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**New KING OF
THE ISLANDS
Adventure**

ISLAND of SILENCE



It was weird . . . uncanny. As the Dawn approached the usually busy island of Lalua there was not a soul to be seen . . . not a sound to be heard!

By **CHARLES
HAMILTON**

A Fright
for
Danny!

CAPTAIN KING, I guess?"

The long, lean figure was lounging on the veranda rail as the shipmates of the Dawn came up the coral steps. The white man of Lalua did not step forward and greet his visitors, but he gave them a nod and addressed them in a voice that had a strong nasal accent.

His eyes, deep-set in a hard, seamed face, scanned the two shipmates with keen scrutiny as he spoke.

"Ay, ay!" answered Ken. "I expected to see Dan Sullivan here."

"Sullivan's been gone a month—ever since I came out to relieve him, I guess!" answered the long, lean white man. "You're meeting Ahab Pinner, Captain King. I guess you've called for copra?"

"The usual cargo," answered Ken.

"I reckon you've put in your call for nothing! I've got no cargo this time."

"No cargo?" repeated the boy trader blankly; while Hudson looked hard and curiously at the lean man lounging on the rail.

"Nope! I've had some trouble on this island. Strike of the natives," drawled Pinner.

"A strike of the natives!" said Ken, again repeating the American's words in sheer surprise.

"Yep! I guess they wanted higher pay—and I guess I wasn't throwing away the Pacific Company's money on the black trash. Not a sack of copra in the sheds!" said Pinner. "I guess I'm sorry you've had your trouble for nothing, Captain King, but there it is."

"Where are the natives?" asked Ken abruptly.

Pinner waved a lean hand towards the coconut groves.

"Cleared off to the other side of the island!" he said. "They've left me on my own."

King of the Islands stood silent. He was utterly astonished by the news. There had never been any trouble on Lalua before. Fat, cheery Dan Sullivan had never had a word of disagreement with the natives. Most of them worked on the coconut plantations for the Pacific Company, and spent most of their earnings at the trader's store. If there had been a "strike" of native labour since the new man had taken over from Sullivan, the fault was not on the side of the happy, peaceful Lahuans. Ken was sure of that.

"Perhaps I could help!" said Ken at last. "I've been here before; I'm pretty well known to most of them. I'll speak to them if you like."

"I guess I can manage my company's business without help from a sea-going skipper, Captain King!" answered Ahab Pinner dryly.

Ken coloured with annoyance.

"They'll come round!" said Pinner. "I guess they got to come round sooner or later. But I got my own ways with niggers."

"Your ways don't seem to have benefited the Pacific Company much so far!" said King of the Islands.

Pinner shrugged his lean shoulders.

"That's my business, and the company's!" he answered coolly. "I reckon you're sore at losing freights, Captain King, but I ain't got a cargo this trip, and that's that! I don't want any interference between me and the niggers. I'm running Lalua my own way."

"I'm not here to interfere!" said Ken. "I'm here for cargo, and if there's no cargo, the sooner I pull out the better."

Hudson, watching the lean, seamed face with intent curiosity, read the glitter that shot into the deep-set eyes at Ken's words. The mate of the Dawn saw—though he could not guess why—that the American trader was eager to see the Dawn pull out of the lagoon.

"I guess you can fix it with the company at the end of your trip, Captain King!" drawled Pinner. "They got to pay you for time, if not for freightage."

"I shall pull out as soon as I can get the hook up!" answered King of the Islands curtly. "But one of my crew is a relative of your house-boy here. I've brought him ashore to see him."

Pinner glanced at Danny. His brow wrinkled in a frown.

"I guess it can't be done!" he answered slowly. "My house-boy's sacked himself and gone off with the other niggers."

Ken bit his lip.

"The boy's keen to see his relative," he said. "You know what Kanakas are like, I suppose. Lalua's not a big island—I can give Danny time to go and see Tototo, wherever he is. Where is he?"

Pinner's lean jaw squared.

"I've told you that the niggers have gone over to the other side," he answered. "and I've told you I don't want any interference on Lalua. Take your nigger back to your ketch with you, Captain King."

"Me wantee see feller Tototo, sar!" wailed Danny. "White master belong me say me see feller Tototo, sar, along we come along Lalua, sar."

