



A Sand Court Mission
Moraby Drydocks | Lower La Noscea
DM: Yucca Al'Sahra | Mateus RP Community
System: Eorzean Battle System (EBS)



Prologue

Word came to the Court through Naldaq and Vymelli's, asking for help after what the group did on the Isles of Umbra reached the right ears. A shipyard, running behind schedule, and a supervisor who wanted eyes on the place until the job was done. The ship being built there was called the Victory. Tonight was the last night before it needed to be finished. That was the job.



Act I: The Gathering

Yucca Al'sahra greeted Y'maomi and Night first, warm as ever. "Good evening, my dears." She said as she saw them approaching, opening her arms in a rather warm greeting toward Y'maomi. "I suppose you found your way out of the sands of Thanalan again!" Y'maomi nodded and chuckled. "I managed to find my way." Yucca put both hands on her hips and flashed a smirk. "Today we're actually going to figure out something at least a little bit." A pause, as if it were a habit. "Interesting."

Then Yuyuka Yuka arrived. "Hey! I heard you guys needed help with a haunting?" She made a gesture with her hands, crossing them over her heart, an expression that was almost pain and sorrow. "I hope not. Nald'Thal wouldn't be so cruel as to put another voidsent in my path so soon." Then a flash of realization crossed her face. She clearly remembered something. "OH YES! We sold the pot, or what was left of it. Let's just say the folks at Sharlayan didn't want to take it in the condition we left it in."

Y'maomi laughed. "Ha. Figures." She noticed Yuyuka circling and offered her a smile. "Evenin'. Nice hat." Yuyuka beamed. "Thank you! I'm a big fan of hats." Bastian Caldeth arrived not long after, curious how word of the Court had reached her. "How did you hear of us if you don't mind me asking? I don't recall..." Yuyuka answered honestly. "Word on the street."

Yucca tilted her head at the newcomer, one brow arched, clearly delighted at the near echo of her own name. "So the streets carry word our way." She glanced toward Bastian, then back to the witch, hands settling on her hips. "Well, the Court's got itself a small job tonight, nothing too grand, just a haunting that needs sorting before the tide turns. If you've got the stomach for ghosts and the ears for gossip, you're more than welcome to lend us both."

Bastian offered a bit of thaumaturgy for whatever black magic might come in handy. Night, quiet as ever, added, "Besides, if you allow me to say, a thaumaturge is a great addition to today's mission. These kind of people deal with all sorts of entities as another Tuesday." Yuyuka nodded along. "I mean, you're not wrong. You'd be surprised how often the Ossuary gets hauntings." Yucca's mouth twitched into something crooked. "Maybe so. Naldaq and Vymelli's and I have never been on the best of terms. She has her own way of, you know, worshipping Nald'Thal." A cough, poorly hidden behind her fist.

"But her, aye, maybe. It could be magnificent, actually. Considering what tonight's job is about."

They waited a while longer for one more member of the party who never arrived, and eventually the group settled without her. "Now we wait on the rest before I hand out instructions." Yucca said, glancing toward the square. When everyone was ready, she gathered them close.



Act II: The Sanity Potions

Yucca reached into her pack and pulled out four small flasks, passing one to each person gathered. "For all of you, I brought these." She held one up between two fingers, giving it a little shake. "Sanity potions. The desert folk use these to face down Djinn, and yes, even ghosts. These are made from saltwater and herbs from Thanalan." She gave the flask a little swirl. "Each one holds up to three sips."

Yuyuka sniffed the drink she'd been given and threw her head back. It was potent. Night eyed his own flask. "Saltwater. Got it. If I lose myself and drink all the potion, jump in the sea." He nodded. Yucca chuckled at that, arms crossed loose over her chest. "You already know how the desert folk are. Superstitious. Careful. Liars through and through, and well, we do have our own ways with magic." A small shrug followed. "If the water works, we are all fine. If it does not." She let the pause hang a beat. "Best start praying to Thal."

"Now follow me, all of you." Yucca gestured for the group to gather close. "And do be a bit careful." Her tone turned thoughtful. "Sailors and sea folk are superstitious too, you know. As a rule, we should not go doubting them either." Bastian took the offered bottle of the magic cocktail and clipped it to his belt for safekeeping.

"Let's be honest, who isn't superstitious in Eorzea?" Yuyuka asked. Bastian raised a hand. "Me." Yuyuka grinned. "Well good on you."



Act III: Ahtbyrm

The man in charge crossed his arms, expression flat at the group's approach. "I am not superstitious in the slightest." Ahtbyrm said, giving a short shake of his head. "Especially not about whatever nonsense is keeping my ship from being finished." A frustrated sigh followed. "Everyone is behind schedule because of it."

Bastian couldn't resist. "Called having the benefit of not being raised in Eorzea. A lot of stories where I'm from but nothing like this here." Yuyuka added, "And you brought none of those superstitions here to Eorzea? Not one?" Bastian shrugged. "Well, when it comes to ships, you are required to follow the culture."

Yucca stepped forward and greeted him with a nod. "Brother." Ahtbyrm waved a hand dismissively, tone clipped. "I do not have time for this. I paid the Hare to do her job. Security for the docks, that is all." Yucca raised both hands in surrender, a small huff escaping her. "Just tell us what the situation is then."

Ahtbyrm gestured toward the ship behind him. "This is the Victory." His voice carried a note of pride despite the frustration underneath. "And every last one of my workers has turned lazy, making up ghost stories instead of doing their jobs." He shook his head sharply. "I do not have the time for this, nor the coin to spare on it."

