

The Voyages of Victora

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Chapter 1: *The Failed Raid*

Fire! Commanded our first mate, Nina, from the starboard rails of the ship.

The sounds of cannon fire boomed across the deck. The cannons fired upon a Shinobi stronghold on the southern side of the *Nimpo Isles*. Our captain, through his network of island parrots, was convinced this stronghold contained gold in its lower vaults, and the man loved a raid.

The Captain, a handsome gentleman, named Bartley, was giddy with excitement as he stood on the railing watching his quarry. The prospect of stealing gold from a Shinobi stronghold filled him with glee. The captain looked toward his first mate and stood, waving his hands to get her attention. He then started motioning to her that he wanted to walk on the land.

"Get the long boats ready! Bard, Cutty let's get in the long boats. Fish face, you continue the barrage on the stronghold." Announced the first mate.

Jerry, some type of fish cursed with being partially human, ordered the crew to continue with the cannon fire. In his garbled voice, I followed the first mate's orders. Cutty was already at the longboat. Cutty has lots of muscle and is tall, quite the intimidating stature. As part of the raiding party, I boarded the longboat with the captain, Nina, and Cutty at the far side of the ship.

Smithy, another strong man, wide in frame, said, "Enjoy!"

Then let go of the rope that held us, dropping us into the sea.

"Lower us next time, you one-armed, no-legged meathead!" I yelled up at him.

He looked over the rail and said, "Don't die, Bard, we won't have anyone to play music at your funeral."

Being part of the boarding team is always risky, but being near the captain put me at ease; he's a reliable captain. As the ship's bard, I consider myself a singer and storyteller, not a fighter, but the captain insists I keep a log of our journeys, so I often need to be part of the raiding party.

Cutty and I were stuck with paddling the long boat. It's useless to ask the captain to paddle the longboat. It's a quick way to get nowhere, slowly. Our first mate usually just tells whoever is asking to do it. Cutty grabbed his oar and began rowing, so I fell in line and started rowing. As the longboat emerged from the cover of our ship, *The Vengeful Victora*, I could feel an intense pressure fall upon me. My breath became short and I could feel the sensations of panic on the nape of my neck.

"The ninja have us in their sights but so do we. Don't let them see your fear." The captain said this to no one in particular, but I think he was trying to calm me down, and it did.

Although our captain leads us into reckless situations, he always gives his all to keep the crew safe. The captain saved my life many seasons ago when he didn't need to. I joined his crew and have been the ship's bard ever since.

"Heads up bard!" said Nina.

It was three cannonballs heading our way. The stronghold diverted a few of its cannons to target our long boat. Cutty and I started paddling like our lives depended on it, but the cannon balls were spread so wide that we could still get hit!

"Look out!" I blurted out and covered my head.

I heard the sound of a machete leaving its sheath, followed by a dunk and splash. I could feel the shock waves and muffled explosion sounds. As I opened my eyes and raised my head a sudden downpour of water landed on us. The first mate drew her snake sword, a whip made of metal blades, and cut the cannon balls out of the air. All I could see was her arm extended. She drew her weapons so fast that I, even with my great eyesight, could only see a blur. The captain then drew his katana, placing the flat side in front of the first mate's face, catching an arrow that came from the direction of the stronghold. Suddenly I could see dark spots filling the sky. It was a volley of arrows that was launched!

With one motion, Captain Bartley stepped in the center of the longboat, sighed, and said, "Whether it's one or one thousand, that's not enough to beat me." He began swinging his katana so fast that he formed an umbrella of blades that deflected the arrows as they rained upon us.

As Cutty and I began paddling, the volley stopped. I started to hear the whizzing of air as individual arrows passed or were deflected by the first mate. The captain had sheathed his katana, and Nina took over, deflecting the arrows that were shot our way. The

stronghold took a few more cannon shots at us but our first mate easily protected us with her snake sword and her machete.

We made it to the shore. Cutty, with his brute strength, began holding the longboat over his head in both hands. I was grateful I didn't have to do much there, and I started dashing for cover at the forest bordering the beach. Of course, the captain pulled a green apple from within his black coat, had a bite, and sauntered over after us. He had unusual habits, his pace was his own. The first mate kept us safe from incoming arrows or ninja stars as we entered the forest. They just could not seem to hit the captain as he moved. His sauntering pace had the arrows landing and whizzing past his face or heels. The captain had a simple plan. The ship was on one side of the stronghold and the raiding party would approach from the opposite side. The classic pincer maneuver. Jerry is quite capable as our Helm's man. He will bring the ship closer to the stronghold with each pass and keep the pressure up with cannon fire. When *The Vengeful Victora* or Vee Vee as we like to call her, gets close enough, the remaining crew aboard the ship will deploy their ropes and climb the hillside. Our job as the raiding group is to advance and apply pressure while checking for the gold reserve. This raiding party is small but they are our most capable crew members. Cutty was on the crew before I came, and I still get the feeling he can do more than I've seen him capable of. I've seen

Cutty punch a great white shark in the face, wrestle giant crocodiles, and cause polar bears to tap out while strangling them. Cutty is a menace.

"There's likely lots of traps hidden in the bushes." Said the captain. "Probably a good idea to be extra vigilant until we get to the stronghold." He continued.

Taking a bite of his apple as he stated the obvious. A glint of light caught my eye, and immediately I squatted down. An arrow stuck in the tree behind me.

"Hey! Good dodge Bard! You're getting better at being able to survive." The captain complimented me on avoiding the arrow.

Cutty walked forward from where he stood, and so did the first mate. Cutty got about twelve paces in before I saw him jump toward the tree stabbing it with one of his machetes. Cutty carried five machetes on him, one sheathed on each knee, elbow, and finally one across his back. The only fighter I know to fight with five machetes at a time. He juggles his blades while viciously attacking his opponents with one or more of the machetes wielded. It's an amazing sight, where the blades spark against the ground and glisten as they spin through the air being juggled. Cutty jumped

because he walked into a trap that gave away at his feet and he anchored himself into the tree with his machete. He drew another machete and swung himself to safety. As Cutty landed, I saw the flicker of light reflecting off something, but Cutty was prepared and deflected darts that he said smelled like they were coated in poison. As our first mate advanced, I saw the glittering light of a knife thrown coming toward her from either side. She easily deflected them, and suddenly, from behind her, a ninja appeared from a camouflaged floor trap with a dagger in hand. It was over in the blink of an eye. Our first mate walked past the once shadowy figure that stood behind her with elegance and grace, flicking her hair with the tip of her machete that disemboweled the ninja. Then the ninja just sort of dropped back into the hole it emerged from, lifeless. Nina is scary for a kid. I often wonder what she's survived that allowed her these skills. As Cutty and our first mate continued advancing, they were attacked a few more times by shadowy figures. Sadly for them, as quickly as the figures emerged, they seemed to be met with the same fate where they lifelessly dropped into the hole from whence they came.

The captain continued sauntering and followed the path Cutty and Nina made ahead of us. I followed behind the captain, though attacks from behind would suggest this was the worst place to be, but I trusted the captain to intervene to prevent my death. We got

to the edge of the forest bordering the field of grass leading to the cliffside fortress. It was almost eight hundred meters away from the forest edge but we could see one ninja running across the open space. He was desperate to warn his comrades of the impending threat that approached from the forest. Our first mate, although she was young, was quite a capable sniper. Her primary weapon was a long-barrel rifle. She would, in addition to her snake sword, carry her rifle across her back. As she lined up her shot the captain told her to let the ninja go.

“It’s better to sink the blade into the chest of the ninja than shoot it through the spine,” Captain Bartley said.

The captain enjoyed having a bit of fun with his raids. The way he approaches his target after commencing an attack. Striking opponents down when they can see you coming gave the captain great joy. The Shinobi were woefully unaware of the problem that sauntered their way.

The captain knelt on a knee behind a tree to get cover and so did we. The captain seemed to be watching the stronghold for a way in. I could see him talking to himself pointing at the rubble between here and the stronghold. His plan seemed obvious. Get to the rubble in the field for cover and approach the stronghold from the

front. It looks like he's planning to go through the front door, typical. I don't even know why he bothered to stop and plan this out. The first mate told Cutty and me that we should position ourselves behind the rubble while the captain breaches the stronghold doors. Once he enters we will follow him in. The grass field led up to the stronghold's main and only visible entrance. It was basic, with no towers, just a cube with window holes and a roof with many cannons. There was a path through the field that led up to the main gate of the fortress; there were windows over the gate, and attackers would likely be shot at through there or have something poured on them.

I caught the blur in my peripheral view. The captain had started running toward the rubble. We got ready to run to the rubble as soon as the captain transitioned from the rubble to the front gate. Now at the rubble sat the captain. He finished his apple and threw it in front of him which landed next to arrows that had been fired at him as he dashed. I didn't notice the arrows, I barely saw the captain begin his dash.

"Captain!" yelled the first mate as she pointed toward the sky. It was a massive ball of fire plummeting, ripping through the clouds below as it tore through.

“It's heading our way!” I shouted out.

Its smoke trail leading up beyond the sky I could see the object was not a ball, but more triangular shaped. The fireball continued in our direction and struck the top corner of the stronghold, completely obliterating it. The object struck the peninsula about half a mile to the east of the stronghold. I got my spyglass out to get a better look. The peninsula was a blaze and reshaped. I could see a giant crater surrounded by flames. There was something in the crater that drew my attention but it was also translucent. A shimmer glazed over the surface of it which I could see ended at a peak.

I looked over to the captain and I could see him focus on the glass mountain. I could see the smoke and flames coming from the other side of the stronghold. Looking through my spyglass again, I peered over to where the trBrtr Brigadooneball hit the fortress. I saw the destruction caused by the meteorite. It took almost a third of the stronghold as it plummeted. The top of the stronghold was exposed and on fire, a magnet for Vee Vee's cannons. It was then I realized that the ship's cannons were not firing. I peered at the skyline beyond the fort for any signs of smoke, I couldn't see any from where Vee Vee should be. I'm sure the ship halted their attack. They must have seen the transparent mountain fall from the sky. They had to have seen it. On the way down it took the fort's cannons clear off the roof, the target they were firing at. They can't see us from over there and the sudden destruction of the fortress

might have raised their concerns for us. We will need to send them a signal soon, they will send a second raiding team with the goal to recover us. Pirates aren't big on rescue raids, but our crew made an effort.

The captain was still by the rubble and fixated on the transparent mountain. I felt an eerie tingle run through my body. The hot, humid air suddenly felt cold and drafty. I could hear deep, muffled, crackling noises similar to when the earth violently splits beneath the ocean. The reverberations drew my attention toward the peak of the translucent mountain, but the peak seemed to be different now. I could see the shimmer of the translucent mountaintop, but it was splitting apart, creating a void that blended into the sky. The split kept getting wider, the air got colder, and I could feel the weight of the air on me and it was heavy. As the void expanded, I could see translucent spheres erupting, with only the shimmer on the sphere to follow. The spheres were falling in the direction of the stronghold.

"Something is falling your way!" I yelled to the captain.

The spheres landed atop the fortress. They were more visible now with the unsettled dust and smoke caused by the impact of the translucent mountain. The smoke or dust being displaced around

the spheres allowed me to see their tactical prowess. I could see about seven or eight of the spheres moving across the top of the fortress tactfully and dropping into the destroyed roof.

The captain waved his hand gesturing to come to him. The first mate and Cutty, in a blur, started sprinting over, and I quickly followed.

"Let's quietly raid the fort and see if we can nik a few naks." Said the captain as I approached them. "It's a bad omen to leave a raid empty-handed." He continued, with an ominous look on his face.

"Captain, what about those things we saw?" Asked Cutty.

"Not to mention, that," said the first mate as she gestured over to the crater where the translucent mountain stood.

"Those things, I don't suspect they are friendly, joining us on this raid and all, let's avoid running into those spheres that went into the fort." The captain added, "Let the ninja take care of those unidentified things, and while they are busy with that, we can help ourselves to their loot."

An explosion from within the fort blasted a hole through the west side of the fort.

"Woo, that sounded convenient for us. Follow me!" Said the captain as he ran to the wall on the west side of the fortress in the direction of the explosion.

We continued up the path in the field to the fort. As we got close to the northern gates of the fortress we diverted to the west wall. The captain ran ahead of us a bit, showing us the route to run. As we approached the fort, I realized we weren't facing any resistance. The ninja were not attacking us anymore, not with arrows, no shadowy figures appearing out of thin air, nothing. There were windows above the fort gate, a tactical spot for riflemen or archers, however, no one appeared to be posted there. We got to the corner of the northern wall. The captain poked his head around to see if it was clear. *Splat*. Seagull droppings landed on the captain's hat.

