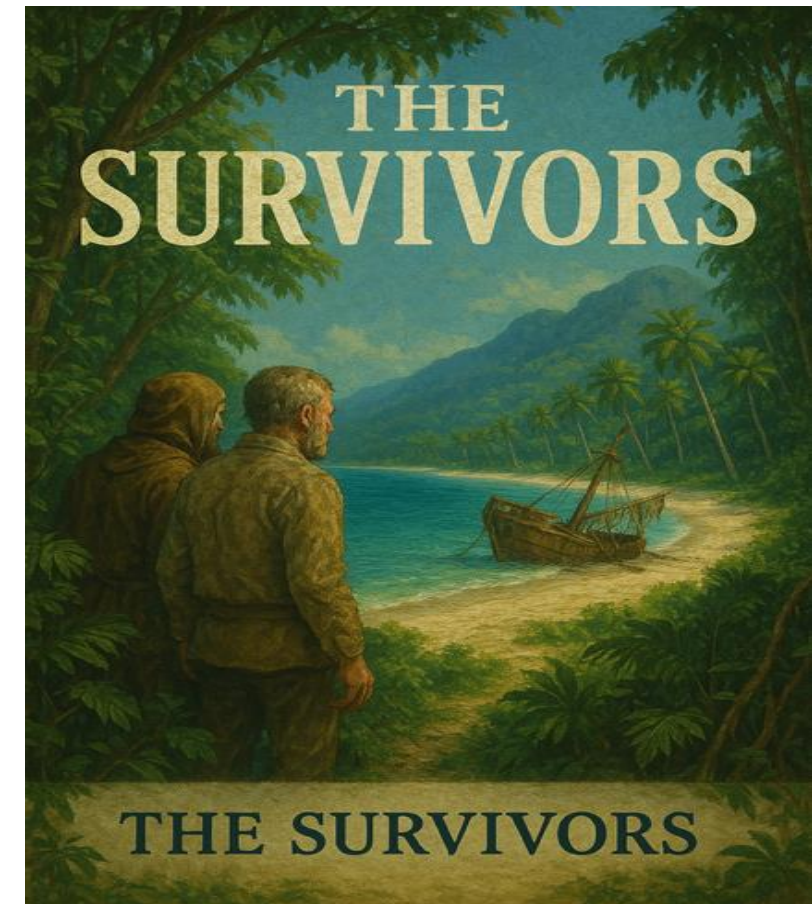


# The Survivors

Hugo Stegeman



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## Chapter One - The Expedition Vessel

It had been a few hours since we left shore, and were heading as far south as we possibly could towards the devastating South Pole. Our crew consisted of fourteen people and our hopes were high to find a remarkable discovery in the freezing cold at the bottom of the world. At that moment, it was pitch dark. The only visible matter was the light being emitted by the vessel. Three people were on a shift: me (the second youngest), the captain, and the engine room worker. I worked as a patrol member with three other people (Stuart, Xander and Alex) looking around the ocean and pointing out any possible hazards. We also contacted the captain a fair amount of times to share what we had seen.

## Chapter Two – “Halfway there! Or maybe not...”

The crew was still elated on taking the risk of sailing this far, but a few hours ago, we experienced an atrocious storm which damaged the stabilisers. A few crew members were looking for a solution. If this problem was left untreated, it could have ended up as a disaster.

We headed to the dining area to eat our lunch. We sat down and were served some simple protein bars and sandwiches. As I consumed my lunch, two workers began arguing ferociously about who should stay in the boiler room.

“You said I could replace you in the middle of the journey. We’re halfway there!” the first one spat out.

The second one, on the other hand, had a rather peaceful response, “Or maybe not...” Once again, the less peaceful one shouted,

“I don’t care! You get away from the boiler room. I’ve been doing nothing for the past two days!” Then the intensity hyped up. They were shouting over each other while a few other crew members

tried to calm them down. I sat there watching the madness. For sure, they wouldn’t be friends and get along after that.

The expedition was taking longer than expected. A few members were worried. Compared to the first two days, the happiness levels had decreased slightly. Now, after four days, people were wondering whether the food would last enough to feed everyone on the boat. We had to make fishing rods just in case. There wasn’t enough space in the storage compartment, so we had to leave them outside in a crate. Another storm hit in the night, thus swallowing the box whole off the vessel. This caused even higher levels of anger and desperation, as there weren’t enough supplies to make new rods. The captain was sure we’d get to the South Pole on time.

