POVERTY ISLAND GOLD

By James Leach

Genre: Adventure / Mystery / Historical Thriller

Logline: When treasure hunters searching for a legendary Civil War fortune join forces with an aging lighthouse keeper and his daughter, they uncover a secret buried on Poverty Island for generations—and discover that some treasures are worth far more than gold.

Synopsis

In the final years of the Civil War, a secret shipment of French gold intended to aid the struggling Confederacy crosses into the Great Lakes aboard the Le Aigle. Pursued near Poverty Island by a U.S. Revenue cutter, the ship's captain orders five chained chests thrown overboard before the vessel is destroyed on the island's treacherous rocks. The gold disappears into legend.

More than a century later, treasure hunter **Buck Spencer** and his dive partner **Rex Thorne** arrive aboard the Gold Digger, determined to solve the mystery of the legendary "Poverty Island Gold." Their investigation leads them to **Carl Jackson**, an aging former lighthouse keeper whose life has been inseparable from the island—and from a tragedy he has carried since his youth.

As a teenager, Carl fell deeply in love with aspiring photographer **Jesse Whitten**. Together they witnessed the crew of the Captain Lawrence, a later treasure-hunting vessel, recover the five missing chests. When a violent storm sank the Captain Lawrence, its surviving crew secretly buried the treasure in the island's forest. Carl and Jesse witnessed the burial and swore never to reveal what they had seen.

Their secret became intertwined with their love for each other. But Jesse died after a sudden gust swept her from the lighthouse platform, leaving Carl devastated and under a cloud of suspicion. He never stopped loving her, never married, and spent much of his life protecting both her memory and the secret they shared.

Buck gradually earns Carl's trust, while LiDAR surveys and old photographs suggest the island still conceals something. Their search also attracts Black Tide, rival treasure hunters connected to Carl's longtime friend Andy Holcum, whose interest in the legend proves far darker than it first appears.

Before Carl can reveal everything he knows, a violent confrontation at the *Bucking Galleon Pub* ends with his death.

His daughter **Gracie** inherits the bar, Carl's possessions, and his interest in the Poverty Island Lighthouse. Among his belongings she discovers a letter, an old photograph of Carl and Jesse, and a single French gold coin bearing the image of Napoleon III.

Carl's confession finally reveals the truth.

He and Jesse had seen the *Captain Lawrence* crew bury all five chests. After Jesse's death, Carl secretly moved the treasure and spent the rest of his life protecting its location. His final request is not that Gracie become wealthy, but that if the gold is ever found, it remain connected to Poverty Island and Jesse's memory.

Following clues Carl concealed in Jesse's photographs and a treasured painting, Buck, Rex, and Gracie realize the gold was hidden inside the abandoned lighthouse itself. They return to Poverty Island while using a decoy search to mislead Andy and the *Black Tide* treasure hunters.

Inside the lighthouse, they uncover Carl's final secret: sacks of French gold hidden within its walls.

The discovery transforms the legend into reality—but Gracie refuses to let the treasure become another source of greed. After the legal battle over ownership, she proposes that the gold be placed in state custody while a portion of its value funds the restoration of Poverty Island Lighthouse and its historic buildings. The state approves the plan.

Two years later, the restored lighthouse once again stands over Lake Michigan. Visitors walk its grounds, the recovered gold is displayed as part of its history, and the beacon Carl fought so long to preserve shines again.

What began as a hunt for a lost fortune becomes the fulfillment of Carl and Jesse's final promise.

The gold was the legend.

Their love was the treasure.