

Waking up with a yawn and a stretch. I open my eyes and glance at the captain's room from my vantage point atop an empty bookshelf.

What the hell?

"I swear I fell asleep on my pillow."

Frowning, I hop off the bookshelf and land perfectly on the wooden floor. Not a carpeted floor, but that can be fixed with time.

I stroll out of my room, walk down the hall, up the stairs, and am met with the soft morning light alongside a cool breeze. I blink rapidly as my eyes adjust to the light, and then look around. Boriss is at the stern. The Russian is leaning at the edge with a piece of cold meat and a cup of probably not water.

When I turn to the helm, Myers stands at the core with a soft smile on his face.

I stroll up to him with the silence my form allows.

"MYERS!" I yell. The man freezes and quickly turns with a hand on his cane. Upon seeing me and my grin, he quickly relaxes.

"You did not need to yell," He says.

"Well good morning to you too. It seems I overslept. You should have woken me."

He shakes his head. "It's fine. High vitality allows one to require less sleep."

"Less sleep, but not no sleep." I hop up to the railing near the core. "But it's not the sleep that kept you awake. You enjoy helming the ship, don't you?"

His aged eyes shift from me to the distant expanse before us. "It has been three years... maybe four since I'd helmed a ship. It is nice."

We both stare silently as clouds pass us by. Only after five minutes does the novelty fall off.

"Alright. Training time. How do I use the core?" I lean forward and place a paw on the orb. "Do I just touch it here?"

Myers flicks my paw away. "Careful. Cores can't process multiple people." he warns. "Do you even know how to manipulate your mana?"

I pout.

“Maybe. Give me a moment.”

I close my eyes and go through the various ways I'd manipulated energy before. I go down the extensive list from direct soul manipulation to meridians. Eventually, I feel something throughout my body. It just flows, but not like blood. More electric, like nerves. I try to manipulate it, but nothing seems to work.

Then the memory emerges. When I'd transformed into a cat, mana had moved.

I focus on the feeling of that movement. Then it shifts to my will. Slowly, I shift the energy in my body, increasing the speed faster and faster until I have a good feel to it.

When I open my eyes, Myers is staring at me, perplexed.

“What?”

“Your eyes are glowing.”

“Yea, and? Glowing eyes after manipulating mana is a pretty normal phenomenon in most worlds. It happens quite often. Now, how do I control the core?”

He harumps at my question. “The core controls the movement of the ship's ambient mana. There are runes carved into rigging and poles. Sending mana to the runes will power the movement in that location. This works by inserting your own mana and leading the ship's mana to the location. The more mana moved, the more pressure the rune will apply, and the faster the limb moves. I suggest applying as little mana as possible so as to get a feel.”

I nod.

He removes his hand and I place a paw on the orb. With a small effort of will, I thrust some of my mana into the orb... and then I feel it. Like an extended limb, the entire ship seems to come into being. I can feel the masts, the wood, the resistance of the wind, and the warm energy entering from the bottom of the ship. I feel the air as it impacts me as well as the slipstream forming in my wake.

With additional concentration, I recognize the runes across every area of the ship. Numerous inert runes within the ship's hull are silent, but the largest ones connected to the rigging and all three masts are firmly connected. I direct some mana into the top mast and feel it shift an inch in the runes opposite direction.

“Ohhh, the runes are a pushing force. This is pretty simple then.”

I hop on the orb and turn towards the front. A grin rises on my face.

“Full speed ahead!” I roar. I shove mana into the orb. All three masts shift, turn, and bend. All of the side sails open to their maximum. The ship lurches forward, doubling its speed.

“MEEEEOOOOWWWWWW.” The instinct takes me as I cry out in ecstasy. When I look forward, Boriss is on the ground and covered in liquid. He waves his empty cup at me and then takes a bite out of the meat still firmly in his other hand.

Turning around, I am met with Myers. The old man is unfazed by the shift in speed, though his eyes are intently staring at me.

“What?”

“Is this really your first time?”

I roll my eyes.

