SKIES of EQUESTRIA

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CHAPTER 7

Vyse and the rest of the Delphinus's crew had just arrived in the airspace of Yafutoma, and were the very first ponies to ever do so, so far as their knowledge of history was concerned. Although they had yet to see any land, it didn't look that different from back home. Well, maybe the sky seemed brighter, due to the light of the Blue Moon.

The longitudinal wall the Everfree Rift created still stretched eastward, and the latitudinal wall that separated Yafutoma from Nasr was still there as well of course, so heading south or west was not an option. They could only go northeast, and for the longest time, they didn't see any civilizations.

In the distance to the East, they could see what looked like the ruins of some giant stone walls. Fina explained to them that in the Ancient World (before the Old World), the walls were used not as a form of defense, but as a means of observation, to look out for intruders and spot them as soon as possible.

The Delphinus had been sailing north-northeast for a good few days, and still no sign of intelligent life. Until they eventually came to a small rock field...

"...Hey, do you hear anything?" Aika asked. "I mean, besides the wind..."

"Now that you mention it..." said Enrique. "I can hear something... I'm not sure what it is."

BOOM!

The side of the Delphinus had been struck by cannonfire, much to the surprise of everypony on board. From behind the floating rocks came a large group of small, wooden ships with what appeared to be sails made from colorful, folded paper. The one that approached them was what had struck them without warning.

"They just came out of nowhere and attacked us!" Aika shouted.

"It looks like we're going to have to take them down," Vyse declared. "Battlestations!!! Let's go!"

"Hahaha..." the captain of the attacking ship laughed. "Do you really think you can defeat

us with that big block of steel you call a ship?! Prepare yourselves, strangers!!"

Both ships got into formation, and as soon as the battle began, Vyse ordered that some cannons be fired. The enemy ship was made from wood and paper; surely a single cannonblast would be enough to disintegrate the entire thing. The cannons fired, but the quick, agile ship quickly rose out of the way, and continued to rise. And rise. And rise. Until it was even above the cloud ceiling.

"What the?!" Vyse shouted. "How can their ships go so high??"

"Yafutoman culture is heavily involved in flying," Fina explained. "Over the centuries, they have mastered its art, and have applied it to their technology. But because they can climb to such great altitudes, our cannons can't reach them..."

"Vyse, our cannons may not be able to reach them," Aika started, "but I'll bet our torpedoes can! We should try firing one of those!"

Vyse immediately had one of the torpedoes fired, and sure as Aika had suggested, the enemy ship blew up like a firework on Indeponies Day. Yafutoman technology, his plot! There was nothing the Delphinus couldn't handle.

Having seen one of its subordinates so easily defeated, another enemy ship headed for the Delphinus. "What appears to be the enemy's Flagship is approaching!" Enrique reported.

"There are two boats!" Aika reported, confused by the ship's appearance. "No... one boat! No... there's two... I think..."

The Yin Yang functioned as one ship, but it was created by fusing two identical ships together at the side. Each ship was shaped like a serpent, one red and one green, so it appeared as though it were a two headed dragon. The ship got up really close to the Delphinus and began to slow down.

"Looks like they're planning to board us!" said Vyse. "All hooves on deck!!!"

Vyse, Aika, Fina, and Enrique rushed out onto the deck, only to find no intruders waiting for them. That is, until they heard a voice from above.

"Westerners..." said a deep voice.

"We've been waiting for you..." said a light voice.

The two intruders were standing atop the bridge, looking down at them. They were not, however, anything they were expected to be. That is to say, they weren't ponies. They weren't dragons, buffalo, zebras... or even flamboyant sea serpents. They weren't like any creatures they had seen before.

They were the Yafutoman hybrids Enrique had told them about. Each had the lower body of a lion, and the upper body of a giant eagle. Their front legs were adorned with talons, (the "appendages" Aika had been so scared of before) and they had large brown wings on their backs. If anything, they most closely resembled pegasi, only with claws, paws, and beaks. There was no mistaking what these nearly-forgotten creatures from the depths of Equestria's mythology were.