"Hm. Yes, this is a good omen." Captain Bartley said, sheepishly.

He slipped around the corner, followed by Nina, Cutty, and myself. We took our positions around the hole, the captain stood in the middle, Nina took the far side, and Cutty and I stood at the near side of the newly formed entrance. The captain leaned into peer, his feet still outside the fort. We stood on floor level, I could see there were two levels above the ground. The explosion below a

hole at least twenty-five iron shackles high. The entrance was relatively narrow, the explosion caused a gash-shaped hole.

"I can't see the floor down there, it's pretty dark." Captain Bartley said as he leaned over the edge to see the bottom.

It was a sudden stroke of the captain's luck, while leaning over, he was struck on the back of the head by a falling piece of rubble. The captain fell into the darkness.

"Idiot!" muttered the first mate as she jumped into the darkness after the captain.

Cutty immediately followed, without hesitation, as the brave and stupid do. After some whimpering the realization came that I was alone up here. I jumped into the darkness below. As I fell, I saw I fell about four levels. The greystone walls had the darkness contrasted by the glow of torches or lamps mounted. I felt a jolt that ran through my body announcing my butt hit the floor.

"Ouch ouch ouch ouch! That hurt!" I yelled out.

I looked around as my eyes adjusted to the dimly lit room. The room had a pungent odor, burnt hair, and charred flesh. The room

was large with its walls laden with shackles bolted to them. Little spikes were spread across the walls where a person would rest while restrained. This was a painful prison. It was a grim and foreboding place. The captain sauntered around with his right hand resting on the hilt of his katana. The captain could draw his katana with ease regardless of the hand. He appeared aloof but he was far from it and was ready for anything. As we explored the room, my mind ran rampant with scenes of people being tortured. After all, this is a fate that could befall us, plundering from ninjas might not be good for overall health. Who knows what ninjas are capable of? Ninjas are warriors of legend with only a few living to tell the tale of their encounter. Sharp, bloodied pokers lay around disheveled, likely from the fortress being struck by the translucent mountain. The captain found his focus on an iron hatch on the floor, two latches bordered either side of the hatch with a hinge and handle on the other two respective sides of the hatch. Cutty, anticipating the captain's request, slid the viewport to the hatch open. I could feel a strong presence emanate from below that hatch when he did that, it felt cold and inhuman. From the darkness, a pair of hollow eyes glared back at us and it was intimidating.

"That's a comfortable-looking room you've found yourself in, Pancho." Said the captain to the prisoner in the hatch. "Your room

service must be exquisite, reserved for royalty even." He continued.

Those eyes just peered back at him. Still intimidating but a little less hateful now. I was curious about this person locked up. Ninjas are mercenaries. What did this ninja do to be locked up by the clan?

A spark from steel striking steel, then again, and again.

"Captain!" I yelled out!

Captain Bartley cut the latches and hinges. Then he gestured to Cutty to remove the hatch.

"Stand back." Said Cutty as he grabbed the hatch with one arm and flung the door behind him.

That hatch door was big and heavy, Cutty was stronger than he looked.

"Why did you do that!" I shouted.

Grunting Cutty replied "Captain's orders. Shut up and play ... music."

Boom! Another explosion overhead rocked the fortress, I almost fell on my butt. I felt a jolt from being struck on the head by falling debris. When I opened my eyes I could see the captain standing in his lunar fang pose. The lunar fang, where the captain would draw his katana back in his left hand, with his torso twisting as he continued to pull his blade behind him. His right index and thumb slid forward on the back of the blade as they got to its tip. He brought his face close to the blade as he leaned into it. He stood firm in a wide stance, weight on the left back foot. Like a billiard player in a back stance about to strike their ivory ball. The air always seemed to slow down when he initiated the lunar fang. In the blink of an eye, he thrust himself forward with his torso unmoved. Then as he struck, he turned his torso to thrust his contracted left arm and drove the katana forward. In all the seasons I've seen our captain fight, this was the most devastating attack he possessed.

I shook my head to shake off my disorientation. I was able to see what the captain thrust toward. It was one of those clear spheres that erupted from the translucent mountain infiltrating the fort. I was just starting to notice that there were chains that seemed to disappear within the sphere. The chains were rigid and were used to pull on something within the sphere. Pulling the chains were

many ninjas. The ninjas were in an intense tug-of-war with the sphere. The shinobi weren't on the basement level like us. They were on the floor above us, I could see the hole the sphere fell through above it. The ninjas were tugging on the chains that pulled at the sphere from multiple sides. The sphere landed where the prisoner hatch was, I could see the rubble piled up over it. The prisoner ninja was alongside Cutty with the captain. They landed in our path. At the moment of impact from the lunar fang, we all saw it. The sphere seemed to be affected by the attack as it flicked briefly. What was revealed behind the translucent sphere when it flickered was not a creature I have ever seen. I counted at least thirteen tentacles with thick black dull-looking talons at the end. Above the tentacles, shaped like a torso were four muscular arm-like appendages. Its skin tone was a mix of black and deep blue with silver. Looking at its head I couldn't see anything I recognized as eyes but its jaw was so big, it ran vertically along its face but then split wider when the mouth split horizontally again, midway through the vertical part of its jaw.. Around the crown of its head were many sphincters that rhythmically opened and closed in synchronicity.

The captain followed up his initial strike with a barrage of slashes against the sphere. It snapped me out of my shock of seeing the creature and to the present danger of the chaos this creature

initiated. There were at least six more unaccounted for. Cutty and the ninja ran into the fray with the captain and blindly attacked the clear sphere. Cutty, with his five-machete juggling style, and the prisoner ninja who armed themselves with a nearby poker. I heard the shot that was followed by our first mate thrusting into the fray as well. I saw the bullet impact the sphere at the creature's head. The creature itself was looking somewhat timid, its screeches sounded more like a fearful animal. The creature lashed out to the captain, the nearest target, with a fierce nastiness. Its talon-tipped tentacles were parried by the captain's katana. It lashed out at Cutty as well who also opted to parry the strikes with his machete in hand while throwing and rebounding the other machetes off the creature's invisible wall. Nina and the prisoner both struck and jumped around to avoid the attacks of the creature. I was inspired by their movement, I got out my bow and violin and began playing a little jig to inspire the crew.

The clear sphere was showing signs of cracks and revealed the creature with each devastating attack. I could see inside the sphere with more frequency, several chains were wrapped around the arms, neck, and torso of the creature from multiple angles. I counted at least twenty ninjas holding each of the chains firmly. Seemingly working in tandem with the captain they held the creature that was well over thirty shackles long and seemed to

weigh as much as a whale. Ninjas can endure being pulled apart by bison and will tire the bison before they are pulled apart. Their physical prowess is legendary, these many struggling to hold this creature in place meant it was strong.

A surge of lightning extended outward and then disappointed. The translucent sphere was gone! In an instant, the captain was in his lunar fang pose dashing forward then elevating to strike the creature. He got up there, the captain. His thrust was at the center of the chest. The creature looked stupefied. I don't think it was expecting this tiny creature, the captain, to be able to reach its torso. It suddenly seemed to panic and then let out a prolonged, eardrum-shattering, screech with its jaw as wide as could split. As it screeched my eyes landed on its neck where I saw something that looked like a neck shackle that had a glowing orb in it. There was a faint blue glowing fluid flowing around the necklace.

Silence slowly fell upon the dungeon along with the head of the creature. Its jaw was still as wide as it fell to the ground. The captain was fast. He elevated from the creature's chest while removing his katana, spun gracefully, and beheaded the creature. I'm not sure if anyone else saw, but when he removed the head with his sword in his left hand and as he spun he grabbed the shackle from around the creature's neck with his right. When he landed on the floor I wasn't able to see where he hid it. He does

have quite nimble fingers, the captain. As the creature's head came to rest, after rolling on the ground.

Captain Bartley announced. "There are at least six more of those creatures roaming this fort and their spawn point nearby." Gesturing to the direction of the transparent mountain. "Let your leader know this pirate raid is over. I, Captain Bartley, will offer parlay to all the shinobi of this stronghold. I will grant safe passage on my ship to the *Liquor Isles* as a safe space from this sorcery. These creatures are not of the world we know and have the power we cannot easily overcome without great strife. This fort is on its way to destruction, let us leave this place. If you are interested in coming back to reclaim it I would suggest doing that with more than what our combined efforts can offer right now."

The captain then started running toward the far end of the dungeon where we originally dropped in. Nina, Cutty, and I followed him. We got back to the hole we came in from, although it was pretty far up I had my grappling hook pistol. After getting out of the fort we headed along the sand toward where we parked the longboat.

The crew aboard the ship had already brought *The Vengeful Victora* as close to the shore as it could approach. The captain gestured to Vee Vee while Cutty retrieved our longboat from the

nearby bushes. The captain faced the fort to see if any ninjas followed. Running toward us was one shinobi, their clothing was tattered and torn.

It was the prisoner ninja from under the hatch! He stood facing the captain and said “I would like to join you on your ship, Captain.”

Captain Bartley granted his request and instructed him to help the approaching Cutty with the longboat. Not that Cutty needed any help, he was already comfortably carrying the longboat over his head. We all got in the longboat, Cutty and the prisoner ninja grabbed an oar each and then started paddling. The captain stood at the front of the longboat looking back at the fort, checking to see if any other ninja would follow.

We made it back to *The Vengeful Victora*, each grab of the rope ladder made me feel safe like I was climbing the path to my home, which is why I was taken by surprise to see twelve ninjas on the deck. The crew that was already on board seemed to be startled by the group's presence as well. The captain was the last one up from the longboat. Jerry lassoed the longboat and hoisted it up with a single tug.

"I am the clan leader. I will accept your request. To ensure our safe passage out the ninja at the fort will cover our escape at any cost." an old, cynical voice at the center of the group announced.

The group parted revealing a very slender, elderly man. They were all covered in black cloaks and only distinguishable by height. The prisoner ninja that came over with us stood behind the captain. I could see he was angry. He glared at them and I could feel his insane bloodlust. Darkness just emanated from that guy. Is that why they kept him locked up?

"Set a course Jerry, to *Liquor Isles*. Let's get this fine group of individuals safely away from here. They will be our guests." announced the captain.

Destra and Hissy began unfurling the sails. Destra's skill with a needle was unmatched and she could repair sails even while they were on fire!

"Ya ya ya ya ya hoo hoo! Ya ya ya ya ya hoo hoo!" Destra exclaimed as she worked.

Helping her was Hissy, a sixteen-year-old bookworm with a love of reading. Often she would be up in the ship's nest reading books on

historic or anthropological events. She always wore dresses and white socks. Pretty classy for a pirate. She parroted Destra's chanting and they got all four groups of sails ready and we were off.

Chapter 2: *The death of our young hostage*

I entered the captain's quarters, I could see he and the first mate were in a serious conversation. As I entered the captain told me to take the shackle necklace he looted from that creature to our ship's Janice, our ship's scientist. I always enjoyed visiting her. She often stayed alone with a young crewmate, Tano, below deck in her workshop. She made useful tools and weapons for us. She made my violin and bow arrow accessories like the rope dispenser for my utility belt. She also made my super spyglass and super monocle to get long-range information. I got below deck and knocked on her door. A few moments later she answered the door. Her long dark brown coat covered her white blouse with her dark pants and boots. She scratched her blonde untidy hair and took the cigarette out of her mouth.

"What can I help you with, Home Slice?" I presented her with the shackle necklace.

Janice gasped, snatched the necklace, slammed the door in my face, and yelled "Get out!".

"But I didn't come in," I replied silently.

I turned around and headed back above deck. It would take another day and a half to get to liquor isles, Janice will come to the captain or send Tano out to get him when she's ready.

The ninja were making themselves useful, fishing off the sides of the ship, and cleaning the deck. It gave me a break from cleaning at least, so I appreciated them. I took my violin out and began playing a merry jig for the ninja to tap their feet too.

At supper, we gathered in the mess hall. The ninja group sat in one area, the prisoner ninja stood near the exit with his arms folded. The lower part of his face was covered, classic ninja wear of course, and I took notice of his bald head. I could tell his physique was immaculate even though he was slender. His sclera had thick red veins, his iris bright green, fixed on the ninja group Cutty sat on the corner chair between the ninja group and the prisoner ninja.

Cookie was at the stove preparing the plates along with Hissy. Cookie, also known to his enemies as *The Butcher*, was a former slave cook. Cookie could make water and rocks taste good if he had to. His short, jet-black, afro always smelled like coconuts. He was also pretty tough, he dove off the bow, found a great white shark over twenty-five shackles long, wrestled it onboard the ship, then cooked it for the starving crew. It was quite flavorful actually. Our navigator Navabi was at the table with Nina and Smithy. Tammy, the beast tamer, Jerry, Janice, Tano, and the captain were absent. Jerry was likely at the helm and Tammy was probably in the nest keeping watch.