A hard look settled on his face. "Today, this ship gets finished." He gestured vaguely toward the workers scattered around the yard. "Pretend you are here as security, nothing more, and keep everyone calm. Questions?"

Yuyuka asked, "So you do have superstitions? You are, technically, superstitious!" Ahtbyrm let out a nod. Bastian added, "I like him already, straight to the point." Yucca glanced at the group, pursing her lips, a look on her face that said she already knew exactly what she needed to do, as always. "Can you tell us the nature of the ghost story they're sharing, dear?"

Ahtbyrm frowned deeply. "There is no ghost." His tone turned sharp. "It is nothing but an invention and lies from a bunch of lazy fools." He waved a dismissive hand toward the yard. "If you want to hear about legends go bother that idiot Hezzkhezl, the second in command. He wastes his time on such things." A hard shake of his head followed. "But I do not have time for that."

Night raised his hand. "I have one. Aside from the ghost tales, anyone here told about possession, zombification, sudden death, nausea, or any other suspicious side effect?" Bastian pressed his lips together as he let out a hum. "Sounds like we're just going to have to hunt blind, not a problem."

Ahtbyrm crossed his arms even tighter. "But the company thought it was a good idea." A grudging note crept into his voice. "After whatever it is you all did on the Isles of Umbra." Then he looked over at Night and gave a loud, resounding "No." But it was clear he could be lying, or simply denying it outright, because he did not believe any of it.

Yucca crossed her arms with a smirk. "First things first, you can stay right there pretending you do not believe in any of it." She tilted her head, eyes narrowing playfully. "We are going to do our jobs either way, and by the end of the night, you will have to eat your words." A beat, then she glanced around. "Now where can we find this fellow?"

Ahtbyrm pointed up the ramp, toward the hangar, his tone turning firm again. "Just make sure you lot do not get in my workers' way."



Act IV: Swarsynt's Warning

A man near the hull was counting crates under his breath, murmuring something that sounded almost like a prayer between numbers. He glanced up at the group's approach, straightening slightly. Swarsynt looked the group over. "You lot are the heroes of the night, then?" Bastian answered. "Just a sailor tired of living out the sailor life or whatever it is."

His hands twitched nervously against the strap of his apron, eyes darting toward the shadows near the hull. "It started small, aye, just a few nights back." He lowered his voice, leaning in slightly. "Tools going missing, then turning up again in places no one left them. Then came the sounds, footsteps on the deck when everyone was already ashore, and no one there when we went to look."

He shook his head slowly. "But the screaming, that is when folk really started running scared." His grip tightened on the crate beside him. "A woman's voice, high and awful, coming from somewhere inside the hull itself, like she is trapped in there with the timber and the nails." He swallowed hard. "Old Denny swears he saw her standing right on the bow one night, white as bone, staring out at the water like she was waiting for something."

"He has not set foot back on that ship since." His eyes flick toward the group again, searching their faces. "I am telling you, she does not want this ship built. Every time we get close to finishing, something goes wrong. A beam cracks for no reason, a rope frays through overnight, tools go flying off the racks like something invisible knocked them clean off." He crossed himself, quick and instinctive. "Whatever she is, whatever happened to her, she means to see this ship never sails. And I, for one, do not intend to be aboard her when she tries to stop it."

Yuyuka climbed onto the rail, holding up her staff, letting an aetheric sonar go out, listening for anything suspicious on the ship or around it. "She? Was this person you all know of, or something or she's a complete unknown?" Bastian scratched at the back of his neck, thinking it over. "No wife of a dockworker, far as anyone knows." He shook his head slowly. "The story going around is older than that, way older." He glanced toward the ship again before continuing. "They say she was some noble lady, promised to marry one of the old heirs of the shipping company, back before the Calamity even."

"Word is he betrayed her somehow, broke the promise, left her for someone else or some such." His voice dropped lower. "And in her grief, she threw herself off one of the towers right into the harbor." He crossed his arms, shivering slightly despite the warmth. "Been haunting these docks ever since, or so the old timers say. And wouldn't you know it, someone went and named this ship after her sorry tale." He shook his head again, muttering under his breath. "The Maiden's Lament." Tempting fate, if you asked him, naming a ship after a ghost story like that.

Bastian offered up what he had. "We have a thaumaturge on this night. Experts with dealing with the dead." Night couldn't help himself. "Do you think the ghost is just angry because there's a ship using her name? Petty, if I may say." Yucca tilted her head. "When was the last time the ghost was seen?" Swarsynt rubbed the back of his neck. "Late afternoon, near the stern of the ship, close to the water." He hesitated a moment. "The sailor who saw her, he dropped unconscious right there on the spot." A grim look crossed his face. "Has not woken up since."

Bastian shrugged, spreading his hands looking at Night. "That, or vengeance, who is to say." He let out a tired sigh. "All I want is for this nightmare to be over." Bastian threw out possibilities. "Strong emotions, voidsents, magic users, so on and so forth." Yucca crossed her arms thoughtfully. "Could be an Ashkin, or something else entirely, we never truly know." She shook her head slightly. "Voidsents do not tend to play games like this. They are usually far more aggressive than that."

Screams tore through the night, sharp and clear, cutting through everything else close by. From the direction of the stern, where the ship met the sea, a handful of sailors came stumbling and scrambling up the ramp, faces pale, boots slipping on the wet wood in their haste to get away from whatever lay behind them. Ahtbyrm's voice boomed across the yard at once, cutting through the panic with sheer irritation. "Get back to work, all of you!" He cursed under his breath, storming toward the fleeing men with his arms thrown wide, as if he could physically herd them back down the ramp by will alone. "There is nothing down there!"