"That's enough from you!" rapped Pinner, glaring at the dismayed cooky-boy. "You shut up mouth belong you, or I'll shut it for you!" He turned to Ken again, scowling. "Captain King, I guess you're wasting time here—my time as well as your own."

King of the Islands gave him a single look and turned away. Hudson, who had not said a word during this peculiar interview, followed him to the steps.

The shipmates walked down the coral path to the beach, Ken's brow clouded with annoyance. Danny followed slowly.

The cooky-boy glanced right and left, scanning the vicinity of the bungalow as he went, as if in hope of seeing some sign of the house-boy. Suddenly he turned from the coral path and cut off at a run towards the coconut groves. Danny had made up his mind that he was going to see Tototo, wherever Tototo was.

Ken and Kit did not notice his action as Danny was behind them. But they were very quickly apprised of it by a roar from behind.

"You feller boy, you go along boat!" came the angry roar of the lean trader.

The shipmates glanced round. Danny, already at a distance, was scuttling up the beach towards the palms. Ahab Pinner was roaring at him, and as Danny did not stop, he reached to his hip pocket and whipped out a revolver.

Bang!

Danny gave a yell of terror as the bullet knocked up a spout of sand hardly a yard from his racing bare feet.

"You swab!" roared King of the Islands, his eyes blazing at the trader. "Stop that! How dare you fire on my cooky-boy?"

"Keep your niggers on your ship!" roared back the trader. "I'm telling you, if that boy don't make for the boat, I'll drop him with the next shot!"

"Danny!" shouted Ken.

But the cooky-boy was already scuttling back. One warning shot was enough for him. He came back with a rush, passed the shipmates, and plunged headlong into the waiting whaleboat.

King of the Islands paused a moment or two, his eyes fixed on the flushed and enraged face of the trader. Then, with a deep breath, he went down to the boat, and the Kanakas pulled back to the Dawn.

King of the Islands was frowning as the Dawn left her anchorage and took the reef passage to the sea.

The lean figure of the American trader was visible on the veranda there watching the Dawn go out.

"That swab's glad to get shut of us, Ken!" remarked Hudson.

"Not so glad as I am to be shut of him!" grunted King of the Islands. "I've never seen a man I'd sooner boot. Kit, he's made all the trouble there is on this island since he took over from Sullivan."

"It's a queer business!" said the mate of the Dawn slowly. "I don't get it, Ken. Why should he be so keen to get rid of white men if he's got a heap of trouble on hand with all the niggers on the island?"

"A bullying brute!" grunted Ken. "Still, we didn't come here for a row with the company's trader! I shan't be sorry to drop Lalua astern."

And Ken gave his attention to the reef passage. The Dawn glided out into the Pacific, hardly an hour after having entered the lagoon. King of the Islands had a clouded brow and a sore temper. It was irritating to have missed cargo at

QUEER!" said King of the Islands.

"I don't get it!" said Kit Hudson, the mate of the Dawn, as puzzled as his skipper.

Every eye on the Dawn was fixed on the white beach of Lalua, as the ketch glided into the lagoon from the Pacific.

Koko, the big brown-skinned boatswain, wrinkled his dusky brow in perplexity as he stood at the wheel. Kololo and Tomoo, Lufu and Lompo and Danny, the cooky-boy, stared blankly.

On the beach of Lalua, circling the shining lagoon, nobody was to be seen.

Back of the beach were the groves of coconut palms which produced the copra that Lalua exported once in three months, when a ship called for cargo. Lalua was a remote island, and seldom saw a white man's ship oftener than that. But if the natives of Lalua were in the coconut groves, they were not to be seen there. Neither, on the lagoon, was a single canoe visible. Lalua had the look of a deserted island, and yet, as Ken King knew, there were not fewer than a hundred inhabitants—brown Polynesians, peaceful and light-hearted, always excited by the rare coming of a ship, crowding down to the beach and coming out in their canoes on such occasions.

Now not a man was to be seen. King of the Islands turned his eyes on the trader's bungalow, a low building of palm poles and pandanus thatch, standing on a coral foundation eight or nine feet high.

Sullivan, the Pacific Company's trader, should have been there, ready with his cargo of copra. Ken had expected Sullivan's red head to be one of the first objects to meet his view as he entered the lagoon. But there was no red head to be seen. The Pacific Company's trader seemed to have vanished as completely as the natives of Lalua.

"Suffering cats!" said Hudson. "I don't get this! Not blackbirds, Ken, in these days!"