They were griffons.

"What are you?!" Vyse interrogated.

"My name is Jao," said the light-voiced griffon.

"My name is Mao," said the deep-voiced griffon. Each of them leapt from the top of bridge, and landed on the deck, standing before their opponents.

"It is our mission..."

"... to collect 1000 weapons."

"So, you must pick one..."

"... of two choices."

"Surrender, and give up your weapons..."

"... or die, and we take your weapons."

"It is up to you..."

"... to decide your fate."

Vyse rolled his eyes not only at the cheesy sentence-finishing the twin griffons were engaged in, but also the idea that they'd honestly expected them to just give up and surrender. As if that would ever happen.

"Tell you what," said Vyse. "How about we kick your plo-- er, butts and toss you overboard? Besides, you guys are unequipped. What can you possibly do to us?"

"If that is your decision..." Jao began.

"... then we must kill you now," Mao finished.

Vyse drew his sword and was the first to make a move, diving headfirst at Jao, who flew into the sky to dodge him. Vyse, having wings as well, flew after him to do battle in the air. Fina flew after them both as well, not wanting Vyse to have to fight alone.

Aika and Enrique bared their weapons as they held their ground on the deck of the ship. Mao stood on his hindlegs and outstretched his wings in an attempt to look intimidating. But this only made Aika giggle, for where she came from, randomly erect wings had a totally different meaning. Mao simply thought she was laughing to hide her fright.

Vyse and Jao flew around each other several times, each trying to hit the other; Vyse with his sword, and Jao with his claws. On occasion, Vyse would get lucky and have a clear shot, but Jao's strong talons could grab the blade and shove the pegasus out of the way. On the off-chance that Vyse's luck had run out, giving Jao an open shot, Fina would put up a barrier around Vyse to deflect the blow. She stayed on the sidelines in order to help her captain out while he battled his foe.

Meanwhile, on the ground, Aika and Enrique were having similar troubles fighting Mao. Enrique used his magic to levitate his rapier and duel the opposing griffon. But levitating something with magic and holding it with your body were very different. Rapiers are thin, piercing weapons, and too much force could probably break it. Which is where Aika came in, as she was using her boomerang to keep Mao distracted. This didn't stop Mao from throwing blind punches and kicks, so he was still very difficult to actually harm.

The fight with Jao seemed to be at a standstill, until eventually, Fina got the idea to fool

Jao with the barriers she'd been making. The next time Jao received the opportunity to throw a swipe at Vyse, Fina put up a barrier, but got rid of it as soon as Jao was about to strike. Even though it was only for a second, Jao had been expecting himself to hit a barrier, and when he didn't, he lost his balance and stumbled, giving Vyse ample opportunity to get above his back, and dive bomb him into the deck of the ship, right on top of Mao, who'd still been aimlessly throwing blows.

The twin griffons got back onto their legs, and stood at the railing of the ship. "Westerners..." Jao began.

"... you are stronger than we thought," Mao finished.

"We must report this..."

"... to our Commander."

The two twins leapt from the side of the Delphinus and into the clouds below. As the ponies rushed to see what had happened to them, the Yin Yang rose from beneath the cloud floor, Jao and Mao perched on its deck.

"We rule the skies of Yafutoma," said Jao.

"And we are known as the Tenkou," said Mao.

"Westerners..."

"... we shall meet again." The Yin Yang continued its ascent, until it was high above the clouds, further than they could possibly reach, or even see.

"Well, looks like we chased them off for now," said Enrique. "We should continue trying to find Yafutoma. Since we just encountered intelligent life, civilization can't be far."

After about another few hours of traveling north, Vyse finally reached what looked like a small nation, surrounded almost entirely by floating stone walls. In the northwestern corner of the nation was an enormous blue mountain whose summit rose above the clouds. And in the center was a small city, built upon several small islands connected by bridges and the like. the Delphinus docked at the city's pier, and the crew disembarked.