“Bard, can you go grab everyone, please? I will get this bucket up to Jerry, and take a plate up to Tammy in the meantime,” said Cookie.

I complied with his request. Janice wasn’t joining us so I had to walk back again to give her the meal. After the meal, we all sat around the main mast of the ship. The captain emerged from the shadows at the bow.

“It’s time we discussed what happened at that stronghold.” Said Captain Bartley.

The shadowy figure of a tall slender man emerged from behind the captain. It was the clan leader, so creepy.

“I concur with your captain.” He said as he emerged.

“Yeah! Tell us what happened!” exclaimed Hissy. “We saw an inflamed, obtuse object falling through earth’s atmosphere that decimated the roof of the shinobi’s stronghold,” she added.

“When that happened we stopped firing the cannons,” said Navabi, she continued. “We got worried you guys might have been caught up in the blast.”

The captain, along with the clan leader debriefed the group on their respective experiences at the raid. According to the clan leader they were taken by surprise by the impact on the fort. When the spheres dropped in through the roof they landed in the clan leader’s room. They were orchestrating a counter-strike on both the raiding party and *The Vengeful Victora*. The spheres killed the three ninja captains along with the clan leader’s protective detail. The clan leader initially was not able to understand the enemy, they were camouflaged, he opted to escape to the lower regions of the fort to find his remaining two captains. The clan leader needed to update and refocus his remaining command structure. The enemy

was a greater threat than the pirate raid. The clan leader had lost one hundred and fifty-eight warriors that day. He was left with only the ninja on board. The clan leader brought to our attention the way he got the sphere creature chained up. The crew had to break the translucent sphere that hid the creature within before Captain Bartley was able to end it. The clan leader explained that the ninja rolled chain explosives at the creature. It was a group attack and only the explosives that slowly rolled entered the translucent sphere. Using that knowledge they ricocheted the explosives off each other allowing the chains to extend out of the sphere and wrap the creature. After we finished the debrief I took to my room, got into my hammock, and processed what I saw at the raid myself. Those translucent spheres, the monster it hid, scared me. Breakfast came, then afternoon lunch.

“Liquor isles ahead!” shouted Hissy from the nest.

Jerry got Vee Vee to the port, docked, and dropped anchor.

Liquor Isles, a land governed by mythical elves, is a haven for anyone who wishes to live there. Elves were strong and could fend off a siege of their island, anyone who caused trouble here ended up in a deep open ocean. The elves also made exquisite wines and spirits attracting pirates or merchants. Nina made her way to the

nest, as the captain came out to address the lonesome leader of the ninja clan, his group was not visible around him, the only ninja I could see was the prisoner ninja standing in the shadows behind the captain.

“This is Liquor Isles sir, you may disembark,” said the captain.

“You have upheld our accord, pirate captain Bartley. I am indebted to you.” replied the clan leader. “I can think of a way you can repay me and we’ll be even.” said the captain.

“I understand,” responded the clan leader.

He made his way off the ship and vanished with a gust of dust as he disembarked.

“Well that’s over,” said Hissy as she disembarked with Destra and Smithy. “See ya later.” she continued.

Cookie and Tammy disembarked as well.

Cookie announced, “Get some food stock, be back soon.” with Tammy waving back as they left.

“Jerry, let's go check out the tavern in town,” said Navabi, Jerry complied, and they disembarked.

I approached Cutty as he was leaning on the mast.

“Hey, Cutty wanna go to town and see if they have any gadgets?” I asked sheepishly.

He grunted and disembarked with me.

“See ya later, captain,” I yelled out.

I was grateful Cutty was coming with me. I needed a protector in case things get hectic. We headed toward the market. I saw a burger stand and just had to try one. Pigeon burger! So good! As I was indulging my burger I saw Janice and Tano walking together. Tano was right next to her carrying her bags. Cutty was looking for his usual cleansing grasses. He has a ritual that he practices where he burns special grasses and covers himself in the smoke. A cleansing ritual. Cutty and I passed other crew mates as we walked around, finding the different groups bartering for cheaper prices or enjoying a meal. As the sun began to set Cutty suggested we visit the tavern to meet up with some of the crew and get some grog. We spent most of the night drinking at the tavern enjoying the

atmosphere. We were surrounded by lovely ladies of different shades, sizes, and sassiness. I got slapped in the face more than a few times. Myself and the other crewmates that were at the tavern made our way back to our beds aboard Vee Vee before dawn.

“Ow ow ow ow!” My sleep was rudely interrupted by falling out of my hammock and hitting my face on the floor.

I rubbed my face to massage the pain away and headed to the deck. I was awake so I might as well go bug the cook for something to eat and drink. After some back and forth with the cook, I left with a cup of tea and a chicken drumstick. On the deck, I was watching the sunrise, and realizing I would have one of those tired days I took a bite of my chicken and drank my tea. I walked to the other side of the ship. I was looking out to the city as the morning rays slowly forced the darkness to retreat into town. I began to see three figures walking directly to the ship. The tallest silhouette seemed to be carrying something, like a person.

As they came into the sunlight I could see everything. The captain was carrying the lifeless body of our youngest crewmate. It was Tano. He was one of the crew for the last three seasons. Our captain met Tano while pillaging a nobleman's fleet. After Captain Bartley submitted their naval crew he offered the slaves aboard

their freedom. The slaves took a ship in the fleet, sailing away from their former captors. The navy soldiers and their fleet captain were subdued and then imprisoned. There was a particular nobleman with his wife and son onboard. Convinced he would lose his possession, the nobleman, in a moment of madness, killed his wife with a ceremonial dagger he carried. The lean, tall, nobleman's blond hair caught the spray of blood the wind blew on him as the jugular veins emptied. He had slit her neck from behind and then attempted to kill his son. Captain Bartley was able to prevent the son's death by intervening, however the nobleman claimed that he would rather he and his family be dead than the prisoners of pirates. Captain Bartley had a reputation for being a gentleman and usually opted to shame his foes rather than kill them. The captain had told them he would simply take the treasures onboard and be on his merry way. The captain could not confiscate the ships because our crew was not big enough to take our ship and one of theirs. The captain offered Tano a spot in the crew, Captain Bartley felt it was his responsibility to oversee Tano since it was Bartley's actions. Tano accepted and Bartly added the kidnapping of a nobleman's son to his list of crimes. Tano was chatty and always helpful doing what he could to contribute. Our scientist, Janice, took a liking to Tano and they became an inseparable pair. She acted like his older sister, always taking care of him or teasing him.

The captain walked up the plank with Tano in his arms followed by the first mate and the prisoner ninja. They walked into his quarters and closed the door. We didn't have a doctor on board, not for a while, I'm not sure if the captain knew what to do with the cadaver. The captain emerged moments later.

“Get everyone out here, now!” I ran below deck to call all the crew and wake them up.

The crew ended up at the tavern in town and partied pretty late, most of the crew was likely to be in bed. I rounded up the crew mates I could find and headed back to the deck. Cutty, Tammy, Hissy, Jerry, Navabi, Cookie, Destra, Smithy and finally myself assembled on deck. The first mate and the prisoner ninja stood behind the captain on the upper deck. Janice wasn't here, I'm sure I banged on her door and announced the captain's gathering.

The captain's eyes seemed hollow, callous, cold. In a stern tone, the captain announced. “Last night, Tano was murdered! Jerry, set a course to *Green Tree Island*. Everyone get Vee Vee ready, we are sailing to avenge our fallen crewmate.”

He did not give us time to digest what we heard. The umbrella-shaped anchor was raised, sails were unfurled, and we

were off. The captain began to walk to the bow of Vee Vee, each step heavier than the last. The aura on the ship became more intense, scarier, and determined. The captain stood at the tip of the bow, arms folded with his gaze fixed far ahead. The first mate took her post in the nest. We have a beautiful room atop our mast. It kept you covered from rain, it even had a hammock and chair. She did not relax in the nest, Nina. She stood at the front of the nest with Hissy next to her checking the rifles in the nest. Our first mate is the best sniper I have ever seen and with Hissy at her side, exponentially deadlier. Hissy would take the fired rifle and begin the process of reloading the musket as she gave Nina a loaded musket. They keep about twelve rifles in rotation in the nest. Using their rifle reload system, our first mate shoots almost continuously. They are capable of taking down an entire crew from a distance with ease.

I went past Cutty who prepared our ship's cannons. Cutty is amazing at getting those cannons ready. The elite skills of crew mates like Cutty allow our crew to remain condensed. Captain Bartley appreciates a condensed crew. Cutty would have fuses that linked into each cannon and he would light one end and as they fired sequentially he would run to the start of the cannon line and begin reloading them and have the fuse ready to fire again. Jerry worked closely with Cutty as he would line up the target along the

port or starboard sides of the ship. Cutty would usually work with the first mate or myself when we used the bow or stern cannons as we are the better long shots on the crew. I use the bow of my violin to strike!

“Captain, I think we left Janice on the *Liquor Isle* when we.” I couldn’t finish my statement, our voyage for vengeance felt heavy on the lips. We need to return for Janice.”

Captain Bartley did not engage with me.

“How do you know where to find the killer?” I continued.

“Write a song for when we have Tano's funeral. When I kill Greenbeard I want to take Tano to Turtle Bay and let him rest there.” The captain responded.

I could tell the captain did not want to be bothered. I headed below deck to think about what the captain said. We were going after Greenbeard. Greenbeard is a grand pirate with a fleet and even his territory. From what I heard of the man, he would eat spinach while killing his enemies, often slaughtering many people in one swing. Spinach gave him strength and expedited his healing. His beard turned green from the quantum of spinach he would devour. He

was a pirate who valued strength above all else. Greenbeard's ship *The Stede Bonnet's Revenge* was a large galleon with a great many cannons. I have only heard rumors of the man and his crew and the tales had one common denominator, ruthless violence. This is not a voyage I'd willingly want to be on.

Hours had passed and nightfall came. My sleep ended when I heard the first mate announce that she could see Greenbeard's ship. My adrenaline spiked. Although Greenbeard was a pirate of great repute, so was our captain which just meant the clash would be more intense. I could see Greenbeard's ship when I got to the top deck. The dawn was just breaking and I could see the ship's silhouette on the horizon. It was tiny being so far away. I ran below deck to get my utility belt's accessories when I came back up the distance seemed much closer. I could see the crew on their ship now. The captain still stood at the tip of the bow. I don't think he moved from that spot. It was like he was willing the ship to move forward, faster. Such a strange sensation. I went to the navigator to ask her how she plotted the course and as she began telling me she had nothing to do with the course, the captain commanded Jerry to get him on the Greenbeard's ship now. Jerry jumped from the back at the helm to the bow of the ship in one massive leap. The things a fish cursed with being half-human could often amazed me. The captain had a rope in his hand and started wrapping one

end around his wrist. Jerry grabbed the other end of the rope as the captain threw it at him. The captain then ran toward the stern and dove over the edge of the ship, Jerry, in sync with the captain's dive, began swinging the rope around his head with the captain on one end. Jerry was swinging the captain around like he was a rock in a sling. Jerry let go of the rope and threw the captain in the direction of Greenbeard's ship!

I could see the captain sailing across the sky with the sun rays that were starting to dawn that day. The captain had his hand on his katana at the hilt and curled up in a ball. Jerry's throw was accurate, The captain was now plummeting toward the main mast of Greenbeard's flagship. The captain drew his katana and landed on the port side of the ship. I could see he stunned Greenbeard's crew from where I stood at the top of the helm deck looking through my spyglass. The main mast slowly fell overboard behind the captain. I saw the captain jerk about with his katana a few times and then I heard the sounds of gunshots echo across the sea, he'd been shot at a few times and deflected it. It looked like he was lecturing them then he gestured his hand. I heard the shot come from our nest. I looked up and saw the first mate had a smoking rifle in hand that she was passing to Hissy, I looked back in the captain's direction quickly and I saw a body drop. The crowd backed away from the body which happened to be the closest

person to the captain. I saw Captain Bartley begin to lecture them again and did a different gesture, this time I heard three shots from the nest, and three bodies over on Greenbeard's ship fell. Our ship was well within firing range but with the mast down their ship was immobilized and Jerry opted to come up alongside their ship.

I could see the captain walking past the mast and looking up at the helm. There stood Green Beard, a rather large man amongst his crew. He jumped from the helm and landed about fifteen shackles away from Captain Bartley.

