

Hi! I can't draw but I can write so I put this little story together. I hope y'all enjoy it! I wasn't sure if you needed it as a Word document or Google Doc so I just pasted it below. I hope that's okay!

Sam

The groaning, moaning ship swayed like a great lumbering beast on a lone pilgrimage in the dead of night.

Wresk clutched his two trembling younger sisters tightly against his side as the ship rolled. The surrounding crates strained the old rope netting barely holding them in place. A single oil lamp hung from a rafter, its light guttering dangerously as water dripped from a compartment above the flame. The young Ysoki focused on the light to calm his nerves and his roiling stomach.

Arrin, the youngest of his five sisters and barely more than a pup, clutched at his tail while her teeth chattered with fear. He stroked the soft fur atop her head, surprised to find the gesture soothing him in return.

".. filthy... throw overboard," a voice called out from above. Wresk's ears twisted, straining to catch the voice but the storm swallowed most of the words. "Damned storm... nowhere... Cursed!"

"Father," Wresk cautioned quietly, his dark eyes shining in the light.

"I hear," the older Ysoki told him. "We paid our passage, no matter what they think."

"Everything!" Rivvak snarled. Wresk's younger brother bristled with unquenchable fury. "They took everything and they **laughed**. We needed that money to establish ourselves."

"Rivvak," Wresk said sternly.

"I have some set aside, hidden away," their father said. "I'm not so foolish as that."

"But still," Rivvak grumbled.

"But, still," their father said. "It is their ship and they set the fee. That is the very basis of commerce."

"They call **us** the thieves," the boy groused. "They're the ones. And worse. Murderers."

"It wasn't them, Rivvak," Wresk told him with a sigh. The conversation wasn't new. It was a repetition the younger sibling refused to let go.

"They're **a//** like that. Humans."

The young Ysoki spat to the side but then grimaced when Bessk began to cry. She was the oldest of the girls but their flight had hit her the hardest.

An enormous crash filled the hold, accompanied by the shouting of men above.

"Something's wrong," their father said, bolting upright.

"What-"

Smoke.

Wresk's whiskers tensed as he scented the air. The shouts above turned to screams and the ship shuddered before canting to the side without warning.

"They'll kill us," Rivvak whispered, staring at the worn ladder that led to the deck above.

"The captain said he couldn't guarantee our safety if we left the hold before they docked. We can't-"

The boy's words faltered as smoke seeped between the poorly maintained boards above them. Water began to drip from multiple places, running down the boards before falling to splatter against the floor and the nearby crates.

"We'll drown if we stay down here," their father said while grabbing his daughters. "I'll take my chances with the humans; they'll be too busy to notice us. Run quickly while sticking to what shadows you can find."

"Wresk, I'm frightened," Arrin said, clutching her tiny claws painfully tight against his arm. He patted her head before swinging her up to his back.

"Hold tight, little one," he told her while taking his other sister's paw.

They ran, stooped to the floor with their tails as a counter-balance. Men screamed orders around them as they fled up the ladder.

A second blast rocked the ship. Wood splintered next to Wresk. He turned, his reflexes enhanced by fear and adrenaline, in order to shield his sisters from the shrapnel, hissing when he felt the fragments tear into his clothing and the flesh beneath. He staggered, shaking his head to clear the ringing before following the rest of his family.

"Gods damn you!" a voice yelled, too close for their comfort. "You've cursed us all! You've-"

Another explosion threw them all to the deck.

Wresk shook his concussed head. He stared into a malevolent vortex set against an obsidian sky dotted with pale stars.

That can't be right, he told himself groggily. *We're- we're below deck. We- there can't-*

Silence surrounded him. He felt claws clutching and gripping his arms but he groaned, pushing them away as his fur stood on end. Time slowed. His eyes widened as a jagged bolt formed high above. It screamed as it rent the very air itself, tearing apart the blackness to reveal pure white light. Almost it was beautiful. Almost.

The young Ysoki sighed as the lightning reached for him. The deck vibrated and he felt himself lift into the air before the silence was shattered.