“First time using a core? Yes. First time using and manipulating mana to manipulate relatively simple engineering? No. Speaking of which, can anyone create runes? They look like they are carved into the wood. I want to see about making them myself.”

He stares at me for another second, and then sighs.

“For simple runes, yes. But anything complicated or more than a single rune will require a [Runesmith].”

“I see. Hopefully it’s just a recommendation and not some complic- hey!” Myers picks me up and then places his hand on the orb. The ship rapidly slows.

“What is-” I don’t finish my sentence when I notice Myers’ grimace. I follow his eyes. And then I see it. A ship larger than ours is heading directly in our direction. At the top of its three masts is a prevalent black flag.

I wiggle out of his grasp and hop to the railing. “[Pirates]?”

He nods.

“Shit. Boriss! Arm up. We might have a fight on our hands. Go wake everyone else.

The Russian salutes and then rushes into the ship.

As he leaves, my attention reshifts back to the distant ship.

“Are we really this unlucky?” I ask. “Will they bombard us or board us? How many [Pirates] are we dealing with?”

"[Pirates] usually avoid major trade routes because of [Pirate Hunters]. Considering we are still on a major trade route, we are indeed unlucky. Moreso because that's a Destroyer. Considering we have no cannons, they will most likely board us with numbers in the twenties."

"Oh, perfect. Say, how much does a destroyer sell for?" I ask.

He gives me the look that people who think I'm completely crazy give me.

But he doesn't give me an answer as a distant explosion goes off. Our eyes return to the pirate ship. One of its top masts falls down. The mast tilts over the side of the ship, but does not fall off. Instead, it dangles at the side on thick rope.

"Um, what's happening?"

"The ship is being chased." Myers announces.

Indeed, right behind the pirate ship is another destroyer. This next destroyer is far different than the [Pirates]. For one, it seems to have armor plating and a single mast. For another, it has two propellers at the stern of the ship and an exhaust trail from a metal cylinder behind the single mast. At the top of the mast is a light blue flag with a golden lion's head in the center.

"I know that flag. It belongs to the **Lion's Maw**." Myers relaxes. "The [Pirates] must have been running from him and wound up here."

Another mast falls off the [Pirate] destroyer and dangles on the other side. With two masts down, the [Pirates] start to slow considerably.

Myers strokes his beard. "You've got the [Captain] class now, correct? Can you tell me the name of the ships?"

I raise an eyebrow at the old man. "I don't see any names on the hulls- also, is your eyesight really that bad? They're not that far."

"Stare at the ships and ask for the name. You should see it."

I frown, but do as I am told.

I glare at the [Pirates] vessel for a good two seconds, and then it pops up right above the ship.

Imminent Huntress (Three-Mast Destroyer)

Max Speed: 12 knots

Construction: Wood

Modifications: Expanded Storage

“Um, the [Pirate] ship is called *Imminent Huntress*. The other ship is-” I focus on the other destroyer.

***Lionsguard* (Single-mast Combustion Cored Destroyer)**

Max Speed: 27 knots

Construction: Metal-Reinforced Wood

Modification: Combustion powered propeller.

“*Lionsguard*.”

“And the [Captain’s] level?” he asks.

“Uhhh, do I do the same thing? Ask the ship?”

“No, find the [Captain] on the ship and then ask.”

I squint hard, but everything on the ships is blurry. “As amazing as I am, my eyesight is only slightly better than a human’s.”

“Level one.” Myers murmurs softly. He reaches into his coat pocket and takes out a retracted spyglass. He extends it and holds it in front of me.”

While he holds it, I look through the spyglass and adjust it with my paws. With the improved vision, I can see the people aboard the [Pirate] ship. I focus on a guy rapidly pulling rope.

Level 24 [Rigger]

Then on another guy carrying debris.

Level 24 [Carpenter]

After checking several more people, I finally found my target.

Emberson Doesly: Level 38 [Pirate Captain]

The man is large in build, with muscles rivaling Boriss. He wears a tricorn, has a dirty unkempt beard, armor plated thick coat, a cutlass at his left hip, and what appears to be a firearm holstered to his right.