Ken shook his head.

In the old days it would not have been surprising to see a small island cleared of its inhabitants carried off by the shipload to work in the Queensland plantations. But those black old days were long past.

"Blessed if it doesn't look like it, Kit," said the boy trader. "But it can't be that. Even if some gang of sea-lawyers had been here and cleared out Lalua like Easter Island, they wouldn't have touched a white man. And where's Dan Sullivan?"

Ken shook his head hopelessly over the problem. He could not suppose that a gang of blackbirds had kidnapped the Lahuans. They must have fled to the

bush—but why? The sight of a strange ship might, perhaps, have scared them into hiding, for fear of the "shanghaing" by some short-handed skipper. But the Dawn was known at Lalua. The trader's house-boy, Tototo, was from Hiva-Oa, and a relative of Danny, the cooky-boy; and Danny wore, on a cord round his fat neck, a clock that he had brought on the trip as a present for that relative. Tototo at least might have been expected to be in evidence to greet Danny.

"What name feller belong Lalua no stop?" murmured Koko.

Ken shook his head again. He could not tell the boatswain "what name" the Lahuans "no stop." The problem beat him.

"The sooner we get ashore and look into this better, Kit!" he said. "Sullivan may be sick in his bungalow and unable to come out—but that wouldn't account for every man on the island having vanished."

The Dawn swung to her anchorage. The cable ran out, and Ken rapped an order. The whaleboat dropped from the davits.

There was a sudden, sharp exclamation from Koko. He pointed with a brown finger.

"White feller stop!"

King of the Islands and his mate looked quickly in the direction pointed out by the boatswain, and saw a white Panama hat emerging from the palm groves behind the house. The face under it was turned towards the Dawn.

"Sullivan—" began Hudson.

"No! Sullivan's short and fat," answered Ken. "Look at this fellow!"

The man who had come out of the palms was long and lean. He was clearly a white man, though his face was hardly to be distinguished at the distance.

He moved on, with long strides, and disappeared from view behind the house. Apparently he entered the bungalow by a door at the back.

"Sullivan was the only white man on Lalua," said Ken. "That looks as if the Pacific Company has sent out a new trader. But where are the natives?"

The Panama hat reappeared, this time in the veranda in the front of the bungalow. The long, lean figure stood there, leaning on the rail, staring at the ketch.

Ken and Hudson stepped into the whaleboat. Lompo and Tomoo look the oars. Danny leaned over the rail.

"Me likee plenty too much see Tototo, eye belong me, sar," said the cooky-boy. "Me bring feller tick-tock along give that feller Tototo."

"You come along boat, Danny!" answered Ken, with a smile, and the cooky-boy dropped into the whaleboat.

The Kanakas pulled to the beach, and the shipmates landed. The white man in the veranda watched them with keen eyes under the brim of the Panama, as they came up the coral path from the beach, puzzled and curious to know what had happened on Lalua since Ken's last call.

The
Stranger

Lalua, after having made a special run to the remote island to pick up copra there. He was concerned, too, for the happy-go-lucky, laughter-loving Lalua, subjected to that hard-fisted bully, after the easy reign of cheery old Dan Sullivan. Obviously it was the brawny fist of the trader, backed up by the revolver, that had caused the natives to desert their grass-houses and clear off to the other side of Lalua. Trade and industry on the island were at a standstill. And Ken, who was a very considerate skipper, was worried about Danny, who had been looking forward during a long trip to that meeting with his relative.

But there was nothing that Ken could do. It was not for a sea-going skipper to interfere with the arrangements of the Pacific Company, and of the trader they sent out to their station. Lalua dropped into a blur on the blue sea astern. As the ketch ran on a long tack, Ken noticed that some of the Kanakas were muttering together, and caught the name of Danny in their muttering. But he gave no special heed; and he did not notice that the cooky-boy was not visible about the ketch, as he supposed him to be in his galley. Lalua was almost out of sight when Koko came up to him.

"Danny no stop, sar!" said the boat-swain. Ken stared at him. "Danny no stop?" he repeated. "That feller stop along galley, Koko." "This feller Koko look along galley, sar, eye belong him," answered the boat-swain. "Danny no stop along galley."

King of the Islands stood astonished for the moment. It was hardly possible that the cooky-boy could have fallen overboard in fair weather, and unnoticed either by the crew or the after-guard. And he recalled the muttering he had heard among the Kanakas.

