to hurry? You don’t like having me around, do you?” Alistair asked, raising one eyebrow with a smirk. Jon broke into a giggle, and Alistair was chuckling with him as Kathryn entered the kitchen. She eyed them both suspiciously.

Alistair smiled at his wife. She was a tall, slender woman who looked too young to be a grandmother. In fact, most of her tennis buddies enviously said she looked like she was nineteen or twenty years old. She prided herself that her short brown hair was virtually without gray—at least, for now.

Alistair was very confident that Kathryn could handle the *Carousel* without him, particularly with the most recent computer hardware he had built and installed.

“Let’s go!” she said curtly, smoothing her hair back behind her ears. She was wearing her favorite work clothes: white cotton pants cropped just below the knees, athletic shoes, and one of Alistair’s long-sleeved, white dress shirts.

“Uh ... did you forget to change your clothes, Kathryn?” Alistair asked quietly, covering his grin. Jon pretended not to hear.

“Yes. On purpose!” she replied. “I’ll put on those uncomfortable clothes and the white wig I bought when we’re ready to leave the *Carousel* in Philadelphia, but not a minute sooner.”

Turning to Jon, she said, “Ready to go?”

Jon nodded and was out the door. He waved the dog away as he ran toward the barn. He didn't want Trek to tear the knickers and blousy shirt that Kathryn had made for him. With the old-looking shoes and white cotton knit stockings to complete his outfit, twelve-year-old Jon looked just like the boys of 1776. He had complained about wearing the white stockings until Kathryn showed him pictures of boys of that time. Gradually he accepted the idea, and the clothes.

"Trek, you're staying here at Three Forks with Pappy to keep him company. There won't be a place for you to stay on this trip," Jon said, rubbing Trek's ears and jowls. He was rewarded with big slurpy kisses on his neck and chin.

While Alistair and Jon put Kathryn's trunk in a storage closet of the *Carousel*, she sat down in the red leather seat of the great white swan, facing the computer console. She keyed in a few codes, and several lights blinked on the console. There was a slight vibration as the hydrogen- and solar-powered engines of the *Carousel* began to whirr. The "Power Source Ready" icon blinked brightly on the computer screen.

"Remember our rule, Kathryn," Alistair cautioned. "Stay no longer than two weeks. We're not ready to test the time window beyond that."

"Don't worry; we should be back well before then. I'll be ready to throw out those pointy-toed boots and put on these sneakers," she said, looking down at her comfortable, slightly worn black athletic shoes.

Alistair gave them a hug and a kiss and stepped off the platform. He and Trek had reached the house by the time the roof of the barn slid open and the old relic carousel grew to its

three-story height. Gone was the brightly colored antique carousel; in its place stood the majestic, silver time-travel capsule: *Carousel*.

A misty blue gas filtered off the pointed, cylinder shape of the ship, down its sides, and through the open barn door. Staying close to the ground, the blue mist flowed outward, confirming the ship's origination point in time. The mist pulsed up tree trunks, the farm house, the barn walls and fences. Every blade of grass, the rock layers of a nearby bluff, and even the layers of soil were identified as the mist rapidly mapped Three Forks, which was home to the three Sinclairs. This molecular mapping was essential to the *Carousel's* return to this exact place and time. Should the path deteriorate or become compromised, Jon and Kathryn could be lost forever.

All at once, the mist was sucked back up into the ship, and Alistair knew that Kathryn had initiated the launch sequence; there was no turning back now, just as there had been no turning back for Jon's parents on the morning of their mysterious, fatal plane crash. The events of that morning long ago weighed heavily on his mind as Alistair watched the metallic *Carousel* slowly disappear, carrying with it the two people on earth he most loved.

The computer monitor inside the ship displayed the view outside the *Carousel* as Jon and Kathryn watched the objects on the ground grow smaller. And then, with a loud *poof*, they were gone!

Inside the *Carousel*, Jon sat strapped in his seat next to Kathryn at the console as the ship swirled slowly in the familiar time vortex.

Suddenly, there was a hard jolt! The *Carousel* began to vibrate and rock side to side with great force. Jon grabbed Kathryn's arm and held onto her as she began clicking all the levers on

the console to no avail. Jon could feel gravity pulling at him. His back ached immensely, as if he were being molded into his seat. Everything swirled above him as the ship vibrated and rolled until Jon thought his teeth would shatter out!

There was a terrible knocking noise and a loud sucking sound. Jon felt as if he were in some kind of vacuum, being pulled rapidly down, down, down. And then a jolting thud—and the ship stopped moving!