Swarsynt's breath caught in his throat. "It must have happened again." His voice came out barely above a whisper, eyes fixed on the commotion by the stern, unwilling or unable to look away. "Thal preserve us, it must have happened again."

"That's our cue." Yucca said. The group made for the stern themselves.



Act V: The Trail

A cold wind swept in off the water as the group reached the stern, salt heavy and biting against exposed skin. The cobblestones here were damp and uneven, slick with sea spray, and the lantern light flickered faintly as if reluctant to burn too bright this close to the water. The tower nearby cast long trembling shadows across the walls, dark and cold, its shadow stretching long across the dock. Somewhere below, the water lapped against the hull with an uneasy rhythm, and the air itself felt heavier here, thick with something unseen.

Night walked toward the edge of the pier. His search came up the same as the others, no answer. The air itself seemed to answer him, cold and wrong in a way that settled deep in his gut. It was the mark of something Ashkin, a wraith or a specter perhaps, nothing else leaves a trace quite like this. Layered beneath that, he also spotted a faint trail along the ground, barely visible, a thin residue that seemed to glow faintly with a sickly fluorescence, leading off toward the stern.

Bastian caught something the others missed as well. Every worker still lingering nearby had tight jaws, wide eyes, hands trembling faintly as they went through the motions of their tasks. Fear, simple and unmistakable, hung over every last one of them. Y'maomi sensed much the same as Bastian, that unnatural trace of aether marking the presence of something Ashkin, lingering somewhere close. Yucca shook her head slightly. "I do not see anything." Y'maomi squatted down and looked at the trail on the stones. "You don't see that?" Yucca frowned. "See what?"

Night called out as he opened his eyes in a rather casual manner, hopping off toward the ground where he was standing upon. "She walked past us." Yucca crossed herself hastily, murmuring a quick prayer to Thal under her breath. "I do not like this." A shiver ran through her, ears giving an anxious flick. "I do not like this one bit. Where? When? WHAT."

Bastian reached toward his sword and his gem, flipping the sword into a reverse grip as he attached the gem onto the top of the hilt turning his weapon into a staff. He then poured his aether into the crystal as he used it as a focus to cast a simple enough spell to highlight the residue in an aetheric glow that could be seen by the naked eye. Yuyuka pulls out holy water and starts flicking it about. "How did I not notice this?" Yuyuka said. "Don't ask me. I'm only a half mage." Bastian sighed. "We all have our moments."

The aether around the crystal pulsed softly as Bastian channeled his magic through it, and the trail that was once nearly invisible came alive before the group's eyes. The thin residue that had been snaking across the dock stones now glowed with a pale, almost bluish hue, tracing every crack and fissure in the wet ground. The trail was clear now, a continuous mark leading away from the ship's stern, curving around a stack of crates before running back the way the group had come, tracing a path right toward the hangar they had walked through earlier.

"Anyways, we should follow it." Bastian said. The trail climbed upward, winding its way up the wooden ramp before continuing on toward the upper hangar, where a small room waited at the top.



Act VI: The Empty Room

The small room opened up ahead of the group, built entirely of aged wood, the planks creaking softly under the weight of wind slipping through the cracks. It was nearly empty, no furniture, no crates, nothing but bare flooring and dark walls that swallowed what little light remained. A single lantern hung near the entrance, flickering weakly, casting long trembling shadows across the boards. The air here was colder than it should be, heavier, as if the room itself were holding its breath. The trail of aether ended right at the center of the space, a pale glow that seemed to pulse faintly against the dark wood.

Bastian motioned over to the center of the room with his staff before glancing over at Yuyuka. Yuyuka tossed Bastian a small jar of salt, telling him to sprinkle that at the other doorway, just in case. Yucca frowned, glancing around the empty room. "I do not see anything odd here." Y'maomi shivered, mumbling, "Godsdamn, it's freezing in here."

Bastian caught the salt as it was tossed to him and, thoughtful, poured a line of salt along the doorway. Maybe he would be able to see footprints with it. "Should we try to communicate with the ghost?" Yucca tilted her head. Bastian nodded. "He poured a line of salt along the doorway, maybe he would be able to see footprints with it." Yuyuka added, "We can try, I know a few rites for that." Yucca glanced toward her, an expectant look on her face, as if she fully believed the little witch could chat up a ghost fluently, like an old pro at it.

"Oh! I think I know what to do." Bastian said. He cleared his throat before he began to yell suddenly. "HELLO! ARE YOU FRIENDLY?! ARE YOU HERE?! ARE YOU OLD?! CAN YOU SHOW ME A SIGN!?" He did not know what to do. "SSHHHHSHSHSH!" Yuyuka hissed. Night muttered, "I have questions." Yuyuka would have clapped a hand over Bastian's mouth if she could reach.

Yucca looked over at Bastian with a face full of disappointment. "Shut your mouth." A sigh followed, and she shook her head slowly. She reached into her satchel and pulled out a dried fish, holding it up like some sacred relic, and began chanting under her breath. "O Mo Bu Gai Fei Di Tai." She circled the fish once above her own head, then pointed it toward the center of the room where the trail had ended, brow furrowed in deep concentration, utterly convinced this was exactly how one speaks to the dead.