Greenbeard exclaimed "Die, Bartley!"

He lunged toward the captain but by the time he did that the captain was already two steps past him, his left arm extended holding his katana. Greenbeard turned to face the captain. He looked bewildered raising his right hand to his face. Both Greenbeard and I, through my spyglass, were shocked to see the forearm slowly detach from the rest of his arm. His torso then followed in the same manner, slowly detaching from his abdomen and then falling to the floor, his lower body falling to the side of his torso. Greenbeard lay on the deck dead and decapitated. Greenbeard's crew immediately surrendered, dropping their weapons, and then to their knees. They wanted mercy from this

monster that suddenly appeared on their ship and murdered their leader. Vee Vee slowed alongside *The Stede Bonnet's Revenge*, we threw our hooks over securing the ships to each other. I had to climb up the elevated rope lines, it sunk in how large this galleon was. They had three decks of cannons and a much larger crew than ours. This could have been a difficult battle.

As I reached the deck the captain requested their first mate to present himself. A large muscular, bald, dark-skinned man claimed the title. The captain approached him, katana still drawn, and said, "I trust you understand the situation you find yourself in?"

The man nodded his head to show the captain his acknowledgment.

Captain Bartley continued, "Tell me about those weapons." gesturing to something on the side.

I looked over to where Captain Bartley gestured. It was the gauntlet on one of the men that our first mate shot and killed. That gauntlet is familiar to me! Our scientist, Janice, is the only person I know who can craft that gauntlet. Janice made one for me that I keep in my tool chest. It has a knife, a propelled grappling hook, and fires

bullets from the finger joints. I use it when I'm in troublesome circumstances or without my violin.

Was someone capable of duplicating Janice's work?

I rushed over to the cadaver and snatched the gauntlet off its arm. I peered inside to see if it was there.

Her mark!

Janice always marked her work in specific spots depending on the appendage the weapon was on. There was, on the underside of the forearm protector, a double ring.

"Captain," I said in shock.

Captain Bartley sighed. Out of nowhere, the prisoner ninja appeared next to the captain.

"She's not here, I was not able to identify anyone on this ship that matched your description." He said to the captain. "I gathered all the women on board over there for your inspection." He continued.

The captain didn't say anything and just sauntered past the small group of women without looking at them and returned to Vee Vee. The first mate left the nest and landed next to the captain.

“Finish up here.” He said to Nina.

The first mate came aboard *The Stede Bonnet's Revenge* and announced to our crew “Time to go!”

Nina stayed on *The Stede Bonnet's Revenge* until the last of us got back to Vee Vee. She then jumped over, and we unhooked from their galleon and began to separate. I wondered if they would try to fire their cannons, but that would incur the wrath of the monster that didn't need a ship to destroy theirs. We didn't completely disable their ship as that would mean certain death. Drifting for days with dwindling supplies. They still had a functional rudder, and oars, and many crew to use the oars. The captain isn't a cruel person but he is a monster and the now-former crew of Greenbeard knows enough to not provoke death.

Our first mate emerged from the captain's quarters and announced we were heading to *Obeyah Island*. *Obeyah Island* is a cursed place where people go to find witch doctors or practitioners of dark magic. Obeyah doctors demand payment in blood or life. A scary

place. I've never been there before but it does not sound welcoming. Its surrounding waters are cursed, dooming any crew that ventures in its water to be devoured by the sea. The crew sat for supper, all gathered in the mess hall, waiting for the captain. Captain Bartley was the last to enter the room.

Hissy started "Captain, what's."

The captain interrupted her "Tano was last with Janice at *Liquor Isles*. She left the ship with Tano to visit an alchemist which she claimed was to research the necklace I took from that monster at the ninja fortress.

I struck an accord with the ninja clan leader. For the life of Chu, the prisoner, I would give the clan leader information about the necklace. When Janice didn't return after a couple of hours, I sent Nina and Chu to check in on her and Tano. When you all got back onboard after the tavern I went myself to find them."

"When the captain found me I was still trying to make sense of Tano's wounds." Nina started. "He was impaled through the heart from behind and through the right side of his skull in a muddy, garbage-filled alley that was next to *Liquor Isles'* alchemist depot. I saw the alchemist merchant hovering over." she paused.

“Tano on his back, laying in a pool of his blood, a hole in the side of his head. I stabbed the merchant in his leg to stop him and made him explain what he had done. He claimed innocence and as an Elf alchemist, that he would be foolish to pass up the opportunity to harvest a human body, material for potions. I was inclined to believe. I can tell by the look on your faces you feel the same sense of familiarity.”

The first mate was right. Janice didn't fight often but when she did she would resort to wrestling. Her goal after closing the distance on her opponent would then be to place her gauntleted palms over the heart and then do the same with her other palm but on the side of the target's skull. With her palms in place shaped spikes would extend out from the palm, impaling her target through the heart and head, ensuring death. It was a weapon of her design, she had rings on each of her fingers and thumbs which were connected at the palm by a coin-shaped metal. It would leave distinct smooth holes in the body.

Hissy asked, “What are you saying?”

“I need to find Janice. I need to ask her what happened to Tano. He was with her and he’s dead now. I need to hear from her what happened. This isn’t up for discussion.” interrupted Captain Bartley.

”I went looking for Janice, I heard from some cargo loaders that a woman matching Janice’s description paid them to load crates of weapons onto *The Stede Bonnet’s Revenge*. Chu found the merchant of the crates.” said Nina.

Vee Vee’s crates were ores and cloth supplies for Destra and Smithy, we aren’t weapons merchants.

The captain continued, “I found the port master and gave him some coins, enough for him to tell me Janice paid a weapons merchant to deliver six crates of special order weapons to *The Stede Bonnet’s Revenge* just after noon.”

The crew remained silent, eating, with a grim aura that filled the room. The captain left without eating supper. He just grabbed a green apple and returned to his quarters.

Chapter 3: *Eyes of the Dead, best Taste Cold*

We arrived at Obeyah Island the following night. The captain ordered Jerry to circle the island three times in an anticlockwise direction and to remain well away from the shore of the island. A ridiculous order.

“Captain, why are we circling the island three times?” I asked.

“Nina has been here before with me, none of you know what a wild ride you’re in for as we stay here. I’m ordering all of you to not use your weapons tonight. Tonight, we’re pacifists.” said Captain Bartley.

“Ha Ha Ha Ha!” laughed Smithy.

“I’m not kidding, Smithy.” replied the captain. Captain Bartley continued, “No violence tonight. Not until sunrise. You won’t have your life by sunrise if you do.”

Captain Bartley asked Chu to bring Tano's wrapped body to the island. I was also part of the landing party. A long boat was prepared, and the captain called for the first mate and I.

"Why does he get to come with us, captain? Can we trust this ninja? Wasn't he a prisoner of his clan as well? I bet he did something really bad!" I didn't mean to say that much but I'm sure it was on the crew's mind.

"Do you want to carry Tano then, Bard?" said the captain. "Lower the longboat, this isn't going to get less pleasant." he continued, ignoring my concern.

Fog from the island slowly made its way to Vee Vee's deck as Jerry lowered us in the longboat. Chu and I started paddling toward the shore slowly. The fog made it difficult to see the shore. Nina warned of the rocks in the water as we moved.

I asked, "Captain, why are we going to Obeyah Island?"

Captain Bartley replied, "To see a woman about finding a woman."

His answers are occasionally annoying, just enough to give you the idea of what he was doing, but not enough to dismiss follow-up questions.

“What woman? On this island? She is a scary voodoo woman, isn't she captain? That's a bad idea, those women always demand blood. Why are you bringing Tano? What is she going to do with Tano's body?” I continued.

As soon as we landed on shore I immediately felt eyes on me. It felt like it could see even my underwear. I looked around to see if anyone was around. It was impossible to tell, the moon was hidden behind clouds, and fog covered as far as my eyes could see. I couldn't see the glow of candlelight on Vee Vee.

“Captain, can't we do this in the morning when the sun is out?” I asked.

“Just stay close to me, I know the path. Do not stray from my side. This forest likes to lead visitors in circles, mocking them as they die of dehydration or starvation.” Captain Bartley said.

“What! What kind of forest wants to kill people!” I exclaimed.

The captain looked at Chu and me.

“Just remember what I said. Do you understand?” asked the captain.

We nodded, pacifists till sunrise, and then began our trek into the forest. The forest was dark, the air was humid, and the bush thick. I struggled to keep pace with the group, everyone else seemed to glide through the thick bushes, branches were slapping me, scraping me, the bush felt like sharp knives cutting me as they held me and I could only see the silhouettes of the crew.

“Why didn’t we bring torches or a lamp, I can’t see you guys,” I asked.

“Zip na bu to luma luc.” was the response to my question.

“Huh, Captain I didn’t hear you,” I said.

“Ko blu hu hakt wah.” was his response.

I pushed through the bushes hard and grabbed at the captain’s silhouette but I could tell immediately that it was not an arm, it felt like silk as the silhouette continued forward and its arm slid out of

my grasp. They stopped, two at my side and one in front, running away was the only option. I turned to run but the silhouette slipped in my way. I turned to run in a different direction with the same result, but the silhouettes kept getting in my way as I tried to escape. I tried my grappling hook to escape upward. The lead silhouette that looked like the captain's flowed right into my face. It was sudden, I fell on my butt with the silhouette in my face. I could see a white-toothed grin appear across the silhouette's face.

"Weak," said the lead silhouette, the other two repeated "Weak", their silky lips close to my ear, I could feel the vibration of their voice reverberate through my entire being.

The lead silhouette then said "Coward", like before the other two repeated "Coward".

The lead silhouette's face drew even closer and as it did the other two silhouettes got louder repeating "Weak" and "Coward" alternating their word choice, overlapping the sounds, and saying their respective words in unison.

The voices sounded like an angry old man or a toddler screaming. It paralyzed me with fear, I could only sit on my butt as these

silhouettes berated me. The lead silhouette whispered, among the angry, crying, berating sound of the other silhouettes.

“You are weak, that’s why you cling to me. You were too weak to work and get the medicine your mother needed to live.”

How did this shadow know about that? What is going on here? My thoughts started spiraling and tears started running down my cheeks. Where is the captain? I mustered all the strength I could, got up, and started walking forward.

The silhouettes were not preventing me from moving, just in the way, berating and belittling me. These apparitions were not the crew. Captain Bartley, his first mate, Nina would never be cruel in their words. Direct and often blunt but never cruel. I kept my focus beyond the silhouettes, I kept picturing the backs of the captain and Nina, I *will* get back to them. The silhouettes faded, and as I momentarily forgot they were pestering me, I kept pressing forward thinking of only returning to the crew. I didn’t notice it, not immediately but I was walking at the edge of a swamp. I stopped when my foot sank in the mire. I looked around to see if I could get oriented to where I was. The swamp began revealing itself, as the moon emerged slowly from behind the clouds. It was eerie, I didn’t think clouds next to each other would move in opposite directions.

The moon lifted the veil of darkness across the swamp. Gnarled trees loomed overhead, their twisted branches reaching out like skeletal fingers. The water was dark and still, reflecting the ghostly moonlight. Most unsettling was the silence. Nothing broke it, not the occasional croak of a frog, the chirping of crickets, not any of it. A flicker on the other side of the swamp turned into a flame revealing a hut. I looked around thinking I could walk around the edge of the swamp to get to the hut.

As I scanned the environment from the right, a skeleton, with pants, an overcoat, and a hat, cast a fishing rod into the swamp. He was over to the left of me. He stopped looking down from his fishing rod, then began turning his head to face me, and pointed toward the hut. The skeleton got a tug on his fishing rod, began cackling then pulled the rod. I was suddenly swept off my feet, leaving my shoes behind in the mire. There was a fish hook hooked into my ankle, through the bone, the pain was intense, and I was thrown and landed in the swamp. The swamp was deep and the hook kept pulling me deeper into the dark murkiness. I panicked and started reaching up to the light I could see from the moon as I sank below the swamp. The light was fading fast, I used the strength I had left to claw my way to the surface of the water. I broke through the surface tired, overwhelmed, and panicked. I still

had more to do! I started swimming toward the only thing that made sense, the hut. The water felt thick and slimy as I stroked through it, and the musty smell of the swamp enveloped me. I made it about halfway through the swamp when I began feeling bony hands clawing at me from below. I was being tugged at by many skeletons below the surface trying to drag me below. Not like this, not to bones! I was not prepared to die like this. I mustered my effort to focus on kicking my feet and pulling the water with my arms. I felt the skulls and hands pull me but I used my own hands to pull and push myself off the skulls. I was using their skulls to climb over them and crawl over the swamp's surface. I eventually made it to the other side. I was tired, I fought so hard to stay above water away from the skeletons. I crawled out of the swamp, the ground was more solid here. A tingle shot up my spine and I turned around to face the swamp. They were still coming! The skeletons! They were walking out of the water with moss-covered bones, stumbling toward me. I started screaming and turned to run. I was stunned in place, the captain was now in front of me and had placed his hand heavily on my shoulder.