Chapter Two
Dishonest Dealings

Port Royal, Jamaica, May 1, 1692 AD

Sitting at the end of a long pier that stretched out into the turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea was a tall, stately black ship. Two men walked together on the deck when, very abruptly, an argument and struggle erupted between them. One of the men pulled his sword and shoved the other man high against the ship's side rail.

"BlackHeart, ye sleazy bilge rat! There was *no* treasure on that island, like ye *swore* there would be!" shouted the man holding his sword tip to the throat of the taller man in a captain's coat. A crowd of crewmen immediately encircled the two quarrelling men.

"A *minor* detail, Sleg!" Captain BlackHeart spit out as he stared down the long, shiny blade of Sleg's sword and straight into Sleg's beady black eyes.

The crewmen immediately pulled Sleg off BlackHeart and helped their captain off the side railing of his ship and into a standing position.

"Minor detail? Avast! Ye always sez that, ye do. It is not *minor*. And it is not a *detail*!" shouted Captain Sleg. "You're worse than a thief o' thieves. You're a scourge straight from Davy Jones hisself!"

BlackHeart rolled his eyes and twisted his mouth into a disbelieving smirk, which caused his pointed black moustache to quiver on the ends as he looked at the pathetic excuse for a pirate captain.

Captain Sleg and three of his men had come aboard BlackHeart's ship acting friendly enough, but now Sleg's temper had him in a snit. It would not pay to let Sleg think he had the

upper hand on BlackHeart's own ship. BlackHeart punched his long finger forcefully into the dirty, wrinkled ruffles of Sleg's once white shirt, thus shoving him backward a step or two. Sleg's peg leg slipped, and he almost fell on the clean, wet deck of the *Black Opal*.

"You, me misled miscreant, do not trust the honor of any man! I sticks to me code," snarled BlackHeart, lifting his chin in defiance and self-assurance.

"And what exactly *is* your code?" snapped Captain Sleg, squinting his eyes in distrust at Captain BlackHeart.

"Well-ll, I keeps me code secret from the likes of you," BlackHeart said smugly. Sleg swiftly brought his sword back up to BlackHeart's throat, pressing it close under his chin and forcing him backward against the railing. Again, BlackHeart's men pulled Sleg away from their captain.

"Curly, me thinks we may have to remove the fine captain's sword, so's we can get on with this dispute," BlackHeart said to his boatswain.

When Curly placed his hand on Sleg's sword to take it, three of Sleg's men grabbed at their swords. But they thought better of the idea and stepped back when several of BlackHeart's men moved forward, cutlasses in hand. Without any more fuss, Curly removed Sleg's sword from his hand.

"Now, as I was saying," BlackHeart went on, "the trade we made was one of great value for you, Sleg. Your three thousand gold Spanish doubloons for me prized, pure gold Aztec eagle warrior, which just happens to be buried on me island, near Pirates Cay. And, just to assist you in your digging, I might add, I already gave you the map!"

"You're forgetting one thing: it was *not there!*" yelled Sleg.

“You didn’t dig deep enough,” BlackHeart said slyly as a new strategy to outsmart Sleg came into his mind. “How deep did you dig?”

“Twenty feet!” roared Sleg, his bloodshot eyes boldly glaringly.

“Oh, well ... hardly deep enough,” BlackHeart drawled as he gave Sleg a sideways glance. “No wonder ye found nothing. I wouldn’t bury any treasure that shallow for fear that even a stupid pirate could find it. That’s why I buried the Aztec gold statue *thirty* feet down in that hole. A *minor detail* I must have failed to mention to ye, Cap’n.”

Then BlackHeart came closer, almost nose-to-nose with Sleg, his cool green, penetrating eyes looking straight into Sleg’s black, beady ones.

“I have other of me treasures buried there, as well. Leave ’em be. They’re not part of our deal,” BlackHeart said.

“Give the good captain’s sword back, Curly,” BlackHeart went on. “He’s waited long enough to receive his part of our bargain. A long trip awaits him and his crew, back to me island to get the Aztec statue before another pirate finds it—now that Sleg’s left the sand showing that somebody’s been *diggin’* in it.”

“Ye better be telling the truth!” Captain Sleg said spitefully. He eyed BlackHeart suspiciously as he shoved his sword into its sheath.

“Mr. Token!” BlackHeart called out to his quartermaster, who was standing on the poop deck. “Take Spider with ye! Bring up me chest o’ solid silver goblets, and I’ll be asking the fine cap’n here to bury ’em in the hole with me other treasures there, when he digs up the Aztec statue. Eh, cap’n? Saves me having to go there, meself.”

BlackHeart knew that Sleg would bury them, all right ... but not on his island.