"Okay, for this to actually work, I need everyone to be quiet." Yucca instructed. Nothing happened. "It's about to get very dark and very quiet." She whispered, leaning in close. "Well then, go on, do something." Night said quietly, "Seven hells woman." He whispered as he looked over at Yucca with her dried fish. Bringing out her staff, Yuyuka first raised it up in the lantern, and the only lightly flickering light that floats down to illuminate Yuyuka. Additionally, all the noise outside seemed to quiet until it dampens, eerily silent, and eerily dark, very spooky.

Yucca reached back into her satchel and pulled out yet another dried fish, holding it out toward Y'maomi. "Here." She gave it a small shake, urging her to take it. "You too, come join in. The more voices calling, the better the chances it works."

Y'maomi took the fish, holding it with an arm outstretched. For a cat, she wasn't too fond of seafood. Yuyuka was whispering incantations, and every sound sounded really far off and quiet. Yuyuka waits a moment and then whispers, "Spirit, give us thy name."

The sign hanging on the closed door swayed gently, a faint creak accompanying the motion. It could have been the wind.

Yuyuka and Night both felt it, unmistakably, the ghost was here, in this very room. It was not the wind. A whisper seemed to slither its way straight into their ears, cold and faint. "Leave." Yucca shivers, rubbing her arms. "It's really cold in here." She shuffles closer, leaning her shoulder against Y'maomi's, still clutching the dried fish and grumbling under her breath.

Night closed his eyes as he started muttering something. "If we're annoying you enough, tell us why are you here and we go." Y'maomi added, "You're telling me." "Spirit, speak to us thy plight. Share your burden, so we may audie thee."

The doors behind and in front of them slammed with a violence that rattled the old wood, the sound cracking through the small room like a whip. For one suspended heartbeat, silence followed, thick and unnatural, the kind that presses against the ears and makes the space feel smaller than it is.

Then the scream came. It tore through the room from everywhere and nowhere at once, high and raw, a woman's voice stretched past the point any living throat could bear, full of grief and fury both. It claws at something deep and animal in every one of them, the kind of sound that does not just startle the body but reaches further, cold fingers dragging down the spine. Gooseflesh rises on every arm.

The lantern light, what little of it remained, seemed to shrink in on itself, guttering as if flinching away. The aether in the room grew heavy, pressing down on them like a held breath given weight, thick enough to taste at the back of the throat. It clings to the skin, damp and cold, and for a moment there being quiet about it feels as though the walls themselves are leaning inward, listening. Dread settles low in every stomach, the primal kind that offers no reason, only the certainty that something in this room does not want them there.



Act VII: The First Sighting

Yuyuka flinched at the loud scream, but otherwise seemed unshaken by it. Bastian, terrified if he couldn't be, stood staring at the corner of the room, where no light reached, a figure in white that seemed to drink in what little glow remained rather than reflect it. Her form flickered at the edges like a candle fighting a draft, translucent in places, and where her skin should be pale it was instead a deep, bruised purple, the color of something left too long beneath water.

Her hair hung heavy and wet around her face, dripping though there was no water to be seen, each drop vanishing before it struck the floor. Her eyes, when they found each of theirs in turn, were hollow, dark pits that held nothing and yet seemed to see everything, boring straight through flesh into something far more vulnerable beneath. She did not move so much as she simply was closer, one heartbeat than the last, the space between them collapsing without a single step taken. For Bastian, for Night, for Yucca, the sight claws its way into the mind and stays, cold and indelible. The others see none of it, no woman, no shifting shape in the dark. What they see instead is their friends' faces drain of color all at once, eyes going wide and fixed on empty air, bodies going rigid with a fear that has no visible cause.

Yucca's grip tightened hard enough on the dried fish to crush it, a small strangled sound catching in her throat. Bastian's staff wavered in his grip. Night went utterly still, breath caught somewhere it cannot escape.

What they see instead is a thin, dark line wrapping around her throat, deep enough to bruise even in death, the unmistakable mark of a rope drawn cruelly tight. Whatever illusion of grace her form once held shatters at the sight of it, the truth laid bare and undeniable. She was hanged.

Yucca's knees buckled beneath her, sanity fraying at the sight before her, and she dropped hard to the floor in sheer desperation, hands pressed against the sides of her head as if that alone could shut out what she was seeing. She knelt respectfully. Night murmured, "Now I see, why she sounds so griefful. An agonizing death, for sure." Bastian was staring at the visage of the woman in the corner, he couldn't move or react to it but unlike Yucca who was collapsing, he managed to remain on his feet. He quickly took advantage of the scene to inspect her with his hold around his bladed staff weakening. "STEADY! Look at the ground below! Hear my voice. Feel what is REAL!"

Yucca looked over at Yuyuka, desperation plain in her eyes. Yuyuka steadied her voice. "You're here. I'm here. We are alive. And we shall see the light of dawn." The presence vanishes suddenly, the weight of the aether that had filled the room draining away like water down a drain. The doors burst open with force, slamming against the walls, and whatever it was flees through them, out the north door, like a gust of cold wind that cuts straight through the skin as it passes.

Bastian checked the salt. There are footprints in the salt Bastian left by the north door. "Fuckin' hell, the salt works!" He got back up, trembling, moving to stand close beside Yucca. Clearly shaken, she speaks. "I saw the woman." Her voice wavers. "She was horrible. It looks like she drowned." "SEE?!" Yuyuka said. "Oldest Thaumturge trick in the book!" She wished she'd brought her smudge sticks.