“Captain,” I said, dazed, looking at Captain Bartley, Nina, and Chu.

“Good work, Bard. You made it,” he said. “This island is cursed and confronts you with your insecurities, then devours you. Whatever

you experienced came from the depths of your mind. I'm glad to see you weren't eaten." The captain explained.

"A little warning would have been great, Captain, and why the hell did we circle the island three times anticlockwise!" I exclaimed.

"Where are your shoes?" He responded.

To my relief, I forgot about my ankle injury. My ankle was as good as new, with no fishing hook going through it, but my shoes weren't on my feet when I inspected them.

We faced the hut. The hut was small, its walls were weathered wooden planks thatched together with palm leaves, and it sat on wooden stilts. Every step we took on those rickety wooden stairs creaked so loud it announced our presence. It also felt like it would crumble under our weight. The captain was about to knock on the plank of wood used for a door but before he could a loud irritating voice shouted.

"Come in, the door is open."

The captain pushed the plank in and entered with the rest of us following in behind him. The inside walls of the hut were littered

with charms, talismans, animal bones, feathers, and dried herbs. A large furnace was on the far side of the room with burning hot coals glowing from within. The air was thick with the smell of blood and incense. Did she burn bodies here, I wonder. Candles lit the room flickering over the face of a woman. She stood at the center of the room, a dark-skinned woman with long dreads, and beautiful. She had intense eyes and lovely cheeks. The woman cackled as we entered.

“Aye stranger, long time no see”. She said to the captain.

He hugged her, “Moja you’re looking beautiful.” The captain said to her.

“Very good, you’re working on your pleasantries. I know you came here to find someone. I can see it in your eyes even behind that pleasant smile. You come to me so it must be important. You know I demand much from my friends that will owe me.” Said Moja.

“Give her Tano,” the captain said as he gestured toward Chu. “I want to know where Tano’s killer is and who took his life.” He continued.

Moja pointed toward a table next to a large furnace as she maintained eye contact with the captain. I helped Chu move the body off his shoulder and held Tano's legs. As we got closer I could feel the intense heat of the furnace and I could see the coals glowing intensely, I heard faint screams coming from within the furnace. It scared me, I dropped the body and ran quickly behind the first mate. The first mate made a grunt of annoyance as I got behind her but she's tough and kind-hearted so I knew she would protect me.

Moja said to the captain "Let's begin, my dear."

She took him by the hand and led him to the furnace.

"Remember, be willing to embrace this. Don't cloud your mind with judgment." Moja said.

She began making weird chanting noises and the reverberations spread through the hut. The furnace also reacted and flames started shooting out rhythmically. The captain stood at the front of the furnace staring into the burning coals. Moja walked over to the table where Tano lay wrapped. She intensified her chanting as she circled Tano removing the sheet he was wrapped in, somehow the wrapping slinked off like silk without Moja letting go of the initial

piece of the wrapping. She picked up Tano from the crown of his head, dangling him, using only one arm, to lift the body off the table. Moja is strong. Moja walked to the front of the captain with Tano's body and held it in front of him, dangling in front of the captain. The captain stared into the lifeless eyes of Tano. Moja's chant intensified then she flung Tano's body into the furnace. The coals reacted and the furnace became inflamed, smoke bellowed out the top of the furnace, and thick black smoke began to fill the room. The stench of burning flesh and hair filled the air. The flame in the furnace ragged as the body burned. Moja positioned herself behind the captain, took a breath in and blew onto the back of the captain.

"Now reach in the fire and devour the eyes of the dead," yelled Moja.

The captain did as she commanded, reaching into the fire of the furnace and ingesting what was in his hand. Gulpd it down in one bite. The flames immediately vanished including the wall candles and the hut became dark. The candles that illuminated the hut revived, slowly. The captain was laid out on the floor with Moja standing over him staring menacingly at him. I rushed over and as I knelt beside the captain, he sat up swiftly. His confusion lasted for a second and he looked at Moja.

“Who did you see?” Moja asked with a sinister smile.

He looked at the first mate and got to his feet.

“Let’s go, I know our heading.” the captain announced.

He began heading to the door of the hut to leave Moja said to him.
“You can’t do this as you are now. Not like this. I *do* enjoy watching you struggle on your adventures but not as you are now.”

Moja circled a bowl of eyes while stroking the rim continuously as she moved.

“You navigate treacherous seas where creatures and spirits, not of this world, roam. You sail the seas with joy and tranquility. It amazes me to watch how stupidly lucky you are. But now, your sea has changed, your sea is turbulent, and you will lead yourself, and your crew to darkness and destruction. You ignored my warning before, didn’t you, and now you are in this hot mess. I will come with you on this journey, if you don’t heed my warning this time then we will meet our ends together and I can remind you, as you are dying, and as you spend eternity suffering on the other side, how much I told you so.” Moja said with a devilish smile.

"I hate you. Welcome to the crew." signed the captain. Moja laughed sinisterly and tied a satchel around her waist.

When we exited the hut, instead of the swamp, the island's shore, now fogless, lay ahead of us with Vee Vee visible in the distance, and our longboat parked on the shore.

"This is creepy," I said.

"More convenient than creepy wouldn't you say? I hate this fog." Captain Bartley replied.

We got back to Vee Vee.

"Everyone come gather round. This is Moja." He gestured to Moja with both his hands, did a little head bow, and continued. "Moja is here to keep you alive, that's her purpose on this ship."

"That's her purpose on this ship! To keep us alive!" Hissy echoed.

Hissy ran, slid over to Moja, and hugged her tightly. The captain gave the crew their orders and he took the helm.

Chapter 4: *Janice, Has Moved On*

As we took to the open sea we prepared the ship for battle in the dark of the night. Our deck candles extinguished themselves, the ship was silent as we glided gracefully across the crashing waves. Our course was unknown and the captain was distant in thought. I started walking toward the captain for more details when Moja stopped me.

“Bard, come here.” Moja motioned and said as she stood at the starboard rail.

She had been staring out to the sea ever since we began.

“What’s up?” I asked.

She went on “I see a gleam of curiosity in your eye.”

“Yeah, I want to know where we are going,” I said.

“Now is not a good time to disturb your captain. He is following a ghost, even though he doesn’t know.” She replied.

“He’s following a ghost? Is that what you did to him when you burned Tano?” I asked.

“You are a clever one aren’t you.” She said, touching me on the nose with her index finger, and continued. “Yes, the ritual allows someone to see the dead’s final moments but in exchange, you are cursed with being haunted by the dead person.”

Moja made direct eye contact with me and the air around her grew cold, dark, and sinister. She continued, “He is being haunted by the corpse of Tano, isn’t it wonderful!”

Her eyes grew wide as she spoke. I was creeped out by what Moja said, I was worried about the captain, he was haunted now, but I didn’t approach him. Captain Bartley looked lost in another world where he stood.

I left Moja and got a supper snack and headed below deck to get some rest. When I woke up it was midday, I got to the deck to find the crew scattered at their various posts, except the helm. Jerry was at the bow securing the anchor. When nightfall came, I saw the candle glow from three ships off our bow in the distance.

The first mate yelled from the nest “Goldbeard’s flagship ahead.”

“About time,” said Cutty, itching for the upcoming fight.

“You know who Goldbeard is, right?” Navabi asked suspiciously.

“Doesn’t matter, I’ll make a path through their crew for the captain, he doesn’t need to concern himself with Goldbeard’s lackeys,” replied Cutty.

“So you don’t know who Goldbeard is,” said Tammy.

The wind intensified, howling, the sails flapped in the wind, and the ship was moving faster now. Jerry was at the bow cannons gathering ammunition.

“Why are we going after Goldbeard though?” asked Tammy. “What does he have to do with Janice?” she continued.

“I don’t know, but I know Goldbeard is not a pirate to cross paths with,” Navabi said.

“Yeah, she's right,” I said.

Goldbeard is a pirate of ill repute, feared across the seas, his name synonymous with terror and plunder. I've heard rumors of the man and his nefarious behavior. Commodore Goldbeard commanded a fleet of pirate ships that numbered in the hundreds, to control so many pirates was no easy feat. I've heard any disobedience or dissension among his rank would be met with a watery grave as he would shackle the would-be deviant to a cannonball and fire them into the sea. Obedience was demanded of them.

"Did Goldbeard kill Tano and maybe kidnap Janice? She'll make a valuable asset to any crew," said Cutty.

"Maybe, but I don't know, Tano's wounds looked like they were made by a custom gauntlet made by Janice. Even if Goldbeard did kidnap her, that doesn't explain Tano's death." I responded.

We were silent for a moment. Was this the purpose of our voyage? It was a grave thought sailing after a pirate like Goldbeard. I don't want to. My thought was interrupted when I felt a heavy hand rest on my shoulder. It was the captain, he'd finally emerged from his quarters. He walked past me, to the bow, each step getting heavier until he finally stopped at the bow.

As he walked past Moja blurted out to him “You see the madness you are about to do?”

As Captain Bartley got to Vee Vee’s bow, he started.

“Jerry!” said the captain.

Jerry grabbed one of the bow cannons holding it above his head. The captain then jumped, stood on the cannon, and Jerry tossed the cannon with the captain. The captain surfed the cannon toward the largest ship in the fleet.

The captain yelled “Goldbeard!” as he soared through the air.

The battle had begun.

The captain fired the cannon he was surfing at the apex, then jumped off the cannon toward the Goldbeard’s ship. The cannonball fired by the captain, suddenly stopped in mid-air, like it had struck an invisible wall. The captain was not far behind the cannonball, as Captain Bartley soared through the air, the captain took his lunar fang pose and then struck the invisible wall where the cannonball hit. As the captain started falling he kept slashing at the invisible wall that was in his way. This scene was familiar to

me, not the captain soaring through the air like an eccentric fool, but when we raided that ninja fort. When we encountered those monsters that fell from the sky.

Thung!

It was the sound of an arrow being blocked by Cutty's machete.

"Pay attention," said Cutty.

He had used the flat side of the blade to protect my face. There are capable pirates among Goldbeard's ranks! I heard shots being fired from our nest. The first mate and Hissy were in their rhythm firing off shots in the captain's direction. Nina and Hissy jumped out of the nest and landed next to us.

"Goldbeard's ship has that protective sphere around him, his ship's not invisible, but the bullets and the captain's attack were nullified in the same way," Nina said.

"What!" I exclaimed. "How are we supposed to get through then?" I continued.

"I know, I know. It was a pain to deal with," Nina said.

It was quite a pain to deal with.

The captain and Cutty can cleave entire galleons. Their barrage on the sphere was intense and the monster was restrained. It took quite some effort for the crew to be able to destroy the sphere and kill the monster within. Goldbeard's ship was no restrained monster, he was a titan protected by a powerful shield.

"We will just need to leave Goldbeard to the captain. The escort ships aren't protected by that sphere. I shot a few pirates to confirm. Let's clean up Goldbeard's lackeys so we can have some alone time with him. We'll pick the captain up when we clear the fools. Now go!" said the first mate.

Cutty ran to the port cannons and positioned himself to do his cannon barrage attack.

"Jerry!" Cutty exclaimed.

"I know but the ship isn't turning, it's moving toward Goldbeard!" Jerry replied.

“It is the ship’s will. It is going after that foolish captain of yours.” Moja yelled.

“What are you getting at?” I started.

“Shut up and listen.” Moja interrupted. She continued “Understand this ship and your captain are cursed, she will do what Captain Bartley desires. *The Vengeful Victoria* is a ship that loves its captain unconditionally. She will follow him into the seas of oblivion if he goes. Your captain’s eyes are closed to all but that one, and he gets wreckless like this. Have you figured that out yet?”

She was right. The captain isn’t the type to go looking for fights. He enjoys sneaking around looking to plunder riches or finding places no one knows about just to see if he can loot trinkets. He especially enjoys sailing away laughing at his pursuers. When Captain Bartley went after Greenbeard, cutting him down like that, and leaving the crew to die at sea was not something I’d seen the captain do while I’d been with him.

“It’s Janice,” said the first mate. “He needs to ask her.”

“What happened with Tano?” I interrupted.

Moja added “The first mate is right. This ship will keep you alive because that is the captain’s will but it is also the will of the captain to reach Janice.”