"You savvy what name that feller Danny no stop, Koko?" he asked. "Me no savvy, sar, me tinkee he stop along Lalua, along he wantee see feller Tototo!" answered the boatswain. Ken breathed hard.

"You feller Tomoo!" he rapped. The Kanaka seaman came up. "You savvy what place Danny stop?" demanded Ken.

"Yessar," answered Tomoo. "That feller stop along Lalua, sar. He go along lagoon, sar, along he swim along beach, sar! Me see um, sar, eye belong me."

Ken compressed his lips. Danny had slipped over the side, to swim ashore before the ketch pulled out of Lalua. He had taken care that skipper or mate or boatswain did not see him—but the crew had seen him. With the infinite capacity of Kanakas for minding their own business, they had seen it, without interfering or mentioning what they had seen, until Tomoo was questioned.

"Him wantee see feller Tototo, too much," added Tomoo. "Him wantee see feller tick-tock along that feller, sar." Ken gestured to him to go.

"We're lost our cooky-boy, Ken!" said the mate of the Dawn. "The best cook in the Seven Seas. The fat swab! He will be sorry for himself if that brute Pinner spots him on the island."

"We've not lost him, Kit!" said King of the Islands. "Danny's a fool—but it's Pinner's fault—why couldn't he let the boy see his relative? We're running back for him."

"We're lost time on this trip already, Ken—and we had our run to Lalua for nothing!" said Hudson. "Still, we don't want to lose our cook. And"—he grimaced—"it will be a treat to see Pinner's face when he sees us come in again after guessing and calculating that he's seen the last of us."

"Bout ship!" said King of the Islands. King of the Islands had decided—and the ketch swung for Lalua, and ran swiftly to the island they had not expected to see again till six months had passed.

"SEARCH me!" breathed Ahab Pinner. His lean, seamed face wrinkled with rage, in which alarm was mingled. Standing in the veranda of Sullivan's bungalow, the long, lean American

had a pair of binoculars clamped to his eyes. For some time he had been watching the sails of the Dawn sink to the sea rim. Relief and satisfaction were plainly marked in the hard face as the Dawn's sails sank to a speck on the sea—and she seemed about to disappear from view altogether.

But suddenly alarm and rage flashed into Pinner's face as the ketch, on the point of disappearing into the blue, emerged into clearer view—clearer and taller, rising from the sea. The Dawn had swung round towards the island again and was coming back. For long, long minutes the trader of Lalua stared. He lowered the glasses—he did not need them now. The tall

canvas of the Dawn was clear to the naked eye—speeding over the blue waters back to Lalua. Ahab Pinner turned from the rail, and stamped down the coral steps to the beach. The rage in his face was savage and bitter, and there was a murderous glitter in his deep-set, narrow eyes.

That the trader did not want to see them at Lalua, Ken and Kit knew; but they would have been astonished had they witnessed the rage in his face as he saw their return.

The Dawn was at the reef by the time Ahab Pinner reached the lagoon. From a hollow of the coral on the shore he pulled out a canoe and slid it into the lagoon. He threw himself into it, taking a double-bladed paddle, evidently with the intention of going aboard as soon as the ketch returned to her anchorage.

Kit Hudson looked round with a grin on his sunburnt face. "We're getting a visit this time, Ken, instead of paying one!" he remarked. King of the Islands looked curiously at the dark, scowling face in the canoe, and he shrugged his shoulders. The trader's long, lean arms wielded the paddle swiftly, and the canoe shot towards the Dawn.

The Dawn anchored, and the hook had hardly struck the coral below when the canoe touched her hull. The trader of Lalua made fast, grasped the rail, and swung himself on board the ketch. He panted as he faced the two shipmates, the Hiva-Oa crew watching him curiously.

"What's the game, Captain King?" spluttered Pinner. "What are you back at Lalua for? What are you spying into here, you meddling fool?"

Ken looked at him. "Better language, Mr. Pinner!" he said quietly. "You can't talk to a skipper like that on his own deck."

"I guess I'll talk as I choose!" roared Ahab Pinner, his lean face red with rage. "I've got no cargo for you. Keep clear of my island!"