Spider moved closer to Captain BlackHeart and Mr. Token, and watched Sleg, dragging his peg leg, scurry across the dock below to his ship, the *Scorpion*. His grumbling men struggled along behind with the heavy chest of silver goblets.

“Why did ye give ’em your fine silver goblets, Cappin? He’s no real threat to us, eh, Curly?” said the tall, dark Jamaican as Curly joined the men and nodded his bald head in agreement.

“A cheap enough price to pay, Spider,” answered BlackHeart in *perfect* English. Gone was his mock pirate’s brogue. “We need to get Sleg off this island before the Chinese junk, *Red Dragon*, sails into port. She’s laden with gold from their new discovery, a sunken Spanish galleon.”

“Galleon, eh?” said Spider with a broad grin.

“Yes,” BlackHeart said. “The sunken ship lies in the shallow waters off the string of keys in the Caribbean, according to the drunken sailor they threw off the *Red Dragon* near an island. He was their sailing master; I have no doubt about it. The merchant captain who picked up the sailor from the island was glad to be rid of him because of his constant nervous ranting aboard their ship.

“The sailor has spoken to no one here in Port Royal, save me,” BlackHeart continued. “He’s been resting quietly for the past few nights in a very private room purchased by me, along with fresh bottles of rum. Skull is sitting with him to be sure he has no intruders.

“According to the sailor, the galleon is overloaded with golden Aztec treasures, thousands of gold Spanish doubloons, and a king’s ransom in gold bars from the mines—among

other things. She was headed for Spain over a hundred years ago—must have been brought down by a storm because of her weight.

“The *Dragon*’s crew will stay in Port Royal for a week or two, carousing and spending their gold. Their captain, Chum Lee, is a barbarian, but he’s a smart tradesman. He’ll be here to trade with worldwide merchants,” BlackHeart said.

“Plot a course for the keys, Spider,” commanded Captain BlackHeart. “Ready the crew and ship to sail, Curly. The *Black Opal* sails as soon as the *Red Dragon* anchors here in Port Royal. The sailor, if one is kind of mind to call him that, will sail with us, willingly or not.

“Chum Lee will also be looking for more diving gear, all of which will be aboard the *Black Opal*.” To make his point clear, BlackHeart added, “Mr. Token, disguise a few men and quickly buy up all of the diving equipment in Port Royal, whether we need it or not. That will force Chum Lee to make an unscheduled trip to the island of Tortuga to buy the *Red Dragon*’s diving equipment, giving us plenty of time at the site of the sunken galleon. And, Mr. Token, bring aboard plenty of food and fresh water,” BlackHeart said finally. “We’ll be gone for quite some time!”

Chapter Three
An Untimely Arrival

Somewhere in Time

Jon struggled to pull himself upright in his seat and stared at the computer screen, which was still set to the outside view. The *Carousel* was definitely on the ground. Green leaves obstructed the monitor's view.

"What happened?" Jon asked Grammy frantically.

"I don't know," she replied shakily, "but it's the same kind of problem you and I had once before, remember? I'll need a few minutes on the computer, checking data to see what's wrong. Why don't you go to a porthole and tell me what you see."

Jon unfastened his seat harness and went to the porthole nearest him. "There's big green plants and tall red and orange flowers and ... *parrots*, Grammy! Parrots! They're flying all around us!"

Kathryn got up from the console and joined Jon at the porthole. The *Carousel* stood in the center of a large clearing of some very tall trees that seemed to form a canopy of sorts over shorter trees. There were patches of thin knee-high grass intermingled with white sand.

"This most definitely is not Philadelphia! We're somewhere in the tropics," Grammy said. *But where, and more important, what year? And what went wrong with the Carousel?* she wondered. She went back to the computer to look for answers.

"Can I go outside and look around?" Jon asked.

“No! Not yet, Jon.” Grammy said sharply. “Anything could be out there. We’ve crashed in the tropics somewhere in time, but I don’t know which year. For all we know, there could be dinosaurs out there!”

She keyed in a command, and the monitor displayed line after line of rapidly moving numbers, symbols, bars, and meaningless words as the computer sorted through the mountains of data. Suddenly it stopped. There was a single line displayed in large print on the computer screen:

“Port Royal, Jamaica–Caribbean Sea–May 1, 1692 AD”

Chapter Four
Don't Get Lost

Port Royal, Jamaica, May 1, 1692

“I don't know what has gone wrong with this computer, but I certainly don't trust it now. I'll have to change over to the auxiliary computer we have onboard. It's the quickest and safest way for us to get back on track and proceed to Philadelphia and the correct year. Why don't you read a book quietly while I work?”

“Boring, Grammy, boring!” Jon said impatiently.