The city looked extremely decorative from up close. The streets were carefully crafted with white, patterned stone, and the walls that filled the city were adorned with small, religious-looking statues of various animals, namely dogs and turtles. The trees were much thinner, taller, and smoother than the ones back home, and the houses appeared to have been made by tying these pole-like trees together to form the walls. There were some regular-looking trees as well, but they blossomed with bright pink petals that looked hauntingly like snow as they slowly fell from their branches. It was all very beautiful.

"Wow..." Aika said in awe as she looked around. "The water is so clear... I wonder where we are."

"Huh?" Vyse blurted as he noticed a group of townsfolk gathered at the end of the pier.

They were all griffons, of varying ages and genders, and had come to gawk at their first visitors in centuries. All of the griffons looked identical to Vyse, but then he wondered if the griffons thought the same about ponies. Either way, he couldn't tell them apart other than from their sizes.

"That ship!" said one townsgriffon. "It's huge!"

"Are those Westerners? They look kinda funny..."

"How come they don't have claws? How do they pick stuff up?"

"Look! Two of them lost their wings! And two of them have horns on their foreheads!"

"I wonder what they eat to get their fur that color?"

"Haha..." Aika nervously laughed. "My mane is really going to stand out over here."

"Invaders!" came a voice from behind the crowd. The griffon was wearing a suit of light armor, and carrying something similar to a spear in one of his claws. He flew over the crowd and stood before the ponies. "Why have you come to Yafutoma?! These lands are protected by Mount Kazai and the Blue Moon! Under the sovereign reign of Lord Mikado, invaders will be punished!"

"Yafutoma?" Aika asked. "Is this really Yafutoma?"

"Yes... you have invaded Yafutoman Lands."

"We did it! We did it!" Aika and Fina held each others' hooves and bounced repeatedly into the air. "We're in Yafutoma!!!!!"

"Well done, Vyse!" Enrique congratulated. "This will be recorded in the history books!"

The griffon soldier pointed his spear at them. "How dare you invade our lands! I shall strike you down where you stand!"

"Wait! Don't attack them!" came the voice of another griffon soldier who'd come rushing to the scene as well. "Visitors, our primary responsibility is to defend Yafutoma. Please forgive our harsh welcome. Lord Mikado has said that he would like to speak with you. Please, if you would follow me."

"Lord Mikado?" Vyse asked. "I suppose that he's probably the king of these lands. We should follow him."

The Blue Rogues were led to the very top of Yafutoma, at the northernmost point on the highest island. On the way there, they got to see the inner walls of the city. There was water everywhere, so much so that tiny bridges made up a large portion of the roads. The griffons seemed as though they were content with simply building around the rivers rather than obstructing them with dams, as if to say the water was there first and shouldn't be forced to leave. A lot of the houses and buildings were even constructed on small piers not made for docking ships. Vyse wondered what they did should a pier ever collapse, but given the material the houses were made of, they'd probably just float until repairs were made.

The Yafutoman palace was strangely tiny compared to the other palaces Vyse had seen. This one was no bigger than many inns he'd been to. It wasn't even that much bigger than his own house back on Pirate Isle. But the palace didn't need to be huge, for it only served two

purposes: audiences with the royal family, and living quarters for them as well. The servants all slept in their respective homes.

The Air Pirates were led into the audience chamber. Before them, sitting on the throne, was the Yafutoman king, Lord Mikado. To his left stood a young, female griffon dressed in blue clothing. To his right, two advisors: a short one named Muraji, and a tall one named Kangan.

"So, you came from the land where the sun sets," the king began. "Welcome to Yafutoma. My daughter, Moegi, has always been intrigued with the West. Haven't you, my dear?"