"That means she touches the ground." Bastian said. "Let's see if she left another trail." Yuyuka said she'd heard on for you say she was hanged. Bastian frowned. "I didn't say it but yes, she had a rope around her neck." Yucca stopped short. "No... she was purple, like, what? Really?" She sat down for a moment, needing to grab something. "More salt?" "SWARSYNT! I NEED SOME ROPE!" Bastian nodded. "Yes, really." "ROPE?" "You know, she's very excited about this job." Night added, "It seemed like it. At least I felt she tried to make me feel the same way she felt in the past. I'm sure I felt that." Bastian grumbled, "Thaumaturges. I tell you."

Bastian snapped the staff back into two pieces, sliding the sword back into its scabbard while the gem was hooked onto his belt. Yucca grinned. "I already like this little one." Bastian teased. "You know Luzura is a Thaumaturge, right? They are all like that. Every single one." Yucca shot back. "She's more than this." "So?"

Yuyuka returned with more salt, and also rope, tied into a noose. "One of my sisters would be having a field day if she were here." Y'maomi laughed. Yucca scooped Yuyuka clean off the ground, carrying her like some kind of good luck charm, and declared that she was leading the group now. She set her down right in front of the salt on the floor and asked, "Well, now what?" Yuyuka thought it over. "Okay, first we look for the trail that's left." Yucca smirked to herself. Salt marks, hehe. "Now, th noose I can use to basically goad her into going corporeal, making her weaker to attack. However, it will also make her incredibly mad, and she will try to kill us all likely if we don't take her down first."

The trail led north, following the footprints left in the salt, out through the door. From there, the group spots two figures near the lighthouse beam, sailors or perhaps guards standing watch.



Act VIII: The Lighthouse

Yuyuka called out to the pair. "Hey! You guys! Did you guys feel a weird chill or see something weird a few minutes ago!?" Yucca winced, an expression somewhere between dread and resignation crossing her face, the picture of someone bracing for pain that has not even started yet. "Yes, a chill. And is there truly no other way?" She shook her head slowly.

Night said, "She's truly excited for this." Yuyuka insisted it was an option. Everyone tried another perception check to find the ghost's corpse. Everyone except Night noticed the lighthouse beam flicker, just slightly. This was not normal. Bastian noticed first. "That's in the water which means, oh hey! She's at the lighthouse!" Y'maomi looked up. "There." "Hey! You see that?" "The ships need that light on or they'll crash!"

Yucca slipped into full denial mode. "You know, maybe we should just give the Gil back and go home." A beat, and despite her own words, she ended up trailing along after the rest of the group anyway. Bastian teased, "Excuse me, sir? You saw one little ghost and now you want to leave?"

Night tried to sniff the air. Nothing unusual for now. He thought Yucca hadn't spent much time at the Ossuary. "You draw the line at ghosts?" Y'maomi asked. Lyngstym turned at the sound of their approach, eyes narrowing slightly. "You lot the new security, then?" He glanced back toward the lighthouse, brow furrowed. "That beam has never done that before." His hands came together, and he started murmuring a quiet prayer under his breath.

Yuyuka asked, "Important question, has there ever been a gallows in the drydocks? Any stories about that?" Yucca answered, hands raised defensively, "I deal with the dead, aye, I help them cross over." A pause. "But this ghost business? That is not exactly my department." Y'maomi added, "Rather a ghost than a body." "Also, Bastian, can you spread some salt on the ground please?"

Lyngstym rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. "Aye, there is a story." He glanced toward the lighthouse before continuing. "They call her the Lady Isolde, or so the old tales say." He shook his head slowly. "Word is she threw herself onto the rocks, though I have always had my doubts about that." His voice dropped lower. "Her betrothed was a rotten sort of man, married himself off to some wealthy woman not long after she died." A grim look settled on his face. "And they say the maiden died with child, no less. Would have forced his hand to marry her proper, had she lived." He looked around. "Surely I missed something about this new phase of yours, Hare." Bastian was off, spreading salt everywhere.

Yucca nodded at Night. "That is exactly it. I only guide the souls, the ones Thal calls for. Nothing more than that." Yuyuka said, "Thank you, sir." Night thought we lure her better than the last time. Bastian looked over at Night. "She likes to moonlight as a psuedo-thaumaturge."

Everyone watched as the lighthouse beam flickered again, more violently this time, the light stuttering like a held breath about to break.

Yuyuka, Yucca, Lyngstymr, and the other guard all saw her. She stood atop the lighthouse beam itself, impossibly balanced there, her white form soaked through and dripping despite the empty air around her. Her hollow eyes fixed on nothing and everything, and slowly, one pale, waterlogged hand rose, pointing straight toward the ship anchored below.

Bastian said. "So she doesn't like books too much and she hates the ropes on it, no rope and cold and endless fury directed at the vessel bearing her name." The sight claws at the mind, the same way it did before, wrong in a way that lingers long after the eyes look away. It is disturbing every single time, no matter how many times it is seen. The others see nothing but the beam flickering, unaware of what stands atop it. "I saw it now. It doesn't look good. Wherever she is." Y'maomi remained utterly unshaken by the event, her resolve steeled thanks to her training. "I saw it!"

Lyngstymr and the lighthouse guard bolted, breaking into a dead run, shouting for everyone to evacuate as they went, screaming that she pointed at the ship. Panic tore through the yard. Workers dropped their tools where they stood, some shoving past one another in their rush toward the ramp, others simply freezing for a heartbeat before their legs remembered how to run. Shouts overlapped with shouts, someone knocked over a stack of crates in the scramble, and within moments the deck of the Victory emptied out entirely, every last soul aboard pouring off her in a wave of pure, unthinking terror.

Bastian said, watching everyone else freak out over the sighting, "Yucca isn't very good with rules either, especially relig- Huh?"