After a week, the captain thought of returning to land. But this was a suicide mission, as land was way too far to return to with this little fuel in the ship’s tank. The putt-putt of the engine started numbing my ears since I had been listening to it for so long. Four people had already disappeared – nobody knew what happened to them. There was a rumour saying that their emotions took over, and they threw themselves off the boat hoping for a better experience. I couldn’t say that this wasn’t a sensible guess. There were only ten people left,

and only four of them (including me) were still committed to the expedition. The other six were either injured due to the storm last week and were too weak to continue, or they were too insane to carry on working. Alex coughed out,

“We can’t carry on like this. We have to find a way to move this rust bucket quicker.” I agreed hopefully and nodded my head.

“The ship can’t be monitored by only four people...” he mumbled. I was about to tell him how lucky we were to embark on an expedition when my hunger hit. Suddenly, I felt weak, and I started collapsing. Then, it was just pitch black...

## Chapter Three – “Where am I?”

I woke up on a bed. I couldn’t recall what happened, so I must have hit my head hard. I looked to my left and I saw two other people laying on identical beds as mine. “Alex? Where are you? Where am I?” That’s when I realised, my body was still on the boat. Just in the medical room. My vision was still blurry, and I could only talk as a rasp. To be honest, I didn’t think we’d survive if we remained in that condition. I fainted again...

I woke up to a wave clenching the vessel like a toy, which made an unpleasant screeching sound. The boat struggled and rocked from side to side, up and down. I could hear muffled and distressing shouts from outside. I only heard a few words clearly:

“... no time!”

“Storm... too hard!”

I attempted to stand up, but a wave crashed into the boat, and I fell back onto my head. For a few seconds, my body went unconscious, and then my head was pressured with excruciating pain. I wasn’t

giving up though. I managed to limp over to the door leading to the dining room and heaved it open.

Big mistake...

Another wave smashed the vessel's prow, and I tumbled forward in an arc shape and my back hit the edge of a table. My spine cracked, and I cried out in pain. Not only did it nearly crush my spine, but it winded me badly. I grasped for air desperately. Another wave – probably the largest and most gargantuan of them all – shattered the windows near the prow of the boat, letting litres of water gush in. The captain was forced off his chair and fell out the boat, never to be seen again...

Somehow, I had slept that night. I must have fallen unconscious again. There was still no sign of land on the now calm sea. Levels of happiness had been completely washed away and turned into a glum, careless manner. Only three of the remaining seven people had the slightest bit of hope. The three hopeful people were me, Stuart, and Alex. After nearly four weeks of sailing, the original estimated time of arrival – one week – had been blasted away and forgotten. Food was scarce, so rationing was the only option to

survive on this expedition vessel. Now with the captain gone, and the boat manual's font drowned away by water, driving the ship was nearly impossible. But who said that it was impossible...

## Chapter Four – Old days...

Stuart learned how to steer the ship after two reasonably calm weeks. The ship had sunk fifty-two centimetres since we embarked on this cursed expedition. The fourteen members of the crew had turned into a depressing six. Working on that ship had become two-and-a-half times slower than it had been when the journey was one day in. We had 0.8 kg of food, 4 litres of water and 34 litres of fuel. Engine failures became more common due to the lack of fuel and the supplies to repair broken parts, which were spread across the vessel, had all been used up. That meant no fixing leaks or broken windows. I still remembered when those two men had argued over who should stay in the boiler room. If they experienced the state and the smell of it, neither of them would have dared enter. Obviously, some unlucky worker always had to supervise it. All the six crew members left, (including me) were extremely skinny and vile. The worst bit of the expedition had been not knowing where we were or where we were going. Our radar had broken two weeks earlier, and our boat, instead of heading toward someplace colder had been drifting into a hotter environment. This meant more frequent

storms. Our shifts had become less intense than before so we could get more rest and re-energise our bodies for the days ahead.

“Robert!” shouted Stuart. Oh, that’s me.

“Come now!”

“OK, OK, I’m coming!” I shouted in return. I put my book down and stepped outside into the scorching heat.

“Can you take a look at this?” He showed me a small hole in the deck. It led down to the bottom of the boat.

“I don’t see anything wrong or dangerous about it,” I explained. In return, he gave me a look that basically meant, “Seriously?” or “Are you kidding me?” I asked him what was so different about it and his response convinced me to try to repair it – even with no materials. After four hours or so, the reparation was complete. We would have had a higher chance of sinking without it. It was nighttime once again, and I was very sweaty. I had been lured to bed by exhaustion, and from my bed, I saw through a broken window in the roof, the stars watching down on us.

