

Startled shouts began almost as soon as it appeared. The initial thought was that it might be that they'd come across an island that wasn't on the map and were excited for the chance at some fresh treasure, and it was ignored, but when the volume only grew instead of fading into the usual chatter one would hear on a ship such as this, it became necessary for someone with authority to step in and prevent a brawl. The captain strode from her quarters with an air of barely-repressed ire, pushing through the crew in search of what had set them off. They quieted seeing her, the crowd settling into silence with a nervous energy that could be felt even through the wood.

She moved without saying a word, not stopping until she reached the prow and propped a foot on it, leaning forward on her knee. Brown eyes stared up at the monstrosity, hat tilted back for an unimpeded view into the distance. It was almost disappointing, finding that there was no fight brewing for her to charge in, take over, and destroy the involved parties (and anyone unfortunate enough to get in the way), but it was clear that the night was not over yet. Beating up a few pirates could wait. It was like the good old days, and she knew her fellow pirate a few ships over felt the same. A wolfish grin curled her lips, the surest sign of danger and a raring good fight, and Ray spun away from her perch, rapidly giving out orders and shedding her hat and the heavy captain's coat. The ship suddenly moved as if struck by lightning; nothing was still as they prepared for the inevitable. The ship in good hands, she produced a small, black stone and called forth her winged partner. The Dragon King would take her to where she needed to be in this battle.

Together they flew closer, and once the first shots were fired, they paused to assess the situation. It was clear that this would be the last time they would fight together. Nothing they could do would bring the monster down, especially if it was who Ray thought it was. This was a losing battle for the fools that fought alone. Bahamut continued to circle it, searching for any possible weakness to take advantage of, when they saw it... *felt* it. An apparition of another, an old friend thought to be retired, ran straight through the dragon's left wing as part of the monster, Lavos, faded into something smaller. Phantom electricity hummed through the air, followed closely by shadowy blasts of light, a wisp of cold air, the far off sparks of a fire, a tsunami summoned by the great sea serpent himself. From their own world came a massive whirlwind that could rival a hurricane, but somehow only affected the enemy, and a near constant volley of cannon shots. They weren't as alone as they'd originally thought. Everyone was here, but not here, and when she concentrated, they could feel how frail and tattered the fabric of space and time had become so close to the monster. Everyone was here. They were all fighting, and they were fighting together, in spite of the vast distances they knew to separate them. Ray let out a wild, elated laugh, and together, she and the Dragon King charged back into the fight.

The battle raged on for what seemed like forever, and slowly, Ray depleted her cache of elixirs and ethers. With her usual melee weapons forfeit as useless against this enemy, she was left with little but magic and what remained of her grenades, and she blew through what she had. Even Bahamut appeared to be feeling the strain, and as she watched the Darkness in Lavos persist, the allies fall, and one of their own disappear - she *screamed* - it became all the more

apparent that nothing short of everything they had, everything they *were*, would bring this monster down. If any of them failed to bring their lives and their conviction to the table, nothing of the Realm of Light would be left.

They had to give it *everything*. No holding back.

The roar of a dragon echoed her enraged, defiant scream.

An upward, spiralling flightpath took them high into the sky, high into the clouds. Only then did they begin. Light gathered in Bahamut's maw. Slowly, the clouds began to spin, an ominous sparking at their center. A bracelet began to glow, and with the strain, it burned into the skin of Ray's wrist. Gritting her teeth through the pain, she forced it to open more Corridors of Light than she ever had before, giving it all the power she could spare.

*Let me borrow your Light.*

The Corridors went straight to the Hearts of the Refugees and their allies, sending back to her a piece of the Light that kept them going. It was a technique she'd been practicing for years: stealing the magic that rightfully belonged to someone else, though she had never thought it would be used this way. It was almost overwhelming, to hold that much Light in your hands all at once, to fuse it with every bit of your own Light, and to hold everything together with such foreign magic at work. Her body shook with the effort, skin starting to glitter and then to glow with the power, and with as tight a hold as she could manage, Ray turned her attention back to the swirling clouds. The lightning, even of such a high caliber level, was considerably easier to call. But now came the hardest part. With this magic waiting to be released, Ray forced it all together, Thunder and the Light of those willing to throw down their lives even for the chance at saving the worlds and their innocents, fusing her two strongest spells for something she'd only dreamed of until now.

Aurora Storm.

As one, she and Bahamut released their ultimate attacks upon the Destroyer of Worlds, pouring every ounce of their being into it. Ray held it longer than she'd originally thought possible, stubbornly forcing out more power as her concentration began to fray, her eyesight to fail, her links to everyone else to close. The Dragon King valiantly supported her until he could stay no longer, shimmering and fading away from beneath her, and she fell, Aurora Storm faltering and finally disappearing.

Was that all she had? Once upon a time, Ray had believed she would have lasted longer in a fight such as this. She'd believed that, should the need arise, she would never give up, and never fall, as long as there was something to fight for. As her mind quickly slipped into a final, cold darkness, she felt... disappointed that she had not performed better, or lasted longer. And yet, behind that was a faint feeling of pride. Pride in herself for laying her life on the line when it

mattered, even though she wouldn't be the hero of this story. Pride in all of them, for fighting together for those that couldn't fight back, for coming back from their separate lives to do so, even in the face of insurmountable odds. She fell, and with the last tendril of consciousness quickly fading, she wondered: would any of it matter? Could they make a difference?

One last hurrah.

Could they do it?

The waves of the ocean below met her, still-glowing, with open arms, the crew still on-ship and preparing for another volley of the cannons watching somberly. And though the sky was dark, and the raging waters darker still, a light shone from beneath the surface like a beacon, a message from those that could do no more.

Even when all is lost, even in the darkest Darkness, there will always be a Light to guide you.