"Yes, father," she politely answered. "Please, I would love to hear all about your homeland. And if there is anything we can do for you, just ask." The griffons were unable to visit the West for the same reason the ponies couldn't visit the East: they were separated by impassable walls. Yafutoma was surrounded on all sides by dark sky rifts, except to the East, which lied an impenetrable white stone reef, much like the one to the west of Ixa'taka.

"Sure," Aika accepted, "but I don't want to be too much of a burden."

"King Mikado..." began Kangan, the tall griffon, who stroked the long feathers `neath his beak as he spoke. "As an advisor of the Royal Court, I must say that I am opposed to the idea of foreigners entering our lands. Foreigners have only brought us disaster. We must cleanse them from our lands immediately!"

"I agree with my father!" said Muraji, the short griffon. "The Westerners can only bring us trouble. We should dispose of them at once."

"They are our guests," Mikado insisted. "We must welcome them. They can teach us a great deal about the West. And there is much we can teach them as well... But I would like to know why you have traveled to Yafutoma."

"We're searching for the Elements of Harmony," Vyse began, "to prevent our enemies from using them to destroy Equestria. It's rumored that here lies the Element of... uh..."

"Laughter," said Fina.

"Element of Laughter?" asked Lord Mikado. "Hmm... I think you may be referring to the jewel that grants its power to the Blue Moon. The object that you are searching for lies underneath Mount Kazai. Here in Yafutoma, we refer to the object as the Warai Sphere. Mount Kazai is considered by us griffons to be a holy mountain. And deep within the mountain... lies an azure-colored jewel. After the cataclysm, the jewel was entrusted to us by ponies from the West, and sealed inside Mount Kazai as a symbol of royal succession."

"An azure-colored jewel?" Aika asked. "Vyse! That has to be the Element of Harmony!"

"At one time, Mount Kazai was a volcano, and there is no known way inside. The Warai Sphere has been lost since the days of the Old World... If you were to retrieve it for us, we would be eternally grateful..."

Vyse beat his hoof against his chest. "So, the Warai Sphere is at the bottom of that huge mountain? Leave it to us. Don't worry... we'll get it back for you!"

"You'll want to speak with the owner of the ship maintenance store. I'll send an order to have him escort you to the summit of the mountain, since your ship is incapable of flying that

high."

After traveling back down the many islands that made up the staircase-shaped city of Yafutoma, Vyse finally found the ship maintenance store near the docks where they'd arrived. A particularly fat, but strong-looking griffon stood behind the counter. Strangely, he reminded Vyse of his former captain, Drachma.

"I understand that you wish to go to Mt. Kazai?" the merchant asked. "Lord Mikado has commanded me to escort you. I'll get the ship under way, so you guys can just sit back and take it easy. Oops, I almost forgot. If we're going to go inside Mt. Kazai, I'd better take these along." The merchant reached behind himself and grabbed what looked like a large, yellow, rubber suit with an air-tight, steel helmet adorned with glass windows for vision. Nothing would be able to get in or out of that when all strapped in. "Deep inside Mt. Kazai is a cavern, and in some places, there will be water. These Underwater Suits should prove useful."

"What?!" Aika shrieked. "We have to go underwater?! But I can't swim!!!"

"Do not worry... As long as you are using the Underwater Suit, you should be fine. Just be sure to breathe normally. Well then, shall we get going?"

The trip to the mountain took quite a few hours, for it was much larger than the horizon made it seem. The summit of Mount Kazai lied only just above the cloud ceiling. Had the Delphinus been just a bit more powerful, they probably could've reached it themselves. Within the flooded crater atop the mountain, what was clearly a means of entering the temple within had been built much like a pier, and it is here that the merchant docked the small ship.

"Wow!" said Aika as she got off the boat. "The water here is so calm... it looks like glass." The water in the summit was above the clouds, so it was never subjected to rain or storms. And the walls surrounding the summit shielded it from the wind, so ripples, tides, and waves were all alien to it. This water was pure, clean, ancient, and untouched.

Enrique took in a deep whiff of the water's soothing fragrance. "It's hard to imagine that this was a volcanic area covered in lava at one time."