Yuyuka threw herself to the ground, begging Thal for mercy to take this soul. "LADY ISOLDE! SPEAK WITH US, O LOST SPIRIT!" She takes a sip of her sanity potion. Yuyuka tried to remain firm, but she was trembling. She takes another sip. Night joined the attempt, although sarcastically. "Please, this hide and seek is becoming boring."

A voice comes from behind and in front of them all at once. "Leave." It comes again, closer this time, seeping out from every corner of the ship's hull at once, low and cold and utterly without mercy. A creak of old timber follows, the entire vessel groaning as if something unseen shifts its weight across the deck above.

The words carry no plea in them, no room for argument, only a command given by something that has already made up its mind. Yuyuka took another sip. "I don't think we can reason with this one." Yucca said, "She's hellbent. We might have to enrage her and bring her out to defeat her." "I don't like this AT all." Yuyuka sighed, stepped back, and then ran forward and leaped, barely making it aboard.



Act IX: Aboard the Victory

The group boarded the ship, and everything about her was new and beautiful, freshly built timber still pale and unweathered, brass fittings gleaming even in the dim light. And yet beneath it all lingered a smell that did not belong, something rotten, foul, the unmistakable stench of death clinging to every plank and beam. The aether here pressed down heavy and thick, far worse than anywhere else on the docks, thick enough to make the lungs feel tight with every breath drawn in.

Night drew his staff, which started glowing as his aether manifested. "Ready." Yuyuka pulled out another dried fish and started the ritual all over again, sweeping it across the deck as if that should be enough to make a spirit tangible.

Night began walking around the ship. With his staff, he would take better chances to find her, if it was there. Yucca and Night both spotted the glowing footprints scattered across the deck, faint traces circling the entire ship. Bastian and Yuyuka found nothing beyond what was already plain to see, the ship creaking beneath their feet, the smell of rot still thick in the air. Y'maomi felt the ghost, the aether pressing down thick and heavy, its source somewhere up at the top of the structure in the middle of the ship, though whatever waits there remains unseen.

"Arm yourself." Y'maomi warned. "Up. It's up. In the middle." Yucca spun around and hurled the fish in the direction Y'maomi pointed. Yuyuka murmured some esoteric incantation under her breath as she held the noose close, then suddenly yanked it taught, and everyone would feel shorter of breath for a brief moment. Nothing happens.

The temperature drops further, the air turning sharp enough to bite at exposed skin. Her form flickers violently, edges bleeding into shadow and back again, as though the sheer force of her fury strains whatever holds her together. Her hair curls slightly, not in violence, but in old, hollow pain. The blood at her stomach does not drip. It simply is, dark and endless, staining the white fabric it never spreads further and never fades.

"I will not allow this ship to sail." Her voice cracks on the word, something almost human bleeding through the fury for one fractured instant before hardening again.

Yuyuka called back to her, "This ship is the child of many parents. Why wouldst thou not allow it to sail? Not allow this child to be born?" The ghost's scream tears through the air as she surges forward, form stretching thin and impossibly fast, closing the distance in an instant. The deck beneath everyone's feet seems to tilt, the cold biting harder, the smell of rot and brine choking the air as her clawed hands rake wide toward the group. No one can drink their potion this turn, only starting next turn.

Y'maomi stumbles and drops to the ground in pain, as if her very soul were suffering, one hand pressed hard against her chest. She screamed and dropped to the ground in pain. Bastian stared down the ghost, quickly weaving a spell that affected only himself as he was forced to cleanse his mind from the effects of the Ashkin. Night clutched his head. Yuyuka leaned back, wincing as one claw scraped her cheek, ouch, her ear nearly coming off. Bastian stared down the ghost. He quickly weaved a spell that affected only himself as he was forced into cleansing his mind from the effects of the Ashkin.

The ghost pulls back into the center of the group, her form flickering violently, wails of pure agony ripping loose from her as she lashes out again. Her hollow eyes sweep across each of them, and her clawed hands rise once more, ready to strike. Y'maomi's resolve remains unshaken, in spite of the pain. The ghost lunges straight for Yucca, cold hands closing around her with a hollow, suffocating pull. Y'maomi tries to block, but she is scratched across the arm by one of the claws. She hisses. Yucca takes the last sip from her sanity potion.

The ghost took offense with Bastian staring her down, sending a mental shock to him which caused him to recoil in pain suddenly, but he managed to recover quickly, sending out an accelerated jolt of lightning slamming from the skies and onto the ghost. Yuyuka took another big sip. The ghost lets out another piercing scream, the sound tearing through the deck and rattling straight into every bone.

Y'maomi's ears are big, and unfortunately, that scream really hurts. Are her ears bleeding? Yup, they're bleeding. Bastian once again stares down the ghost, deflecting the scream's damage entirely. Yucca conjures her scythe and cuts through the wind for a split second. Night confidently picks his staff again and pins it in the wooden floor. The staff emanated evil energy, enough to counter the attack.

The ghost retreats back to the top of the structure where she first stood, hovering there, her hollow eyes still fixed on the group below.

Yuyuka was having terrible luck. Every time she tries to cast a spell, the ghost lunges for her and leaves big gashes across her flesh. She clutches herself, trying to stop the bleeding. Yucca swings her scythe, sending a wave of energy tearing toward the ghost, but it veers wide and passes right by her as she dodges. Night, focusing his aether, the Chimera unleashes a lightning spell in the lingering spirit's direction, only to miss. Y'maomi leaps forward and throws a heavy punch at the ghost. Somehow, it connects. Bastian, focused on staring down the ghost, retaliates with a magical strike.