“Then let’s get off Vee Vee for now since she’s occupied, sink that fleet, come back and rescue Janice,” Destra added.

She had been protecting us from arrows and bullets that came our way using a blanket she stitched together. Goldbeard’s ship launched three barrels around Vee Vee. One barrel landed behind us and the other two on either side of the ship. These barrels looked familiar. They were regular barrels but they all had a device that was fixed to the lid and the midsection of the barrel. The design was so familiar that I knew what should happen next. Pink smoke started to emerge from the device on the belly of the barrel.

“Hey! We need to move the ship quickly or this will get bad!” I yelled.

The crew also witnessed the barrel barrage and undoubtedly saw the similarities I did. Jerry started towards the helm but the ship jerked us forward faster and we all fell on our butts. Being downwind of the barrel behind us put us in the path of the smoke and if we tried veering off to the port or starboard side we would

have to go through the smoke that was stretching out with the wind and parallel on either side of the ship. Going forward and beating the smoke was the only option. I looked ahead to find Goldbeard's flagship and saw him veering away from his escort ships. We finally got into the cannon range of the escort ships that were on an intercept course. Jerry grabbed a few cannonballs and began throwing them at the nearest port side enemy ship. Our opposing groups were sailing into each other, Vee Vee was playing chicken with Goldbeard's escorts. The deck flashed and boomed with Cutty's cannon fire. To offer Cutty support, Jerry threw the cannons at the ship approaching us off the port of the bow while Cutty targeted the ship approaching off the starboard bow.

I could see our attacks were not working against either of the oncoming ships. It appeared that skillful pirates were slashing the cannon balls out of the air on their respective escort ships. I could see the glint of the sword and the spark on impact. The shadow of the night made us more difficult to target but as they got closer we were losing that advantage, and their numbers were our disadvantage. Cutty's cannon barrage was not effective either, they could deflect the cannon balls. We couldn't see them very well to get accurate numbers and Goldbeard's fleet would be filled with tough pirates.

“Let’s go!” Yelled Destra.

She and Smithy were atop the mast. She donned her kite suit with the blacksmith strapped on at her waist. They jumped from the mast and began gliding over. A glowing trail followed them, Smithy wielded a hammer, he was an amputee, he had attached at the forearm his clamp which he used when forging, he took a hot anvil, it glowed bright orange. Destra reached the apex and Smithy struck the glowing metal with his hammer and it lit up the sky around the ships and began fading after a brief moment. Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. Five shots came from the mast, our first mate and Hissy were back in the mast sniping at the escort ships. I saw two bodies drop from the ship approaching the starboard side and at least one drop from a ship on the port side. The glow from Smithy’s strike was fading and as it faded I could see a person launched upward into Destra with an axe. The glow of the struck anvil illuminated the moonless night sky once again when iron struck iron. Smithy smashed his attacker back to the deck of the ship. Destra used the force of the strike to gain more altitude. Smithy struck the hammer and glowing anvil together to illuminate the sky. This time twelve shots from the first mate. Goldbeard’s fleet faced the same danger from the smoke and couldn’t deviate much from their path. They were trapped within the perimeter created by the pink smoke. Cutty and Jerry kept a steady stream of

cannon fire which occupied the pirates aboard the escort ships with defence. Vee Vee was defended by their cannon attack by Cookie. He stood at the bow, using handfuls of cooked spaghetti, he slapped the cannonballs into the water. I wondered if he plans to serve us that spaghetti when this is over. He doesn't like to waste food.

"Cutty! Get the port and starboard cannons ready then stay on the starboard side." Moja yelled.

Cutty looked at her for a second.

"Can't you feel what VeeVee wants to do?" continued Moja with a sinister smile.

Cutty did as she instructed. Jerry and the cook remained at the front and Chu took over for Cutty at the bow cannons.

"First mate, you better get ready." Said Moja as she clasped a rope attached to the main mast.

I braced myself as well in anticipation. I heard a loud clang and splash. The anchor came loose and went into the sea. Our anchor was shaped like an umbrella that had a pointed tip. I'd always

thought it was the weirdest anchor to have since pulling it up would be more of a pain by design, it would collect the water as it came up but, in this context, I see why it was shaped like this. The anchor acted as a brake mechanism in the deep sea. The ship began turning sharply, creaking with the strain the anchor put by pulling on the port bow, which made me tumble to the back of the deck. As the ship turned to the side I could see the flash from Smithy's hammer striking the glowing anvil. The events lined up perfectly, now the ship, although still turning, had its side cannons facing the ship that was off our port. Both Cutty and the first mate fired. As Vee Vee kept turning I saw the cannonballs hit their ship perfectly at the hull, cratering it. Smithy's illuminating trick faded. Cutty dashed on and relocated to the other side as Vee Vee kept rotating in the water. Another flash strike from Smithy lit up the sky and now I could see the other fleet ship's bow exposed to our port side cannons. Cutty and the first mate fired their barrage and this time the cannons struck the deck causing some of their crew to be thrown off the deck. The fleet ships were halted. One was sinking and the other had sustained a damaging blow. With our cook defending the ship with his cooked spaghetti, aerial support, and a barrage of attacks, we were in a superior state compared to Goldbeard's escort ships. The only problem we faced was the pink smoke on the wind coming to engulf us.

Our ship was severely slowed with that maneuver, the anchor was slow to bring up. In about thirty seconds the smoke would cover us, and not long after the fleet ships. As bad as this situation was, it would work out in our favor. Goldbeard's flagship was far away and appeared to be leaving this fight for the escort ships to handle. The captain was still in the water and the pink smoke was heavy as it rolled over the top of the waves.

Would the captain get stuck in the pink smoke?

I could not finish the thought before The pink smoke made its way to the ship and engulfed us.

When consciousness made its way back to me, my face was swollen, and hurting with Hissy squatting next to me grinning from ear to ear. I sat up to see most of the crew looking like they just woke up, like myself. The captain stood at the bow looking into the sunrise with Moja. The captain made it back. They both made their way to the captain's quarters and closed the door behind them. Hissy got a mischievous look on her face.

"I wonder what they are going to talk about. We were knocked out for a couple of hours. I'm curious." Hissy said.

She was right. I was curious as well, what happened between Goldbeard and the captain? Hissy and I ran over to the captain's quarters and squatted, just outside his door. We both pressed our ears against the door.

I could hear the captain. "I was able to talk with her. She said to me that I was not enough to help her accomplish her dreams. She wants to be known, and do great things, and I can't defeat a strong pirate like Goldbeard."

Moja was talking to him now. "She's right, Bartley. Goldbeard is a strong, powerful pirate with a large fleet at his command, and is the most influential pirate of the era. You are not on par with Goldbeard. You had more than your share of drinks and you enjoyed many voyages with her. Close the logbook on those voyages. You can't think of Janice as a treasure, even if you got this treasure back you can't keep it. That is your closure, Bartley. Betrayal is part of pirating dearest. Be happy with the crew that sail with you, not the crew that would mutiny against you."

The captain snapped at her "Of course, I should accept that a member of my crew was murdered because Janice couldn't tell me she wanted out. For the sake of the crew right, Moja? I will do what you say, I'll not hunt Janice or Goldbeard."

The captain's worst traits were directed at Moja in his current state. I could hear the condescension and hurt in his voice.

"I will remain on this ship for a while. Keep things on course. I have a vested interest in you, Bartley. I can't have you running off doing some foolishness." Moja said plainly.

Footsteps from within the captain's quarters started towards the door. Hissy and I slid to the side and acted casually. I bumped up against Nina. She had been behind me with her arms crossed leaning against the wall next to the captain's door, listening. Moja emerged and closed the door behind her. She walked forward and stopped after a few steps.

"That man was in love with her. She offered him a treasure that she gave to Goldbeard in the end. Nina, you are the captain's protege. You can guide him out of madness better than I. You are a youngling to him, he will not burden you with his troubles. His actions if unchecked will become burdensome. Do you understand?" Moja asked.

"I'll protect the captain," Nina said sternly.

Her eyes glared with focus and disdain. She was a vengeful one, unlike the captain, she would ensure her enemies would be reduced to dependents. Disabled like. She's very good at decapitation using her snake sword and there never was an Achilles or bicep tendon left uncut when she drew her machetes or daggers. Her non-fatal pistol shots either rendered a person unable to ever walk upright, or at all.

"The captain has lost his purpose. We need to help him plunder a naval fort. Anything to keep his frontal lobe occupied and in the right direction." Moja added, she then walked toward the bow where she stood smiling at the sun still rising.

Captain Bartley moments later emerged from his quarters. He took a look at Nina, still outside his door. He looked at Hissy who was still near the captain's quarters, then walked to the helm, and with a big smile, he announced "Let's go find some treasure! The lot of you have not done any pirating, basically time thieves. Let's get some booty." "

"Aye Captain!" we all exclaimed.

This voyage into madness had ended, for now. On to plundering, we thought.

It was Tammy yelling from the nest that shifted our mood, “A fleet of Navy ships off the stern! Eleven galleons! And they bear the flag of noblemen!”

This was bad, the noblemen were the elitists of our era. Their wealth awarded them ownership of the world’s military powers and command over world politics. They consider themselves stewards of all kinds and rule accordingly. Pirates are criminals that defy the laws they make, our eradication would feed their propaganda.

“They are on an intercept course, captain!” Tammy yelled.

Smithy walked to the stern, removed his clamp prosthetic, and pulled out a rifle attachment. The rifle attachment was one of Janice’s creations, she made many prosthetics for Smithy to replace his missing limbs, the rifle had a twenty-five slave shackle long barrel. I’m not sure where he hid that prosthetic. The first mate then mounted the rifle to her shoulder and looked through the scope. Smithy loaded it with one of his custom shells, which was one slave shackle long and as thick as a cannonball. This was his heavy artillery shell. Powerful enough to sink a galleon and it covers a vast range.

“Hang on a minute. We need supplies for our treasure hunt don’t we?” asked the captain.

“Yes, we need food supplies at least,” said Cookie.

“Jerry, get me a longboat.” the captain said as he removed his coat, hat, katana, and pistol, handing the items off to Cutty.

He was wearing a white button-up shirt with frills on the cuffs, which hid his lean figure. Nina started toward him and threw a green apple toward the captain. Captain Bartley caught the apple and then got in the longboat.

“You sure?” Nina asked the captain.

“Life isn’t always fair, no matter how much you plan and prepare, sometimes you just have to sail with the winds you have and do your best.” Captain Bartley said with a warm smile.

Nina signaled Jerry and he dropped the captain in the sea.

“What’s he doing?” I asked Nina as we left the captain behind.

“Bard, now isn’t the time. We need to put some distance between us and that fleet,” she replied.

I went to the stern and got out my spyglass to see what the captain was doing. He was just sitting there with his apple, eating it, as the longboat rocked on the waves.

Chapter 5: *The Narcissistic Nobleman*

The captain was surrounded by six galleons. Five galleons had broken off from the fleet to pursue *The Vengeful Victora*. I continued to observe the captain with my spyglass. Six strong soldiers put shackles on the captain and brought him aboard the galleon which bore the symbol of the noblemen. When he was brought aboard I could see one well-dressed man have a very animated conversation with Captain Bartley, eventually striking Captain Bartley in the face. The captain was then taken below deck where I could no longer see him.

The five galleons pursued us but by the afternoon we lost them, their ships were not able to keep up with Vee Vee's speed. Tammy's trained seagulls would scout for us, keeping us out of their way. Tammy was a beast tamer, often using animals to do her bidding. Tammy avoided fighting because her animals would often get hurt trying to help her.

"What are we doing about the captain?" I asked.

"You're a little slow aren't you, Bard," said Hissy.

“We are resupplying with the nobleman’s stock,” said Nina. “We will rescue the captain under the cover of darkness. Tammy has a dolphin following the captain.” she continued.

Nightfall came, and I could see the lanterns glowing on the eleven galleons. The fleet was reunited, which meant more problems for us. Our plan was simple enough. Vee Vee would sneak up behind the fleet, under the cover of darkness, allowing us to board the rear guard galleon hopefully unnoticed. The plan gets interesting after that, according to Nina. Vee Vee approaches the rear guard galleon where we take it. We will then board and take the ship that held the captain, rescue him, and bring Vee Vee so we can loot supplies. Audacious and simple. I didn’t know how we would accomplish the details of this plan but I trusted our young first mate.

As Vee Vee came upon the rear guard I saw a line of soldiers positioned at the balcony of the galleon with spotlights panning across the ocean behind the ship. They were on high alert, which made sense, they were holding a captain prisoner. Our captain had a special reputation. He was known for double-crossing pirates and among the navy, Captain Bartley was known for stealing from them. He always had the habit of embarrassing the Navy,

unwittingly of course. Escaping from them was embarrassing enough and somehow his actions against the navy would be extreme, kidnapping, murder, grand theft, coercion.