“Please help us...” I whispered.

## Chapter Five – Worst Nightmare

I woke up late compared to the others. I wondered why... This was the time everybody was supposed to wake up. I had an odd feeling saying,

*“Save yourself, save yourself, save yourself...”*

When I stepped out of bed, I heard intimidating rumblings from the skies above and some larger waves lapping against the vessel. I was already telling myself,

*“This is bad. Get ready.”*

To my horror, and everybody else’s, if you looked precisely through the mist and into the distance, you would see a towering wave rapidly speeding towards the expedition vessel. Compared to the wave, the ship looked like a wrecked toy hopelessly bobbing towards a starving monster. The crew and I ran into the dining area, raced up the stairs and into the captain’s room. As it was in the middle, it was the safest.

“Stay here!” one of the terrified people screamed, then launched himself down the stairs and closed the door to the driving room. The engine spluttered to life and the ship moved. He tried to drive away to avoid the wave as best as he could. Another crew member was petrified, like all of us were. He was hoping for the best and was whispering some inaudible words. The vessel started shaking and rocking in all sorts of directions violently while rain, hail and wind battered the windows. The sea had turned into a hole, swallowing anything in its path. At an instant, there was a deafening crash of metal, the lights flickered, and a deep hum noise filled our ears. We all screamed as we tripped and fell all over the room. More metal crunched and churned as meter-high waves tortured and deformed the ship’s structure. Blood dripped down my face and my body was weak. Stuart wasn’t in much better shape. He was unconscious. Alex’s right leg was slightly cut while hitting a sharp edge of a window. He looked at me for one last time before the monstrous wave would crush the boat.

It hit. I could only hear ringing and could feel objects thrashing me, but I felt no pain. Then, there was nothing...



I woke up dazed and bruised. I felt sick and tired. I was still in the ship, but it was on its side. Could this mean... No way. The ship somehow blasted away to land. That was a lucky shot. Enthusiastically, I slid off the wrecked boat, which was buried in sand. As soon as my feet touched the golden sand, I fell over onto my face. It had been the first time in six and a half weeks that my body felt land. It felt like I was moving, because of the constant shaking of the boat. One of the crew members, Bartholomew, had fallen out of the vessel and into the ocean. Alex also disappeared. Stuart comforted me. Him, a crew member called Harry, and I, were the only ones left.

## Chapter Six – The Island

After three days on the island, we had been trying to repair the ship as best as we could with palm tree wood, killing boar for meat, drinking coconut water for hydration, and gathering oil to fuel up the boat. That hadn't been easy. We made a campfire next to the vessel's hull and used the old bed duvets for warmth. Harry placed those around the campfire. It had been an intense day. We cleared the boat of sand and built an artificial wooden fence surrounding it. This should stop most of the water from taking away the remains of the boat.

My head had constantly been bleeding because of the treacherous night when I hit it on the side of the ship. We figured whether there were wild animals that could possibly harm us. I mean, other than boar. Better stay conscious, then.

I stood up and investigated the distance to see a storm heading our way.

"I hope this barrier does good," Harry said, looking at the wooden fence surrounding the boat.

"I hope so too," I replied. Stuart was still busy in the never-ending forest gathering more wood to repair the ship. Or at least to try to.

The waves climbed the sand, growing higher. Thunder rumbled above us, waiting for the right moment to release its fury. Our only refuge had been the boat, so we entered through a small gap and waited. Waited for the storm to end.

In the morning, we saw that the barrier had been damaged and some of the pillars had fallen. The sand had been taken by the water, so it meant that the ship had fallen with it. The ship crushed the pillars in front of it and half of it had fallen into the water - the half which had all our supplies. Harry was also sleeping there; he fell in the water too. It was just Stuart and I now.

I sauntered to the forest in hope of finding stone or iron. We had to make some tools to gather more resources. Annoyingly, we didn't have any rope to connect parts.

After about half an hour, I found a massive rock towering over me. "Nice," I said to myself. It should have worked as a good barrier. Maybe we'd find iron in there. Wouldn't that be something?

I crawled around boar territory with my eyes peeled for danger. Strange. There was nothing, not even a sound. My eyes tracked a moving figure darting across the forest floor. I'd thought I had one. No, wait, that wasn't the shape of a boar, that was the shape of a bear!