"Things are surely repeating itself again." Bastian said. The ghost reels from the blows, her form flickering violently, a raw, agonized wail tearing loose from her as the damage lands. She has no counter for it, no defense left in this instant, only the sound of her own suffering echoing across the deck as she writhes in place.

Night repeats the same attack, cursing at the ghost. "That's what you get for your rotten heart! Take that and choke on it!" Yucca dualcast, Bastian rapidly weaves out another spell right after the last one. Air tightening around the ghost as she slices and dices at the aetherbeing. Yuyuka finally channels a full spell, holding her staff aloft, a fiery heat roars out into the air before it concentrates and shoots off toward the ghost.

The earsplitting wail makes Y'maomi cover her ears and fall all over. "Aagh!" Night, "Stay quiet!" as he channels a wind spell, some aftereffect makes Night miss and hit himself. Bastian's scythe flashes, a clean cut of light arcing straight toward Y'maomi, pure aether wrapping around her in a warm pulse before fading. "There. Patch yourself up a little." Without missing a beat, Yucca spins the weapon back around, driving it toward the ghost in a second swing meant to draw blood, or whatever passes for it in her now.

Bastian snapped the gem off the top of the hilt, switching back to sword mode as he held the focus to his side while flipping the grip to be normal once again. The blade was now glowing red, primed with magic from the casting he was already doing. He sends out a thrust as he goes flying across the field as he closed the distance as he impaled the ghost with his empowered blade.

Night tries to engage in close range combat, wrapping his staff in lightning and attacking the ghost at point blank range with wind and fire spells.

The ghost's scream tears through the night, raw and wounded, as her form unravels at the edges into pure streaks of pale light, scattering apart, thin ribbons of glowing white breaking free from each other, spinning upward off the deck in a spiral that catches the wind. The light does not fade so much as flee, tearing across the open air above the ship, arcing toward the rooftops beyond the bridge with unnatural speed. Where she passes, the cold lingers a moment longer before finally releasing its grip, the heavy aether thinning out just enough to breathe easier. The last of her, a single thread of light, vanishes over the rooftop's edge, leaving only cold air behind.



Act X: The Rooftop Chase

The group could leap from the deck toward the bridge below. Whoever failed the jump took a hard landing.

"GET BACK HERE!" Yuyuka shouted. "Get your ass back here!" Bastian added. "NO NO NO YOU COME BACK HERE!" Yuyuka's own leap went sideways. "Fucking faceplants." Y'maomi asked for a lil boost. Yucca leaps with skill, clearing the gap between the deck and the bridge below without a hint of hesitation. Night falls with style. Bastian trips over the railing and somehow lands across the way, slamming down onto the floor. Y'maomi falls on her ass.

Yucca's scythe cuts through the air, a clean arc of light reaching out toward both Night and Yuyuka at once, healing them both. Night looked at the small mage and the half mage, letting out an "Ugh."

The ghost stood atop the rooftop, far from the group now, her pale form flickering against the night sky. Whoever fell trying to climb up took a point of damage and climbed back up successfully on the second try.

Bastian tried augmenting himself with aether and leapt across the field, clearing a large distance in one go, taking some time to recover on the cold ground. Y'maomi nimbly climbed up the building, jumping between small ledges to get up to the top. She climbed, slipped, and fell, cursing loudly the whole way down, then hauled herself back up and made it to the top on the second try. Yuyuka decided to cheat. Focusing, she connected to the leylines present at the rooftop and swooped over there.

Night decided to jump and climb the wall like a furious cat, standing above the group and ready to pounce on that runaway ghost if needed.

The wind stilled for a moment, as if even the night itself leaned in to listen. Her form wavered, translucent at the edges, but there was no violence in it now, only a fragile stillness that was not there before. Her hands rested open at her sides, no longer curled into claws, palms turned upward like she was still waiting for someone to take them.

"Why." She said again, quieter this time, the word breaking apart halfway through. Her gaze drifted past the group, out toward the dark water beyond the docks, as if searching for someone who was never going to arrive. "I waited. I called his name until my throat gave out, and still, no one came."

Yuyuka answered gently. "I don't know why no one came for you when you needed them, Lady Isolde. And I am sorry that this happened to you." "You did not deserve this fate." "But neither does the ship below. We are here for you now. Let us help you."

Yucca stayed locked in a ready stance, blade steady, her gaze holding a golden gleam that did not waver.

The ghost's voice trembled, grief bleeding through every word. "He took everything from me." Her hands curl slightly, not in violence, but in old, hollow pain. "My child, and the love I once carried for him." A broken breath follows. "And then he threw me into the sea."

Yuyuka asked what his name was. The ghost's eyes narrowed, hatred flickering through the sorrow for just a moment. "Cassian Rquerre." The name came out like poison on her tongue.

Night finally stepped down to where the group had gathered. He decided to watch closer. "According to the records, this man was the former owner of the company, now long dead." Yucca said, "Cassian Rquerre. Chances are, he is long dead, but if not, we will ensure that he is found and brought to justice." Night added, "If he has fallen, then Thal shall see what wicked deeds he has done, and hath cast him into the bowels of the seven hells."

The ghost's form flickers, something almost like relief crossing her tear streaked face. "I want to leave." Her voice cracks on the words. "I am so tired." "Can I see your hand for a moment, Lady Isolde?" Yuyuka asked.