“Jerry, take Smithy with you and disable the rudders while underwater. Cookie, you and Destra will remain on the rear guard and take it while Bard, Cutty, and I will advance to the ship where the captain is being held. Tammy, help us get from the rear guard to the captain when it's time. Chu, Navabi, and Hissy will support Tammy on Vee Vee. Moja, do what you came aboard this ship to do.” said the first mate as she waved her hand to Moja.

Moja smiled and bowed her head a bit in acknowledgment.

“Keep Vee Vee hidden, we don't want to fight them on the sea. After we save the captain we will deal with the rest of the fleet. Our priority is saving that fool then we will have their supplies. Now let's begin.” commanded the first mate.

Navabi took the helm, Hissy remained at the mast, and Tammy overlooked everything from the nest.

“Hold on Jerry let me get my skis on,” said Smithy as he removed his peg leg attachments and put on his water skis prosthetics.

Jerry got a rope and gave him the other end. They both went overboard, Jerry started swimming, pulling Smithy on his skis behind him. Jerry being a fish cursed with being half man was a powerful swimmer, naturally, he and Smithy went off beyond our target ships under the cover of darkness. Our raiding parties could disable the respective target ships freeing Smithy and Jerry up to deal with the rest.

“Tammy, we are heading over now, let's get in the water.” commanded the first mate.

Cutty jumped overboard at the port side but I didn't hear a splash. I ran to the rail to see where he landed and was surprised to see him on the back of a large sea turtle that was keeping pace with Vee Vee. Another large sea turtle emerged from below the waves, Destra and Cookie landed on the new sea turtle that emerged, and the first mate smacked me on the shoulder.

“Let's go, Bard.” said the first mate.

She jumped on the sea turtle with Cutty, “Pick one” she continued.

I jumped over the rail onto the sea turtle with Cutty and the first mate. The sea turtle then slowly approached the galleon at the front of Vee Vee.

“Hold your breath” announced the first mate, as she squatted down to pat the sea turtle.

When she did that the sea turtle began to slowly submerge, I squatted down and held onto the shell of the sea turtle the best I could. After a short moment, we emerged closer to the stern of the rear guard galleon, avoiding the searchlights that panned the sea. We had the advantage of darkness, the lights aboard the ship allowed us to see the soldiers that patrolled.

“I can take care of this,” Cookie whispered from behind us.

“Do it.” answered the first mate.

Within seconds the four guards at the rear gallery of the galleon were down. I took the opportunity to fire off my grappling hook rope pistol. As the hook landed the first mate jumped, and using my face as a stepping stone, she landed on the rope, running up. As she made it onboard she looked around and gave us the signal to follow.

“I don’t need your face, I can climb the rope,” Cutty said.

“Or just wait and I’ll get us up there,” I replied, agitated.

A glint caught my eye in the darkness. It was a needle Destra threw that stuck in the gallery wood of the galleon. Cookie was swiftly running across the attached thread, Destra followed by pulling herself as she floated in the wind, dragged by the string. She was wearing her stealth suit of black and red swirl design.

“Are you going to wait until they beat down everyone?” asked Cutty.

“Grab on!” I exclaimed to him and retracted the rope as he grabbed me by the throat.

When we got onboard I had a coughing episode thanks to Cutty’s choice of where to hold onto. We weren’t noticed by anyone here. The guards were out cold thanks to Cookie’s cookies. An exceptional cook Cookie is but for some reason when he baked cookies, they would be harder than steel. The cookies do taste good when you suck on them but biting them was not possible for the average teeth user. Cutty, the first mate and I took to the

starboard side. Cookie and Destra went to the other side. I happened across one of the guards Cookie knocked out.

“Perfect!” I said, looking at the unconscious man.

“Woah!” both Cutty and the first mate said with their palms up.

“Bard, I’m not sure what your plan is here but no!” said the first mate.

I looked at the guy on the floor and said. “But his shoes are perfect.”

“Ohhh!” They both exclaimed.

I reached down, took his shoes off and put them on.

“You’re not washing those?” asked Cutty.

“Disgusting.” uttered the first mate as she began advancing.

She was coming upon two guards who did not notice her, they were facing out to the sea, and she kept walking toward them. Her walk was nerve-racking for me, she wasn’t even trying to hide. She

walked tall and proud. As she got closer, she got a bit of a skip in her step, it was over for those guards. When the first mate got happy, it meant her mind was free, she wasn't our first mate at that moment. She skipped into a little dance before she kicked both of the guards in the back of the head, sending them overboard. No alarms were raised so we continued making our way to the bow. As we walked across the deck I noticed that soldiers were restrained. Three of the soldiers were tied up with cooked pasta and their mouths stitched shut. This looked like the work of Cookie and Destra. We continued to the bow passing soldiers that had been subdued and restrained with pasta or bound with a thick red and black fabric.

"We may as well move onto the next ship, Cookie and Destra have things under control here." said the first mate.

She was right, there wasn't much for us to do here anymore.

"Go on ahead guys," said Destra, she was above us.

She threw a needle with a string attached to the deck next to me and she pulled on it which made her land next to me.

“Cookie and I got everyone, I even stitched their mouths shut to keep them from yelling.” Destra continued.

“Good, let's continue with the plan.” said the first mate as she jumped overboard without looking.

I ran to the bow and as I looked over Cutty had jumped over the rail. They landed on the back of a sea turtle, I was slightly impressed. I would have looked over the rail before jumping over and guessing. I jumped overboard and landed on the sea turtle, we submerged and then emerged close to the largest, most elegant ship in the fleet. The stern gallery had three guards.

“I'll take care of this,” said Cutty.

He unsheathed his machete and flipped it to hold the blade end.

“Strike pattern Beta,” Cutty said as he flung the machete, after he flung the first he repeated the same unsheathing pattern as he did with the first machete and flung them at the other guards at the gallery.

As the blade handles struck their targets, knocking them out, they ricocheted back into Cutty's juggling pattern. He took care of the

guards in the gallery but then two more guards came around the corner and were startled by the bodies. Sadly for them, Cutty already threw two more machetes to knock them out.

“Bard, get us up there,” Cutty said.

I deployed my grappling hook pistol, and as soon as it hooked onto the rail, the first mate was on my face, and up the rope. Cutty and I followed her up. When I boarded I saw the soldiers were bleeding from the ankles.

“Always starting without me,” said Cutty as he dashed toward the deck.

I slowly made my way to the deck. I wanted the first mate and Cutty to do all the work and clear the guards ahead of me. As I snuck along the port side of the galleon I could see the trail of bodies where either the first mate or Cutty passed. I continued to the deck, looking across the deck I couldn't see anyone but I saw the lights glowing from their captain's quarters. I ran back to one of the guards' bodies I passed, stripped him down to the knickers, and wore his uniform. I returned to the main deck and started sleuthing around to find the others or maybe the captain. I'm certain he was in the brig below deck. The first mate and Cutty

would also be heading there. No alarms were raised, and we were not noticed. I crossed the deck to get to the lower deck's entrance. As soon as I got there I could see a guard lying face down on the staircase with his ankles slashed. The first mate had been through here it seems. I advanced below deck and found more guards incapacitated. I continued following the trail of guards and went down one more deck level. This galleon was large and elegant, the walls covered in white paint with roses in a field painted on. This might be a good look for Vee Vee below deck I thought. As I got to the rear of the hallway I saw the door to a bulkhead open with a guard incapacitated just behind the door. I looked beyond the door and saw the first mate and Cutty standing there staring into the brig.

I ran toward them saying "Oh you found the captain!"

"Nope, just an empty cell," replied Cutty.

I joined them in staring at the empty cell.

What did this mean? Did they kill Captain Bartley? Are there more cells?

“Bard, did you bring any apples with you?” asked a voice behind me.

Before I realized it, I was handing Captain Bartley his beloved green apple.

“Join the navy, Bard?” asked the captain as he looked at me from head to toe. “Let’s go get some food, I’ve got some treasures to share.” he continued.

“Treasures? Then let’s hurry this up, we still have to load supplies.” said the first mate.

Now that we had the captain we could take the ship. I opened my satchel and gave the captain his coat and hat. Cutty gave the captain his katana and pistol. The captain took a moment to ensure his clothing and weapons were adjusted correctly, he tipped his hat and proceeded to the deck.

“There might be a few stragglers, we cleared most of the ship. I figure we leave the captain’s quarters for you. This is their flagship.” the first mate said.

“Ah yes, well see, I’ve already been to the captain’s quarters. I wanted to speak to the captain when he was alone. Now that you are here though I do have an idea. To the captain’s quarters, mates.” the captain said as he made his way across the deck.

As he ascended the stairs to the captain’s quarters he looked over the starboard side and gave a big wave. I looked over to see he was waving at the guard on the other ship.

“We have an audience now, good.” said the captain with a sly grin.

“Smithy and Jerry should have those ships' rudders disabled by now. Destra and Cookie have the rear ship under control.” Reported the first mate.

“Good, let’s get the fleet captain and ask him for some supplies,” said Captain Bartley.

Raaaaaaaaaaaa raaaaaaaa raaaaaaaaaaaa.

The guard the captain waved at raised the alarm. As we followed the captain into the captain’s quarters I saw that the room was disheveled and behind a large desk sat a stunningly handsome

man in a large chair. His beautiful blond hair was stained red with blood, blood which also trickled down his face.

“Ello again, John,” said Captain Bartley.

The blond man glared at Captain Bartley. John’s hands were pinned down by a pair of daggers, one dagger piercing the back of each hand, restraining him.

“Still here where I left you, eh?” The captain said as he sat on the edge of the table. “Well, as you can hear, there’s a ruckus about the fleet, those alarms and all.” the captain said.

“Should we be worrying about that?” I asked.

The captain looked toward me.

“No, not at all, ask our friend here what happened to his guards.” the captain gestured upward.

I followed the captain’s finger up and saw four muscular men and a woman impaled into the ceiling. I started to notice the pool of blood on the floor.

“See no one is going to interrupt us, personal guards and all. Isn’t that right John? Beyond your title you have no discernible skills that would help you, do you?” the captain said to John.

“You won’t,” said John and as began to speak the captain struck him in the nose.

“Don’t speak when I am speaking to you. Do you understand?” the captain paused. “Answer me.” he continued.

John seemed a bit perplexed and simply nodded to show he understood.

“Let’s go to the deck,” said Captain Bartley, excitedly.

The captain pulled the daggers out and gestured to the door with them. John was slow to get up, he walked out of the room followed by the captain, as the captain started down the stairs behind John, a muscular soldier came flying through the air with a thrusting spear at the captain from the port side. I barely could process the thrusting soldier when from the opposite side an orange cat flew in with a sidekick which sent the soldier flying back into the galleon on the starboard side, smashing the main mast, causing it to break and fall over.

“There’s a good kitty.” said the captain as he got down on one knee offering his hand to the cat.

It was Tammy’s vampire cat, a cat that had been turned into a vampire, and did the bidding of Tammy. After the cat greeted the captain with purrs and brushed its body up on the captain’s boot, it took the lead in front of John, and with a happy tail, the cat led the way.

“Follow the cat.” the captain said to John.

John followed the cat which walked to the bow. I could see the other galleon’s guards filling up on the decks of the other ships. Some of the guards attacked with rifles to no avail, the bullets were small moving toys to a cat. The vampire cat jumped and pulled the bullets out of the air like it was playing a game. The searchlights from the other ships brought their attention to us on the deck.

“I am fleet admiral Pathos Cellulos, you have taken a nobleman hostage, a crime which carries the sentence of death. Release the nobleman and we will show you mercy! You will not get a second chance at this!” announced a voice from the galleon to the port side.

Just then three bodies came flying from the sea between the galleon we were on and the galleon where the demands were yelled from. Smithy then suddenly landed on deck from overboard, and Jerry followed.

In his heavy gruff Nordic voice, Smithy said “Ah captain, how was your stay? Most welcoming I hope.”

The captain drew his katana and pointed it in the sky then brought it down with its tip pointed at John.

In a silly proper accent, the captain began speaking “Chaps, it's a lovely night to set sail. Fleet Admiral Patheos, by now I trust you understand the precarious predicament you find yourself in. John's guards aren't here, that much you must have processed by now. Let's strike an accord, I will let this pathetic excuse of a man go unharmed but only if you dump all your supplies and ammunition overboard. I'm afraid you guys will chase me down as soon as I free John.” That last bit the captain said in a scared voice.