"Have you bought the island from the Pacific Company, Mr. Pinner?" asked Kit Hudson, with gentle sarcasm. "Pack it up!" snarled Pinner. "I've got no use for backchat from a mate! I'm here to warn you off, King of the Islands! You're getting out of this lagoon, and you're getting out quick."

"Keep your temper, Mr. Pinner," said Ken, more astonished than angry at the Lalua trader's violence. "I've come back on my own business, not to butt in on yours. One of my men stayed behind, and I've come back to pick him up."

"That's a lie!" retorted Pinner. "I saw your boat's crew come back to your ten-cent yawl, and no man went ashore afterwards."

Evidently the trader of Lalua had not observed Danny swimming to the beach. No doubt the Hiva-Oa boy had taken great care not to be observed, after his experience with the bully of Lalua.

The boy trader's face flushed crimson. He made a step towards Ahab, but checked himself.

"You fool," he said contemptuously. "I tell you, you refused to let my cooky-boy see his relative here and he swam for it. I came back as soon as I missed him."

Pinner gave a scornful laugh. "Keep your lies to yourself," he said. "They're no use to me. You're going to pull out. Got that?"

Ken breathed hard. "I shall pull out as soon as I get my cook on board!" he answered. "Most likely I shan't have to wait an hour."

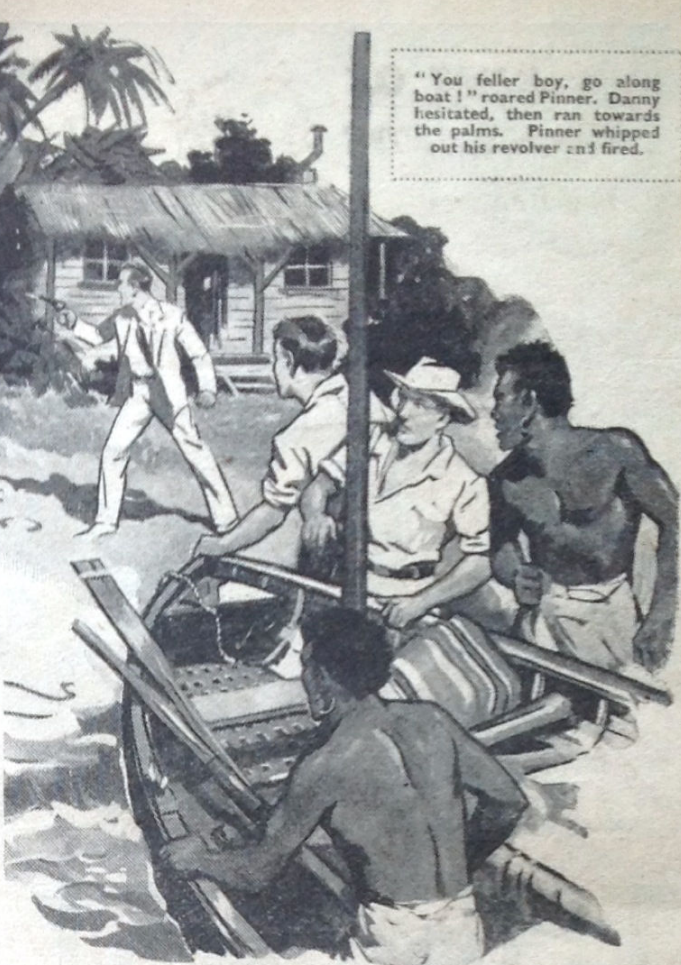
"I'll put it plain, Mr. Ahab Pinner!" said the boy trader quietly. "I expect Danny to come on board as soon as he sees the ketch here—but I shall wait for him—and if he doesn't turn up, I shall land and fetch him—and the Dawn will stay at anchor exactly as long as I choose! So far as you're concerned, you don't come into the picture at all! Now get off my ship!"

"I've ordered you off this island!" breathed Pinner. "I've told you to get up your hook and clear."

Ken snapped his fingers in the angry, lean face. "That for your orders, Mr. Pinner!" he said. "Now get back to your canoe, before I tell my Kanakas to throw you into it!"

"You're staying!" panted Pinner. "You're sticking in this lagoon—making out that you're waiting for a nigger cook! You spying swab!"

Ken gave him a keen look. "What is there to spy on at Lalua?"



"You feller boy, go along boat!" roared Pinner. Danny hesitated, then ran towards the palms. Pinner whipped out his revolver and fired.

he asked quietly. "What's going on on this island that you don't want a white man to see, Mr. Pinner?"