Wresk gasped and screamed, clawing at the sand beneath him. The horde of tiny crabs surrounding his legs fled back to the ocean as he turned himself on weak arms. His calf-length trousers bore the marks from the small crustaceans and his fur showed through numerous gashes in his tunic but he was otherwise whole.

He shielded his eyes against the sun before collapsing back to the beach.

"Father!" Wresk shouted, sitting up in a panic. He pushed up to stand, swaying until he balanced against his tail. "Father! Rivvak! Mother!"

"Arrin!" He took a stumbling step until his foot caught a hidden plank, causing him to curse in pain.

Only now did he see it. Wreckage surrounded him and he spied at least one body in the distance. He ran, limping and swaying with every step until he reached the prone form to

find an unrecognizable human. Bile filled his throat when he spied the enormous gash that had opened the man's stomach.

A gull cried overhead before dipping to glide away. His ears twitched but he ignored it as he turned slowly to survey the island.

Pure white sand gave way slowly to trees that grew dense enough to prevent him from seeing what lay within. He'd never seen their like, with bark like scale mail armor and sparse limbs that pointed diagonally to the sky. Something moved in the branches of one, shaking the tree as it scampered deeper into the forest.

Despite their heights, he could easily see the temple that loomed beyond. It squatted on the horizon like a scorpion hunkering down to surprise oncoming prey. A lone onyx tower, massive and ringed with white, was the only other structure of note. It pierced the sky, a clawing finger pointed in admonishment.

His keen eyes could make out vines that had overgrown the temple and his heart sank at the thought of it being long abandoned.

Waves crashed into the beach, recalling him to his purpose. He sped along the beach on legs still unused to firm ground, searching for his family.

Strange animals called to each other in the twilight. Wresk sat beneath a simple shelter he'd made from broken planks and lengths of rope. Sleep would not come to him. He listened to the sounds within the forest, wondering which belonged to a predator large enough to try its luck. His heavy heart throbbed with the loss of his family.

He'd traced the beach, following as deep into the edge of the forest as he dared but found no one aside from the lone dead body. The crabs found it soon after, raising their little claws in celebration of the feast to come before they stripped his flesh away. He'd watched for a while in horrid fascination before turning away to gather what few supplies he could find.

A crate sat before his shelter, still tethered to a waterlogged length of rope. Another crate, half-buried in the sand, was connected to the other end.

Both were secured with enormous cylindrical locks. He could smell the provisions within and it drove him crazy. Claw marks lined both crates and his hands ached from the effort to

crack them open. There were few rocks on the beach and none were up to the task of breaking the ironbound wood.

Wresk bounced a dagger on his thigh while staring at the box. He'd found it on the corpse and taken it for himself. He'd tried to use it to pry the boxes open but it was too slim for the task.

Tomorrow he would try to pick the locks.

He knew of others in his warren that were skilled with safecracking but his father forbade learning the craft. They were a merchant family and he was a merchant's son.

"I can't barter with a lock, father," Wresk said out loud.

On the second day, he'd shaved a piece of the bark from a nearby tree in order to make picks, using what memories he had of those who used them. He returned to the scavenged bark to adjust his picks as he tried them on the lock.

Just when he thought his thirst would drive him insane, storm clouds enveloped the island. He'd stored what he could with a few shards of broken pottery and the enormous, spade-like leaves from the nearby trees.

Lightning rattled him, sending him into a catatonic state that was only broken when the storm retreated.

It took another day before he felt the first pin move and he celebrated by drinking an entire leaf of water. It was slow work but he found himself enjoying the challenge. He made it into a game as hunger sharpened his focus to a knife's edge.

Later that night, when the hunger became unbearable, he peeled one of the strange hardened fruits hanging from the trees. A trial nibble produced no ill effects after waiting so he ate the entire bitter flesh. Horrendous stomach cramps assaulted him throughout the night but he kept the food down.

The next day, after the third pin fell in sequence, he hunted for crabs. They were wary little creatures that proved hard to tempt until he lay prone to lure them in, leaping up to give chase when enough ventured close to prod him. When he felt no lasting illness from the tree fruit, he added a portion to his meager diet to supplement the meat recovered from crabs.