Aika gasped as she noticed something horrific in the corner. "What is that thing?!"

Everypony turned to see what she was looking at. On the side of the lake was an enormous statue of bird. A regular bird, not a griffon, but a giant one nonetheless.

"That must be the Roc."

"The Roc?"

"Yes, the Roc is the Blue Gigas. I've heard many myths about its origin. It is said that the member of the Mane Six who came to protect the griffons did so out of a favor to a friend, who'd wanted to protect these lands herself. When she chose the creature to become the Blue Gigas, her choice was apparently made out of humorous reasons... I even recall her giving a name to it...

Was it... Tom, I think? Either way, it looks like the Roc was trapped in the lava and encased in stone."

"If that thing ever got free, we'd be in trouble," Enrique shuddered. "The Gigas that you've faced so far couldn't fly. I can't imagine how tough this one would be."

"We should secure the Element of Laughter as soon as we can!" Vyse declared. "Let's go!"

The Blue Rogues entered the temple, and inside found a rope that stretched dozens of yards down. Rather than waste time climbing down it, Vyse and Fina simply carried Aika and Enrique, quickly descending down the hole. Fina was physically stronger than she'd appeared. Perhaps being an Alicorn also gave her the natural strength of earth ponies?

After several minutes of descent, they finally reached the bottom and came to a large room with a deep-looking pool in the center. It appeared to have been a dead end.

"Well, now what do we do?" Aika sighed.

"We go down, of course," Vyse answered.

"Huh? Down? Down where? You don't mean..."

"Yup. That is why we were given these Underwater Suits, after all."

Aika moaned, but knew there was no arguing with him. Like several times before, the threat of being left alone there was clear as day, so she had no choice but to comply. Each Air Pirate struggled to get their suits on. Luckily, their shapes were still somewhat similar to that of griffons. The sleeves had bits of loose material on the ends, but those were where the claws and toes would normally go. Fina and Enrique had the most difficulty, trying to fit their horns into their helmets.

With everypony buckled up and tightly sealed within their suits, each jumped into the pool and began to sink. Aika jumped in last, of course. They sunk deeper into the water for what felt like a few minutes. They were scared, but they each did their best to continue breathing at a normal pace. Heavy breathing would make them run out of oxygen very quick.

At last, they reached the floor, and continued walking through a small tunnel that presented itself. Their movements were slow of course, as moving through the water required them to push several million tiny particles out of the way with every inch. They trudged through the deep, dark, tunnel for only a few minutes, but they were starting to run out of air, and in their panic, felt as though it was taking longer. Eventually, a light showed itself.

An opening above the end of the tunnel marked the end of their underwater escapade. They each rushed to the end of the tunnel in order to emerge from the surface and, quicker than they had put them on, removed their underwater suits. Each breathed deeply as they wiped the sweat from their foreheads. Nopony admitted it, but each of them were afraid the tunnel would never end.

They had succeeded. They had managed to reach the chamber where the Element was kept: a small shrine surrounded by water and glowing lights. In the center stood a small pedestal,

and on it lied a blue, balloon-shaped crystal.

"So this is the Element of Laughter..." said Vyse. "We've finally found it."

"It's so beautiful..." Fina whispered as she lifted it from the altar. "It is said that whoever holds the Element of Laughter is gifted with intense optimism and a great sense of humor. Well... I do feel really happy right now..."

"Vyse," said Aika, "that's another Element of Harmony. You know what that means... it's time to celebrate!"

"Yes!" Vyse replied, knowing exactly what Aika was talking about. They hadn't done THAT since they defeated The Great and Powerful Baltor. "Actually, let's include Fina on this one!"

"What?" Fina asked, confused. "But I... I don't know what to do."

"Aww, don't worry about it!" said Aika. "Just give it a try!"

The three of them attempted to perform Vyse and Aika's victory hoofshake together. They slapped Fina's hooves down low, slapped them up high, and then they all put their hooves together in the air and jerked them away, as if tracing a firework. "Yay!" they all shouted.