The American trader checked the savage words on his lips. Perhaps he realised that he had said too much already. Ken pointed to the canoe.

"Get going!" he said. "You're staying?" muttered Pinner. "I've told you so."

"I guess," said the trader, between his teeth, "that you got another guess coming, King of the Islands! You're pulling out, and I'm going to see you pull out before I leave this packet. You can drop me in my canoe when you make the reef! Get that hook up!"

Ken burst into a laugh of sheer amusement. He did not want trouble with the trader of Lalua, but he was not likely to jump to Pinner's orders on his own deck.

Pinner made a stride towards King of the Islands, his long, lean form towering over the boy trader.

"You pulling out?" he roared. "I've said no!"

Pinner was rushing at him the next moment, his brawny fists in the air. King of the Islands made a swift backward leap, then he rushed in, hitting out right and left. The trader's brawny fists were knocked up, Ken's right came with a crash on his bony jaw, his left with another crash on the long, sharp nose.

The trader of Lalua went staggering back till he brought up against the rail. There was a cackle of merriment from the Hiva-Oa boys. With the blood streaming from his nose, a dark bruise forming on his bony, stubby chin, the trader of Lalua staggered, panting, against the rail.

Then his hand whipped to his hip. But he had no time to draw the revolver. King of the Islands was on him before he could grasp the butt. A crashing blow sent the long, lean figure tottling over the rail.

There was a crash below, as the trader went headlong into his canoe. The canoe rocked, and shipped water under his weight as he crashed. Ahab Pinner sprawled in it, drenched to the skin, spluttering fury. Ken cast off the tapa cord that held the canoe to the ketch.

"Get out!" he rapped. Ahab Pinner glared up at him. But he grasped the paddle and started for the beach. His handling on the deck of the Dawn seemed to have been enough for him. He paddled back to the beach, dragged the canoe on the sand and tramped back to the bungalow.

"So much for friend Pinner!" chuckled Kit Hudson.

Ken cast a searching glance round the beach of Lalua. There was no sign of Danny nor any sign of the natives of Lalua. The lean figure of the trader disappeared into the bungalow.

"What on earth's the trouble here, Kit?" asked Ken. "That swab doesn't believe that we've come back for our cook. He fancies we've got our eyes on him. Why?"

"Ask me another!" said Hudson. "It's got me beat! I fancy we're through with him."

But the mate of the Dawn was mistaken.

"Ooooh!" stuttered Lompo, the Hiva-Oa boy, bounding clear of the deck, clapping his hand to his head as a coral comb was suddenly torn away from his thick mop of hair.

Bang!

A second later, the report of a rifle rolled from Lalua.

"Feller along Lalua, shoot along gun, along head belong me!" gasped Lompo. King of the Islands stared in amazement at the bungalow up the beach. Across the rail of the veranda the barrel of a rifle glimmered in the sunshine. Behind it was the trader of Lalua. Even as he stared, there came a second shot, grazing the cedar mainmast of the Dawn as it whizzed by over the deck.

With exclamations of alarm, the Hiva-Oa boys ducked for cover under the teak rail. Another and another bullet from the Winchester spattered on the Dawn.

"Up hook!" rapped Ken. "We're pulling out of rifle-range."

The anchor swung clear of the deep coral, and the Dawn moved from her anchorage and headed in the direction of the reef passage, but she did not enter it. Swinging away from the passage, the ketch glided round the inner side of the reef and then the trader of Lalua understood.

Bang, bang, bang! roared from the bungalow as he pumped out bullets.

But the ketch was out of effective range now and the lead flew yards wide. Far from the beach in her new anchorage the Dawn dropped anchor again. Ken turned his binoculars on the trader's bungalow and the powerful glasses picked up the lean face of Ahab Pinner, red with rage under the Panama, as he pumped out random and futile shots. He dropped the butt of the Winchester at last and stood glaring.

"We're staying, Kit!" said King of the Islands grimly. "Time and trade can go to pot. We're not pulling out of Lalua till we know why that villain wants to get shut of us! What's going on on this island, that that swab's so desperate to keep secret?"

Hudson could only shake his head. The mystery of Lalua was too much for the shipmates of the Dawn.

Next Week :
WARNED OFF LALUA

Ordered Off!

Modern Boy