I fled in panic and adrenaline boosted my running. I heard an echoing roar and birds fluttering away from the east side. By the time I escaped the forest and reached the shipwreck, my body collapsed. I couldn't afford to waste my energy running a mile to get back 'home'. Another mistake. My legs decided to take a rest and told me to sit. I realised I should follow what they said. So, I sat down.

I stood up, walked to the crate a few meters away and grabbed a coconut – we had refilled the crate that morning. I managed to crack the shell open with my blunt pocketknife. The smell was sweet, and it looked pure and white. I drank more coconut water – it tingled on my dry tongue. As I drank, the sea collided with the sand and the rocks, creating the repeated heartbeat-like lapping noises. I ruffled my hair as it was indulged in wet sand. The air smelled like salt, and it numbed my nose.

"Do you think I could make something out of this bamboo?"

Stuart questioned. I immediately stopped drinking and wiped my mouth of water to say,

“Bamboo you say? If you come here and let me see it.” He climbed the barrier and came to me.

“What are you doing here?” Stuart was confused as I had never usually come there.

“Just lying in the sun, not much.”

“Anyway, here’s the bamboo.” He threw a pile of neatly cut bamboo next to me, my reaction based on a surprised look and a confused look.

“Where did you get this from?” I asked.

“Oh, probably somewhere to the north of the forest.”

“Yeah, like I can believe that. I walked a few miles into the forest and a bear could’ve killed me. The north side is about eleven miles away!”

“Well, I guess I was smart enough to around the forest.”

“Around?” I said in a shocked tone.

“There is no ‘around’, just forest!”

“No, actually, there are more beaches,” he explained. I spilled all my coconut water.

“More beaches! Stuart, do you know what this means?”

“Whatever you say, I guess.”

## Chapter Seven – Thought Strike

After five weeks on the island, we had finally laid the ship into the sea - fully repaired, of course. We had used tree vines as rope and tied it to an old piece of the barrier so the vessel wouldn’t float away. That was one of the many positives we could list.

But the negatives... they killed the mood.

It was winter now. The trees no longer produce coconuts, which meant hydration had become an even a greater challenge. The few coconuts we had left were quickly dwindling. Stuart had developed a persistent nausea that kept him from eating certain meats and foods. If he did, he’d suffer violent attacks.

The list, unfortunately, went on too.

Together, Stuart and I discovered two new beaches, one of them held an ancient ruin and behind it, a wrecked ship. Inside, there were skeletons. Human skeletons. There weren’t many, but enough to keep me away.

We had toyed with the idea of building a fence around our beach, but that dream quickly faded. Our section of beach bordered a quarter of the island, and the island itself was massive. This would have taken at least four months, and the expedition had already drained every bit of energy we had left. The ship was ready to leave.

This was the day we decided to depart.

Our souls were furious as to what nature had done to us. We boarded the ship. Stuart took the wheel, and I went below deck to monitor the engine. I didn't care about the horrible smell anymore. I just wanted to get home.

I missed Alex, he would've loved to see what we had managed to achieve here - what we had survived. Suddenly, the vessel started moving. The engines roared ferociously. We were finally heading home.

## Chapter Eight - Homecoming

A day in the journey home. Two days. Three days. A full week.

Food and water – stable. Fuel and structure – still holding. Who knew we'd have to go back home so unceremoniously. The ship looked terrible, so did we. We smelled even worse than we looked. But none of that mattered - we were alive. Looking back, I realised that if we hadn't rationed, we would've been dead. And even with rationing, the food had run out at one point. It was a miracle we'd made it. I wonder, if they still had search parties out looking for us, even after four months. I doubted it. But who knows, they could still be out there, waiting for fourteen live crew members to come back across the horizon. A perfectly-in-shape ship to return as confident as a lion. The reality was quite the opposite. Instead, Stuart and I were limping home aboard a wrecked vessel held together by vines of sweat, and stubborn hope. Still...we were coming back and would survive whatever came next. I knew then what we'd call ourselves: The Survivors.

The End...

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## Summary

A crew embark on an extremely dangerous mission to the South Pole. They find themselves stuck in the sea for longer than usual and start to worry about whether they will make it or not. Eventually, the number of people decrease, and emotions begin to control the ship. After three long weeks, there are only two people left. A storm pushes the expedition vessel far away onto an uncharted island where they are forced to live with terrible predators and harsh conditions. Will they be able to survive?

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