Early morning on the fifth day, the lock opened suddenly, surprising Wresk when it fell apart in his hands. He wasted no time in opening the crate to dig through the contents. Tears welled in his eyes when he spied the provisions wrapped in well oiled paper. After saying a prayer to his family, he gorged himself until he was sick from the very idea of eating.

He napped atop the remaining packages, waking when the sun touched the endless horizon.

The lock on the second crate proved surprisingly easy to open now that he'd had his practice. He picked the lock, cracked the top and began to climb in to investigate until he spied an object in the distance. The young Ysoki shrieked in surprise. He fell from the top of the crate to scurry along the beach, waving his short arms and screaming, praying for their lookouts to spy the island and take interest.

Thunder rumbled, freezing him in place. He swallowed as a cold wind swept through the island, shaking the trees. Lightning crackled, lancing from one cloud to another. He rolled into a shivering, chattering ball with his tail tucked between his thighs, hugging it to his chest as the fear took root.

Black clouds billowed from the top of the temple's tower, staining the sky like wine spilled from an overturned glass. Sand, stirred by the wind racing through the island, stung his eyes until he closed them. His fur raised along his body. Lightning cracked, again and again and again until it seemed there was no pause between them.

Wresk screamed, paws to his long ears. He opened his eyes to plead to whatever gods would listen but the lightning ceased, leaving only their stark afterimages.

The ship was aflame, the massive fires reflecting on the ocean. He sat up and then ran, racing to the lapping waves to watch. The ship held together and, for a moment, he wondered if the crew could quench the inferno.

"Please," he whispered, clutching his claws against the small pendant he wore, a gift from his betrothed: a beautiful young girl with silky black fur and the softest ears. Dead, now, but surely waiting for him beyond the veil. "Please."

The fire vanished suddenly and Wresk cheered, pumping his furred fist to the sky. His happiness was short lived when lightning illuminated the distance, forking into five wide tines to reveal nothing more than water and retreating dark clouds.

Despite the opened crates and the promise of enough provisions to last for months, his sleep that night was fitful. He dreamed of his family, burning as they drowned. And the voice of Mirra, always. Her head in his lap. Her paw against his quivering whiskers, begging him to run with her dying breath.

Voices, carried by the wind, woke him. Grey light filled a cloudless sky. He stirred, mumbling to the spirits to let him sleep until he picked out individual words.

Wresk snapped up, alert and anxious. He ran from his small shelter to spy a small ship, or boat, he wasn't sure of the terminology, resting against the far edge of the beach. He raised a hand and inhaled, ready to scream for help until his keen eyes spotted a figure in chains. It fell and a rough man struck the figure with a whip. The standing figures laughed and their voices were harsh and cold.

He hid himself, crouching while slipping from tree to tree to approach as the others walked into the forest.

"Master will be mad," one voice, a male, spoke.

"She were the only one we found," another answered. "The other fools drowned 'cept for the one that fought when we hauled him in."

They paraded the woman between them towards the center of the island, chattering about guard duties and their hopes of a reward for bringing in a live sacrifice. They dreamed of brandy or mead or free time ashore the continent with the spoils they'd looted from other ships.

Wresk began to understand what happened as they approached the temple. It was used, in some way, to generate the storms that destroyed ships which approached too closely. Captives were taken when possible as a sacrifice for some ritual.

The party reached the walls of the temple. He stopped, crouching behind a tree while his hand gripped the knife he'd stolen from the sailor. They cursed and searched, touching uneven lines while walking back and forth until one cried out. A section of the wall moved, sliding back before pulling to the side. Wresk stared where the man had touched, memorizing the location with dark eyes. His furred knuckles whitened on the knife while his lips pulled back in anger to show sharp teeth.

If they had one captive, they might have others. It was a small hope and one he refused to allow. Still. Still, if anyone in his family were alive, he'd follow the men into the depths of the Pit itself.

The hidden wall rumbled while closing and he began to count.

He'd never learned to fight but, then, he'd never been taught to crack locks, either. And as the ghostly screams of his terrified sisters filled his ears, he imagined it was much the same: you thrust with the knife and twisted until they fell, one at a time.