“Patience, Jon, patience,” Grammy said, and they both laughed.

“Aw, come on, Grammy! I'll just be right outside,” Jon pleaded. “Last year on our vacation we were here in Jamaica and it was safe. I'll stay close to the *Carousel*,” Jon promised. “Grammy?” No response. Her mind was concentrated on the computer problems. “Grammy?”

“Oh, all right! Here, take the Transformer with you,” she said as she flipped open the lid of the handheld computer and keyed in some codes.

“I already know how to use the Transformer,” Jon whined. “Pappy taught me, and we practiced over and over.” But Grammy wanted to check it to be sure that its coordinates were in sync with the *Carousel*'s and the year in which they had landed.

“Good, the computer mapped this entire area before it broke down. The map in the Transformer will guide you back here if you get lost ... but don't get lost! Okay?” she said sternly as she sat back down at the computer, her mind already focused on her work.

“Okay, Grammy,” Jon said and rolled his eyes. *Grammy makes me nuts worrying about me all the time. She treats me like a little kid, like I can’t take care of myself!* Jon thought as he walked down the ramp from the ship.

Parrots were flying all around the *Carousel*. Some flew back into the forest while new ones came out as if to inspect this strange new object in their forest. Jon delighted in all the parrots: colorful macaws, white cockatoos, and black toucans with big orange and yellow beaks.

Slowly the parrots migrated deeper into the dense forest, with Jon following their flight.

As he continued to explore, Jon was wandering farther away from the *Carousel* and farther into the green foliage of the forest. He lifted some large palm fronds and walked through to the other side, where he stopped abruptly. Straight ahead of him was a bright green snake with a yellow underbelly. The snake was devouring what looked like a rat. All but the feet and long tail of the rat were already down the throat of the snake. Then with one big gulp, the snake shut its mouth over the remains. Since the snake seemed to be ignoring Jon, he continued to watch as the snake moved ahead.

A small rodent, similar to a chipmunk, sat in front of the snake. Without warning, the large snake sprang at the chipmunk, sinking its fangs into the little creature. The chipmunk wiggled a few seconds and then was still as the snake began to devour the chipmunk, its long body constricting and relaxing as the second ball appeared in its long length. Having seen enough, Jon walked in another direction.

There were so many new and interesting things to see in this tropical paradise that Jon did not realize how long he had been gone, or how far he had walked. A full hour had passed when he came upon an open area under the tall trees. In front of him stood a black withered tree with a

limb split and hanging down to the ground. He moved closer. It looked like a bazillion big black ants crawling in and out of a hole in the trunk of the large dead tree. *Those ants must be an inch long!* he thought as he quickly turned and hurried away before any of them could get on him.

Jon swatted at a bee buzzing near his head and turned to see a huge beehive hanging from the lower branch of a tree nearby. The honeycomb was exposed on one side of the hive, and bees crawled in and out of the comb, leaving their deposits of nectar. Jon shied away. He knew better than to mess with bees at their hive.

The crack of a twig behind him aroused Jon's awareness to his surroundings. The forest had grown quieter, and darker than it seemed before. *Where did the parrots go?* he wondered. Looking up, he could see nothing but leaves. The towering trees closed out all but an occasional glint of sunlight. He walked one way, then another way. Nothing looked familiar. He was lost!

"Gram-m-my!" Jon called out several times. No answer, only the soft sounds of the birds chirping and the cicadas buzzing. He tried to backtrack, but the brush and foliage were so thick, he couldn't see any of his foot imprints.

He became increasingly afraid of being alone in this strange place. The forest all looked the same. "Don't panic," he said to himself. Tears were stinging the backs of his eyes, and he was about to let them fall, when he saw a clearing ahead. Running into the opening where the sun shone in, he saw two paths that led away from the clearing. There was only one answer: *follow the path*. At least enough people had been walking here to make a path, but which path should he follow? In frustration, he jammed his hands into his pockets. His right hand felt a familiar metal object.

“The Transformer!” Jon sang out as he pulled the small silver object from his pocket. “I forgot I had it. Grammy said the area around the *Carousel* was mapped. I can follow the map back to the *Carousel!*”

He quickly flipped open the lid of the Transformer and keyed in his code. The words “Computer Off” came up on the screen. He pushed the Reset button and a red light flashed as the Transformer screen cleared. He input his code again, the red light flashed once, and the screen went black. There was no connection to the *Carousel's* computer.

Jon had no way of knowing that Grammy had briefly turned off the power to the *Carousel's* computer while she transferred the cables to the auxiliary computer.

Jon let out a heavy sigh, put the small silver Transformer back into his pocket, and stood looking at the two paths, one narrow, one wide.

Which path?