“What guarantee do I have that you will let him go if we comply?”
Asked the Fleet Admiral.

“Fleet Admiral, my word is my guarantee. Now begin or I will have to start getting dicey,” said Captain Bartley.

The Fleet Admiral ordered his soldiers to throw their supplies and artillery overboard.

“Shall I get in the water captain?” Asked Jerry.

“No, Moja will handle those. Do you see the fog creeping around us?” said Captain Bartley.

He was right, it wasn't the most noticeable thing in the dark, and the searchlights were more aimed at Captain Bartley.

“What have you done, pirate?” exclaimed the fleet Admiral. “Our ships can't turn.” He continued.

The captain shrugged and replied, “Are you just realizing that? Long before our conversation began, your ships were already under my control. I am still a man of my word, you needn't worry, this just ensures we aren't pursued when we part ways, Fleet Admiral. At our current heading, you will still end up at Fairy's End port. Your entire trip is going smoothly, Fleet Admiral. Just let this happen.” The captain cautioned the fleet Admiral.

Captain Bartley then refocused his attention on John. Our crew was already focused on the surrounding threats, not worried, just focused. The first mate stood there twirling one of her daggers, Cutty was juggling his five machetes, and Jerry just stood there menacingly with his large frame. Jerry was in fight mode, his knuckles were now oyster shells, and his usual goldfish head was more like a piranha now. Jerry's elbows, knees, and shin area were covered in thick large, spiky shells. Even his fingertips were snail shells of the pointed variety. Smithy stood behind Jerry facing the other side using his hammer to prop himself up. I remained closest to Jerry, his body acted as a shield for me.

"You and I know, John. That these soldiers will be executed for allowing this to happen. You'll order their deaths for failing to prevent this embarrassment. I mean, I've got you put here wearing nothing but a onesie." Captain Bartley said mockingly to John.

John hesitated to speak.

The captain continued, "Oh, and I murdered your son. Remember the one I kidnapped, Tano? It's quite convenient that your ship was passing by, since it's happened I've thought it my responsibility to seek you out and tell you myself."

John didn't say anything when he heard the news. I was shocked he didn't attack the captain. The way Captain Bartley phrased it, wasn't entirely true.

The captain snickered and said, “ Just as I thought. Ah well, let's get this over with. Nina, send the signal.”

The first mate let out a loud whistle. The air around the ships suddenly became misty with a red hue. Then I could hear the echoing of goats bleating at the front of the galleon we were on. The space in front of the galleon suddenly had a horizontal line, like the air was cut open. Two horns pierced through the line. A goat head that was as large as the galleon's mast was headbutting through trying to escape from the other side of the line in the air. The goat head made it through and began speaking.

“Knowing how to be better and applying that knowledge are two different battles, bah. Wisdom needs courage or actions become unwise, blah.”

As the goat continued its cheesy phrases, the mist got thicker. It was hard to maintain visual contact with the galleons around us.

“Don't panic,” said the captain calmly.

I was losing visual contact with the crew but I trusted what the captain said. Eventually, I wasn't able to see anything but the mist, not my hand inches from my face, not the nose on my face, all I could see was the mist.

The goat's voice became distant now. I could hear him spouting wisdom but I inferred I was further from when I was first shrouded in the mist based on the goat's voice. Despite my instinctual fear, I remained as calm and silent as I could. My heart was pounding loudly, which gave me something to focus on.

“Captain, welcome back to Vee Vee.” I heard Moja say.

She was on Vee Vee, how can I hear her voice speaking as if she were a few shackles in front of me?

The fog was clearing, and silhouettes of people began appearing around me. Eventually, the fog cleared and I was back on Vee Vee. We were all back on Vee Vee, Cookie, Destra, and the rest of us who went over to save the captain. John to my surprise was also on our ship.

“Now let's get you a bucket and a mop. You'll be cleaning our deck for a while. At least until I get bored of you cleaning.” The captain said as he approached John with a menacing look on his face.

John didn't say anything but his face gave away his disgust and fury.

“While we are waiting for that mop and bucket, Nina. Please oversee the unpacking of the supplies the navy threw overboard. Get John here to work on that.” The captain said as he gestured to the many crates packed at the ship's helm.

The crates that were thrown overboard, the crates landed in the mist-covered sea and were brought here. Nina got behind John.

“Hurry,” Nina said to him, plainly.

John hesitated for a second but then the captain started speaking.

“Try not to mangle him much, Nina. At least give him a chance to process that he's no longer even with his fleet. I mean I will return him in a night or two but I want to get at least two days of work out of this nobleman, I wonder what the charges will be.” said Captain Bartley.

John got the queue and stood up then began the labor of moving the supplies to the hatch between the masts that we use to place the supplies below deck.

“Bard!” said the captain.

He held his hand up as if to catch something. I got out a green apple and threw it at him.

“Thanks, I needed a snack for this entertainment,” said Captain Bartley.

“We’re just keeping a nobleman as a butler for a bit then giving him back?” I asked the captain.

“We’ll stay close to their fleet, their rudders are disabled and their heading is Fairy’s End, they should be there in three days. Moja will clear up the mist, they’ll see we still have their dearest John working on our ship. We’ll see them, and we will give them our captive at sunrise. Then we can partake of these little treasures.” said the captain as he pulled out maps he had hidden in his shirt.

Hissy ran to the captain's side and he handed her several scrolls. Hissy's eyes were large with excitement as she shifted through the scrolls and maps.

“Captain!” Hissy exclaimed. “Not yet my dear, take a look at them well and while John is labouring, milk him for information.” said the captain.

Hissy's excitement turned to deviousness.

“With pleasure captain. Farming is in my blood.” Hissy said.

She started skipping away with the scrolls.

“Wait, so Moja brought us back?” I asked the captain.

“A bit slow aren't you, the fog from *Obeyah island*, did the same did it not? Moja is a powerful sea witch, a great friend, and ally, a piss off for an enemy.” Replied the captain. “Chu, stay visible at the bow and relay any communications with the fleet.” The captain continued.

Chu went to the bow, stood tall, gave a thumbs up, and just held the position. John was still moving supply crates when the sun

came up. I could have moved the crates a lot faster, John never did things on his own. It was very apparent. Nina saw less and less humor in John's ineptitude and began giving him detailed instructions on how to lift the crates. The day was uneventful, Hissy questioned John about the scrolls the captain gave her, with every scroll she took out he seemed increasingly agitated. When it was lunch John worked with Cookie in the kitchen, John was under the watchful eye of Nina, as Hissy continued her questions. She seemed to be quite interested in what John had to say, she would make connections between what John said and the scrolls, so much so that she stopped announcing her connecting thoughts. Hissy held the most knowledge in the crew, historical and present day. She would get news articles delivered to the ship via sea turtle to understand what was happening beyond our current horizons.

John took our orders while we sat in the mess hall, he served us food, and with every person he served, he looked hungrier. Nina was the only person in the mess hall who didn't want food. As John finished up he went to Cookie for a meal. As Cookie was about to present him with a dish.

"No, there is no food for him today." Said Nina.

Cookie looked at her for a second. Nina continued, "This man has likely never gone a couple hours without sirloin, or dodo meat. You're a noble, the world belongs to you, is what you guys say."

Cookie understood what she was getting at.

"One day isn't going to hurt anyone," Cookie replied and ignored John's pleas for food.

We ate while John had to clean the mess hall. John would try to sneak a piece of food, the vampire cat would snatch it away from John, and eat what it took while staring into John's eyes.

"Back to cleaning the poop deck, we wouldn't want your friends in the fleet to get worried," Nina said.

She kept him visible on deck. As John cleaned the lookout soldiers on a fleet ship would report and more would come to observe. John did not like that, he would mutter under his breath that they would be executed for failing to get him immediately. The fleet couldn't do much for John, their ship's steering was disabled and their fiercest warriors were recovering. The guards would peer at the noblemen to see his status. They appeared to be taking the captain at his word, for now, not telling if they had any plans brewing. Chu

monitored the fleet and he would send back signals to the fleet letting them know everything was copacetic, Chu was a real sentinel, and nothing escaped his vigilance. Chu announced their divers, their guards, their cargo moving, and even times they would eat. As nightfall came most of us went to bed but not John. Nina was insistent on him working the night shift duties. She reasoned, like before, that he probably never had to stay up longer than he needed and today he would learn how to stay up all night. Nina had to stay with him so it would mean more work and effort on her part.

When I woke up, I got breakfast and found John eating to my surprise. Nina had lifted his food ban. John complained with every bite. The food was great, Cookie knew how to play with your palette, and John didn't get Stockholm syndrome easily. Not everyone falls in love with their captors, unless wedding vows and children are involved, then pleasing the captor takes precedence to improve the odds of self-preservation. John was resolute in his noblemen lineage, which I did have mixed feelings towards. On the one hand, he knew we were his enemies so he didn't want to get friendly, but on the other hand, noblemen considered commoners to be less than feces. As John droned on doing his tasks he stumbled around tripping on anything in his way. Every time he went down Hissy would pounce on him with more questions about the scrolls. Hissy was a smart kid, she knew John was more

suggestible given his lack of sleep. The day passed by with John continuing to work. John got food today but still no sleep. When the sun began to set the captain informed Chu to signal the fleet that we would return the captive during the night. John was not privy to the knowledge of his departure and Nina allowed him to rest as the sun went down. John slept like a log making it easier for us to move him to a longboat. We lowered him into the water and left a few candles on the longboat so the fleet could easily see John. After we let the longboat go we changed course and got out of their way. We had taken enough of their supplies to last about five days. It was time to make our escape.

Chapter 6: *The Stolen Treasure*

We were no longer able to see the fleet on the horizon when the captain called the meeting in the mess hall.

“Hissy got us some great information from that nobleman. No, I won't tell you everything. But what I can't tell you I will.” Said Captain Bartley.

The captain and Hissy had been speaking in the captain's quarters, now we were being filled in.

“I took a couple of scrolls from John's safe when he captured me. I had some time and I wanted to see what his treasures were

onboard. He did have a couple of gold coins as well that I thought we could all use.” said Captain Bartley as he threw in the air a bag that sounded like it had coins in it.

Tammy caught the bag of coins and began looking through the bag to see its contents. With Janice gone, Tammy was now the one responsible for our finances. She did have a vampire to upkeep in her room as well as many pets, both of the vampiric variety and living. Nina didn't like handling money, Cutty was too simple, Jerry got distracted by the shininess, Smithy would just spend it on dumb stuff like more hammers, Hissy would get all philosophical about currency and its structure in our society, and the captain's fingers were always sticky. The captain continued with the debrief.

“Hidden within the scrolls are treasures within treasures. Difficult to reach locations that harbored impregnable structures, unknown regions with rich agricultural land, freshwater sources hidden from existence, and other places that transcend the knowledge of what we know. Hissy made considerable connections among the scrolls that opened new avenues for us to explore and it will be lucrative.” said Captain Bartley.

“How does this little lass know about all of these connections?” Asked Smithy.

“Because I was born in a land that is not drawn on any present-day map anymore,” Hissy answered she continued Brigadoon is or rather was known for its agricultural advancements. Our technology could make seeds more resilient to disease or grow in regions where the conditions were harsh. It is our country's pride.”

Nina interrupted, “Pick a tense. You are floating between the present and the past. You, Hissy of all persons, know your grammar.”

Hissy went on, “Astute as always, Nina. I was only born in Brigadoon, my parents were forced to flee our home when I was only a week old. I don't remember everything and my parents are both dead now. Bartley saved Dad and me but.” Hissy paused as her eyes filled.

“I tried to save Hissy and her father from Tutelary deities. Hissy's father was a researcher and a scientist. He knew the secret methods of Brigadoon. Knowledge of creating vegetation that could heal, and give prolonged life. Simple wholesome foods, that are modified to resist disease, and extreme weather conditions, and enhance life. At least that is how Hissy's father explained it to me.” said Captain Bartley.

“Everything we know about where Brigadoon is comes from my father's research. His last gift to me before a deadly modified toxin ended his life,” said Hissy. She continued. “Captain Bartley made a promise to me and I joined his crew.” She held up many of the scrolls she pulled from her cursed satchel. “I need to hear you say it, captain.” Said Hissy with a face full of determination and eyes that demanded an ultimatum be met.

“This is it? The clues you've been searching for?” Asked the captain. Hissy nodded to him slowly. The captain, squared up with her, looking her in the eyes, he said “Then let's find the home you've never seen. As our accord dictates.” While he said this to her he grabbed his katana by the sheath, presenting it to her. The captain then turned, left the mess hall, and pointed his katana's hilt out in front of him and declared.

“Let us cut a path through the sea until we get to Brigadoon!”

To be continued.

