



## The Castaways: The Curse of the Jolly Stone Trilogy, Book III

By Iain Lawrence

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“The *Castaways* leaves readers breathless.”—School Library Journal

The spirited adventure that began in *The Convicts* and continued in *The Cannibals* has its riveting conclusion in *The Castaways*—in which Tom Tin and his four convict companions save two sailors stranded on an iceberg. There’s Mr. Beezley, with his tattooed hands and icy stare; and Mr. Moyle, with his pig-like face and rotten teeth, who supposedly eats children. As Tom grows wary of the men, he suspects they are plotting to get rid of him. But how? And if Tom and the other boys can’t stop the sailors, will they ever make it home to England, where Tom’s diamond remains buried, and where he still stands a chance of sorting out his tangled fate?

“The quirky characters and an incredible story with fast action will keep you turning the pages to see what happens next, complete with a very satisfying, surprise ending.”—*MyShelf.com*

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## The Castaways: The Curse of the Jolly Stone Trilogy, Book III By Iain Lawrence Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

### About the Author

Iain Lawrence is the author of numerous acclaimed novels, including *The Cannibals*, *The Convicts*, *Gemini Summer*, *B for Buster*, *The Lightkeeper's Daughter*, *Lord of the Nutcracker Men*, *Ghost Boy*, and the High Seas Trilogy: *The Wreckers*, *The Smugglers*, and *The Buccaneers*. He lives on Gabriola Island, British Columbia.

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### ALL AT SEA

We steamed along below the stars, half a thousand miles from land. All I could see were the dim shapes of the boys, and the hulk of the engine in the middle of the boat. But up from the bow flew splashes of green, like emeralds sliced from the black sea. In our wake they lay scattered, swirled by the churning of our paddle wheel.

All night I listened to the chant of the steam engine, the chuckatee-chickadee, chuckatee-chickadee that shook every plank and every nail. When the sun came up behind us, our smoke hung over the sea like a greasy pennant streaming from the funnel, a tattered flag that could be seen for many miles. So Gaskin Boggis pulled the fire from its box, dousing each stick over the side with a hissing gout of steam.

Through eleven nights we'd bored through the blackness; through eleven days we'd drifted on a blazing sea. On this morning, our twelfth since we'd last seen land, it was Walter Weedle's turn to stand watch, to keep a lookout for the black sails of the Borneo pirates. As usual, he went grumbling to his place atop the dwindling pile of firewood.

"There's some what never take a turn," he said, with a dark look in my direction. "Should be turn and turnabout, that's what I say."

Only Midgely bothered to argue. "No one minds what you say, Walter Weedle. You can hop it, you can."

Weedle's clumsy feet knocked the logs askew. "There ain't no pirates. We ain't seen a pirate yet. Don't know why we have to stop at dawn."

"Cause you're a half-wit," cried Midgely. In his blindness he was squinting toward the engine, mistaking its shape for Weedle. "Try steering by the sun, and you'll go in circles, you stupid. But the stars is like a compass, and that Southern Cross is the needle. Ain't that so, Tom?"

"Yes," I said.

"It's going to lead us home. Ain't it, Tom?"

"Of course," I said, as though I actually believed him. Midge thought the Southern Cross hung in the sky like a painted sign. He didn't know how strange and pale a thing it was, so hard to find that I wasn't certain I had ever really seen it. I feared we were already lost.

"Tell him about them other islands, Tom," said Midgely. "Tell him how the Cross will take us there." He rattled off their names again, the Cocos, the Chagos, the Mascarenes. "We can't miss 'em, can we? We'll hop from one to the other like on skipping stones."

He was smiling now, proud as Punch of this notion of his. He had made it sound so simple that we'd all believed it was possible. We had tackled the oceans as only boys might dare to do, chasing the Southern Cross toward islands rich with food and firewood. But now, if we didn't find land within the week, we would have no water left to drink, no food to eat, no wood to burn.

The sea was too huge, the sun too hot. I felt like a candle melting away. Weedle and Boggis and Benjamin Penny were as brown as old figs, while poor Midgely--red and peeling--looked like a lobster boiled in his skin.

He was taking shelter now as the sun climbed over the bow. He tucked himself into the shade of a sea turtle's shell, the last remains of a beast we had slaughtered ten days before. It was nearly as long as Midge was tall, and the boy peered out from one end like the turtle itself.

His eyes were gray, almost covered by his drooping lids. It seemed at times he had no eyes, when all I could see were the darkened crescents below his lashes. But he still smiled in his cheerful fashion. "All's bob, Tom," he said. "We'll reach them islands tomorrow, I think."

I didn't understand how he could never lose hope. I felt like flinging myself down in the kicking tantrum of a child, screaming about the unfairness of it all. I was the owner of a fabulous jewel, of a wealth beyond imagining. I had only to get home to London to claim it. But the Fates, it seemed, would never allow me that.

As I settled down beside Midgely, my thoughts ran their endless circle, beginning--as always--with the notion that I was cursed by the Jolly Stone. I believed absolutely that it brought ruin to all who touched it, and I vowed that I would one day unearth the jewel from its London grave just to pass on the curse to Mr. Goodfellow. I imagined with great pleasure how his greedy eyes would glow when I put the stone into his butter-soft hands.

Then, as always, doubts leapt in to chase this thought. How could a simple stone, a thing of the earth, carry such unearthly power? Wasn't Mr. Goodfellow really to blame? It was he who had sent my father to debtors' prison, and me to the South Seas in the hold of a convict ship. Give the diamond to him? Hardly! I would keep the stone for myself, and use its wealth to crush the man like a cockroach. But what if the Stone were cursed, I wondered; and round I went again.

I could sometimes spend hours thinking in circles. But today I had only begun when the boat suddenly rocked, and my head banged against its ribs. Benjamin Penny shouted, "Watch where you're going, you great oaf!" Gaskin Boggis was moving to his place beside the engine. That was where he always slept, nestled with the machinery. To him it must have been like a favorite old dog, a friend to be fed and watered by night, to be petted through the day.

I tried to find a bit of shade behind Midgely's turtle shell. But with each roll of the boat, sunlight flashed across my face.

I lay on planks that were, at most, an inch in thickness. On their other side was water so deep that it made me dizzy to think of it. What manner of things lurked down there?

With the engine silenced, I could hear the slop of water beneath the boat. My horrors paraded in my mind: man-eating fishes; serpents and leviathans; storm and tempest; and every man who'd ever drowned. Of them all, this last fear was my greatest. The splash against the planks became the thrashing of lost sailors swimming up behind us. Every scratch and tap of wood was the sound of their fingers feeling at the boat, and I dared not lift my head lest I see them reaching for the gunwale.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

## **Users Review**

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