“Emberson Doesly: Level 38 [Pirate Captain]” I tell Myers. I then push the spyglass to the other ship and, standing confidently at the prow, I instantly find the [Captain]. The man stands tall with broad shoulders. He wears a coat with built-in pauldrons in the shape of lions. At his sides, two literal lions in full armor stand ready at his sides. Upon his head, a magnificent golden tricorn with a lion's tail extends upward like a feather.

Leonidas Dhurina, the Lion's Maw: Level 67 [Lion-Prince Captain]

“Leonidas Dhurina, the **Lion's Maw**: Level 67 [Lion-Prince Captain]” I exclaim.

Myers nods. “Two levels in three years. Not bad for the oldest son.”

“You know him?” I ask.

“I do- or rather, I know about him. He is the eldest son of [King] Mordred Dhurina, and one of the highest leveled in all of Burabden. He's an [Expert] [Bounty hunter] with a specialization in magic weapon control. Speaking of which, do you see the *Rip-Terror*?”

An explosion rips apart the final mast with such force that several [Pirates] are sent off-board the ship. Their screams fill the air as they disappear into the planet's core. With the last top-mast down, the only thing left to propel the ship forward are the ones on the side.

Then my eyes see it. Something rapidly spinning orbits the pirate ship. The spinning thing flies to the Lionguard and lands directly in Leonidas' arm. The item is a double reverse-blade shuriken smothered in runes across its surface.

“Yea, I think I see it. It's big, taller than him, with two blades.”

“Rip-Terror is a legendary item, one of five owned by the kingdom of Burabden. If memory serves, three of his siblings wield the others, with the strongest by the [King].”

I watch, mesmerized as Leonidas grins hungrily. He raises *Rip-Terror* above his head, and the magical weapon starts to spin rapidly. Then it starts levitating above his palm. He steps forward, and then swings his arm as though throwing a ball. Rip-Terror accelerates forward, and only then do I hear the distant whistling. I watch, impressed as the blade slices the ship's deck, severing and slaughtering [Pirates] with a focus on the [Captain]. Like a butcher, he completes

several passes, ripping wood and flesh with ease. At the final pass, the blade cuts the [Pirate Captain] in half. With the captain dead, the weapon flies back to the *Lionsguard*. Leonidas catches the weapon with practiced ease and stops its spin. Then, he folds the blade so that it is only half as long before sheathing it to his back. His head turns to our direction for a moment, and then he turns around. He yells an order and starts walking away from the prow.

The *Lionsguard* makes a sharp u-turn and then flies away from the *Imminent Huntress*.

“Wait, why is he moving away?”

“His job is done,” Myers says. “The [Pirate Captain] is dead.”

“But, what about the ship? The loot? There's still [Pirates] aboard.”

“It's not worth the trouble. He's extremely wealthy. Whatever wealth he'd gain from pirates isn't worth his time.”

“What? Are you saying that he's leaving perfectly good loot behind?”

Before Myers can answer, Boriss returns fully armored with Irmgard in tow.

“Comrade, what is happening?”

“Loot Boriss.” I point a paw at the damaged pirate vessel. “We have loot!”

“It's dangerous,” Myers interrupts. “Though the [Captain's] dead, they still outnumber you.”

“Loot and exercise is good.” Boriss grins happily. “We go now?” He asks eagerly.

“Yup,” I nod to him and glance at Myers. “Can I leave the helm to you?”

Myers frowns. He glances at Irmgard. “They probably still have more than ten fighters aboard the ship. Are you ok with this?” he asks the single person who is most likely to go against such risk.

Irmgard folds her arms. Her eyes turn to me. “Will you be transforming?”

“Of course!” I answer.

She nods. “Then it should be fine.”

Myers frowns at her. “This is risky.”

"It's fine." my tail swishes excitedly. "Just drop us off on the ship and sail away. If we die, the ship is yours. If we live and subdue the crew, return to us. Is that acceptable?"

The old man goes silent for a long moment. He glances at the damaged ship and then us. He sighs. "Fine."

"Good. Now get us close. We've got some looting to do."