Bastian peered over the edge and looked down at the rocks at the foot of the docks, trying to see if he could find her corpse, or rather her skeleton, in this case. The ghost vanishes upward, putting distance between herself and Yuyuka. "Do not come closer." The ghost's gaze drifts farther out. "I prayed to the goddess Nymeia, in the moment of my death." A shaky breath follows. "And I believe she is the one who left me trapped here."

Yucca took a slow step forward, voice steady despite everything. "Nymeia would show mercy." She takes a step forward. "She is the goddess of fate, aye, but she watches over all of us." A pause, her gaze holding steady on the ghost. "Perhaps the paths, confusing as they were, led everyone here for a reason." Her voice softens further. "But the time has come to let go now." Yuyuka added, "Then let Nald'Thal help free you."



Act X: The Rooftop Chase

Yuyuka procured a small bottle filled with the trace essence Isolde had left behind, concentrating her aether into it. She brings her staff tip to the bottle, which lets out a sonaric pulse, and she looks down. "Your body is down there. I shall do your last rites, and Thal shall bring you to the arms of Nymeia." Yuyuka turned to the others. "Can you grab some strong shipwrights? And some rope and tools?"

Yucca did as she was asked, gathering some strong shipwrights along with rope and tools, then handing them over to Yuyuka. Bastian went to assist. Yucca said, "Come here guys." The ghost waited, watching with a curious yet sorrowful gaze, pain still lingering behind her hollow eyes.

Carefully, the body was fished out of the water. Somehow it hadn't rotted as it should be, though still a little waterlogged and bloated, Lady Isolde looked as she was asleep. Yuyuka said, "Blessed Nald, this blessed soul has lived by the coin. Her scales in life balanced, and so I beseech thee, bring unto the arms of your brother." The ghost's form pulses weakly, her once heavy aether fading thin, barely holding together at the edges. Her hollow eyes drift down to the body laid before her, and something breaks further in her expression.

Yuyuka continued, "Blessed Thal, balance this blessed soul's scales. Weigh her right and true, and bring her into the arms of the Spinner." "Blessed Nymeia, let Isolde sit by your side. As you cut the last thread of her tapestry, may she be something beautiful forevermore in your halls." "Let it be so." And thus, Yuyuka finished the cleansing rite upon the body, giving Lady Isolde the chance to let go.

"Let it be so." Bastian echoed. "Let it be so." Y'maomi added. Night said the same. "Let it be so."

The ghost's form settles at last, something like peace washing over her hollowed features, the tension that had held her together for so long finally releasing. Yucca prays, murmuring "So be it." Under her breath, and does what she always does, charging straight toward the ghost with her scythe raised high. A golden scale materializes above the ghost's head, tipping slowly to the right.

Yucca speaks in something old, forgotten, the language of the desert. "Ruhi bisalam, ukhti." Go in peace, my sister. "Al'an tajidin al'raha maea Thal." Now you find rest with Thal. A blinding flash of light erupts, swallowing everything in white for one suspended heartbeat.

When everyone comes to their senses, they find themselves in a quiet place. A single peace settles over all of them, and a single flower rests before the stone of Nymeia. Nothing remains, no suffering, no lingering weight. Everything feels calm, the waves rolling gently, the flow of aether settled back into its natural heart present. An overwhelming sense of peace fills every heart present. The symbol carved into the stone flares brighter for a moment, and Yuyuka hears a voice in the wind. "Thank you."



Act XII: Afterward

Yuyuka looks to the rising sun, smiling. "We just pulled an all nighter, huh." Bastian: "I'm beat." Yuyuka: "I'm this close to passing out." Y'maomi: "I'm ready to go home." Then she proceeds to faceplant into the dirt, out cold. Bastian: "I don't think we should leave here." Night takes off his glasses. "A well done job and no one else dead. Boring. But better this way."

Yucca smiles softly. "Fate has its ways." She glances toward the stone, voice quiet. "Al'qadar khayt yansajuh man la yura, wa lam yarah 'iilaa man 'aemaq alnnazar." Fate is a thread woven by hands unseen, and seen only by those who look deeper than the surface. Then Yucca rushes to Yuyuka's side, scooping her up practically into her arms again, treating her like a lucky charm once more.

"Back to Uldah we go to deliver a knocked out thaumaturge." Bastian said.

Yucca Al'sahra presses gentle kisses to the little Lalafell's forehead. "You truly were a fine Thaumaturge tonight. You honored the rites of Thal more than most ever could." She holds her a little closer. "I will personally carry you back to Thanalan myself." A small, fond laugh escapes her. "At the end of the day, I am a mother hen through and through, no helping it now."

Yuyuka mutters something in her sleep, but now she's starting to snore, and its getting less cute. Yucca Al'sahra turns to Y'maomi, Yuyuka still cradled in her arms. "Have you gotten your room set up above the Den yet?" Y'maomi: "Aye. I have."

Yuyuka Yuka has left the party. "That's good." Yucca turns to the whole group, a warm, tired smile on her face. "Thank you all for tonight, truly." She shifts Yuyuka a little in her arms, glancing around at everyone. "It's good, let's get out of here before we are roped into another job." Bastian: "Always happy to lend a hand." She yawns.

Yucca lets out a tired sigh. "I desperately need to get home now." She glances down at Yuyuka still cradled in her arms. "But I will drop this little one off at the Ossuary first." Y'maomi: "I'm gonna head off too, I think."

Yucca walks off, grumbling under her breath. "Yuyuka is heavier than she looks, I swear." A tired huff follows. "I'll drop her off at the Ossuary, or maybe the Den, who knows at this point."

The ship keeps her name. The docks keep their quiet. And somewhere below the water, a single flower drifts, forgotten by everyone but the tide.

END