



She/Her □ Mattershift Lv 2 □ APPLICATION

Roan's second journey to Dragon's Rest is eventless and quiet, punctuated only by the caws of seagulls and the occasional chatter of the fishing crew amongst themselves. Again she rests her front paws on the point of the stern, craning her neck not to take in the cool ocean spray, but to keep her eyes fixed on the atoll growing larger on the horizon.

A month prior, she'd made this trip surrounded by guildmates, full of merriment and chaos and nervous excitement. A few days ago, she might've tried to rouse a group of friends to go with her. Maybe she would have selected Viola for her shrewd pragmatism, or Arc for her curiosity and effusive support, or Heidi for a friend who understands what they went through together. If the talent show hadn't—no, if *she* hadn't made it all go wrong...maybe Ubeu would still be at her side.

But today she's alone.

The fishing dinghy comes to rest on the shore with a soft bump and the scrape of sand against the oak hull. Roan is jostled from her reverie by a single voice:

"You all right, miss?"

"Huh? Oh, I-I'm fine." She flashes a couple incisors at the inquiring fishercat. Her tears dry instantaneously, but the sudden evaporation leaves her eyes blurry with salt, so she's forced to rub them anyway. You'd think she'd learn eventually. **"Thank you for asking."**

She hoists herself over the stern and pads a few steps on the wet black sand, cold with the presence of ice and metal. **"I'm afraid this is where we part ways. Wish me luck. If you haven't seen any sign of me by sunset, go back to Seaworn and raise the alarm."**

"Will do," the fishercat says, preparing to haul the boat back into the waves. **"In the meantime, we'll be in the area. Let us know when you're ready to go home."**

Roan tracks around the side of the atoll along Seasoning Beach, the fishing boat now just a speck in the far distance. Even though she's the only living cat on the island, she feels protected, as though

she's in the presence of an old and dear friend, a feeling that only grows as the bones of the old ship come into view.

"Oh, Terra," Roan whispers aloud. **"I'm so sorry."**

She doesn't know why she's apologizing. She isn't even sure Terra is around to hear it. She feels like she needs to say something, to acknowledge the tragedy that befell them, lest that same threat be leveled at her.

There are some familiar faces left on this island, ones with sticky feet and colorful hides. Lizards. Roan finds a group of them sunning themselves on a flat rock, with the odd member skittering around her feet; the air here is so charged that her fur stands on end, allowing the cold breeze off the ocean to cut down to her skin. They're juicing up.

She reaches into her pouch and pulls out some dried mealworms—the ones she usually feeds Todge—and watches in delight as the critters spark with excitement. An hour passes, and by high noon, Roan's compendium has an official new entry: Island Zap Lizard.

It's a working title, but a better one will have to wait. She didn't come here to play with lizards. Even the quest to find out more about the mysterious Seven Scales is ancillary. She thinks back to her conversation with Arcturus about what they'd each seen, and how the very ground she walks on is knit together by inlays of precious metal. Her pawsteps follow a winding silver path as it leads her to a tangle of mangrove trees so thick that it blocks out the sun and the sound of the ocean waves.

Arturus had spoken of a beautiful forest teeming with life, illuminated with glowing blue algae along the path to an invisible barrier, where she would find what remains of the Guild's camp. The iridescence casts a blue light onto the undersides of the leaves where the sun doesn't shine and haloes the rickety panels of the wooden steps Roan now travels. She also remembers that the biggest danger on the island—supposedly, according to Terra—is giant catfish, so she's careful not to slip and fall, even as she steals a closer look at the duck-billed beavers frolicking in the roots.

She descends into the camp with wonder in her eyes, taking in the sight of rocks that meld into crystal and the sand that flows into smooth, multicolored glass. Shapes are carved into the surroundings, clearly made by an artist's chisel like the one she carries in her pocket—the unmistakable lattices of bismuth. To Roan, this is the most hallowed place in all of Waywardia.

Roan places a vial of black sand layered with opalescent banding in the center of the encampment, an offering from one artist to another.

"Hello?" she calls, but no one answers. **"Rustle?"**

She doesn't know if anyone's here to listen. She tries anyway.

"Y-you don't know who I am, but my friend Arcturus told me about you. I'm not sure what I came here to say. I just felt like I had to say something. I am so very sorry for what happened"

to you. That you did so much to help every living creature, and it's only by luck that we came to know your name.

"When we were talking, Arc said something that really stuck with me. That every cat dies two deaths—once when you take your last breath, and again when someone says your name for the last time. A-and I want you to know that as long as I draw breath, your name will be spoken. The things you've created have fueled so many of the legends that rocked me to sleep, the colors that brightened my world. The magic that flows through us, the reason we're alive at all—it all comes from you. In those things, your legacy lives on."

Fat tears roll down Roan's cheeks in waves, only to be swallowed by the humid air. How do you begin to honor cats like these? What they created, what they sacrificed?

"There's nothing I can say to make this better. No words from the living can compare to the good deeds of the dead. I can't undo what happened to you, or the things that have already been set in motion in my own time. But left unchecked, I fear natural magic as we know it might cease to exist. All we can do is try to continue the work the Windrose Guild has left for us, to keep that dark shadow at bay."

She scoops a glassy stone from the soft ground, carving into it with her foreclaw until it matches the latticed, glistening boulder faces, and places it next to the vial of sand.

"I will take what you've given me and pay it forward."

The edge of the sun kisses the horizon as Roan steps through the open field, set ablaze with an orange glow as the day's last light catches the metal paths. One of these fissures at her feet is smaller than the rest, thin and fragile and no more than a few feet long, but it glows no less brightly. She's the one who put it there. It was her last stand against certain doom, before Rustle and the others came to their rescue. She can recall so clearly the expression of horror written on Ubeu's face, but she doesn't dwell. Her gifts had helped fix the world, just a little bit.

"There you are!" the lead fishercat calls as she approaches the boat. **"We were starting to get worried."**

Roan smiles bashfully. **"Sorry I'm late. I had something important I wanted to do."**

"Aye, that's what we figured," they reply. Their eyes are imploring, betraying their curiosity as they try to stay nonchalant. **"So...did you find anything?"**

Roan hums. She vaults over the side of the boat and takes an extra oar in her paws, helping to push them off the shore and into the breaking waves.

"I found everything I was looking for."