The trip back up the mountain was about the same difficulty as their descent. All they had to do back in the pool was float to the surface, but getting back up the shaft with the rope was quite painful. Back at the summit, the merchant had been waiting patiently, ready to escort them all back to Yafutoma.

"You have done exceptionally well!" congratulated Lord Mikado as he held the Element in his claws. "No griffon in Yafutoma has seen the Warai Sphere since the days of the Old World. You are the first to make it back alive from the depths of Mount Kazai. How can I repay you for risking your lives to recover it?"

"Well..." Vyse began. "As we mentioned earlier, we were wondering if it would be alright if we borrowed it."

"Hmm... But it is the symbol of royal succession... I would like to keep it in my possession at least while you remain in Yafutoma."

"Umm... Sure..." Vyse was not without suspicion, but he didn't want to throw accusations. It's just that he'd been betrayed many times in the past, usually when it came to the Elements, and even by a nation's king.

"Symbol of royal succession, huh?" asked Aika. "That makes sense why they want to keep it. Moegi... you're Lord Mikado's daughter, right? So does that make you the successor to the throne?"

Moegi froze up, and then turned her head away, remaining silent for a few seconds. To hide this, Mikado quickly put on a fake smile and changed the subject.

"Well, thank you retrieving the Warai Sphere!" he yelled. "Let us begin the preparations for the feast! Make yourselves at home and enjoy the festivities!"

"Alright!" Aika cheered. "That's more like it! I can't wait to try the gourmet cooking of Yafutoma!"

"We would be honored to join you," said Vyse. "Especially Aika."

Enrique, however, was not interested in the celebrations. He was too occupied with how strangely Moegi was acting. He couldn't help but wonder if something horribly wrong was bothering the Yafutoman princess. He was extremely worried about her.

Later that night, after all the festivities were over, Princess Moegi escorted the Blue Rogues to a small hut northeast of the palace. "You must be very tired," said Moegi. "You are welcome to stay in the Royal Guest House tonight."

"Thank you for escorting us," said Fina, her manners on the same level as the princess.

"That was some of the best food I've ever had," Vyse praised.

"And for some reason," Aika began, "I just could not for the life of me get used to those weird eating-sticks. I think I'm better off just eating with my hooves."

Moegi giggled. "I am very happy that you enjoyed yourselves."

From behind them came a very high-pitched chuckling. It was Muraji, son of Advisor Kangan. "So, the Westerners do have a sense of taste, after all... I came here to personally thank you for retrieving the Warai Sphere. I will be sure and take care of it when it is passed on to me as soon as Moegi and I are married..."

"I will never marry you!" Moegi shouted, showing an anger previously unseen. "And as long as Daigo is alive, you'll never be king!"

"Have you forgotten that 'Prince' Daigo has been exiled for treason? Heh heh... I find it very unlikely that a traitor could ever become king."

These harsh words struck a chord with Moegi, causing her to turn away in silence.

"Moegi...?" Fina said sympathetically.

"Okay, that's it...!" shouted Vyse as he stepped forward. But before he could do anything, Enrique stuck his hoof in Vyse's way. "Huh? Enrique?!"

"I don't know your motives," Enrique said whilst glaring deeply into Muraji's eyes, "but this is NOT how a noble treats a lady. If you insist on insulting her, then you will have to deal with me!"

Muraji was cowering in fear, slowly backing away from Enrique, unable to break away from his piercing stare. "Y-You think you can push me around just because you got the Warai Sphere back...? I'm going to tell my father on you!" And with that, he flew away, almost tripping over himself as he took off.

"Prince Enrique..." said Moegi as she approached him. "I... I'm terribly sorry... I'm sorry you felt that you had to defend me like that... I didn't mean to put you in that position..."

"No, no... That's quite alright," Enrique said with a smile. "Where I come from, we have

codes of honor on how a gentlecolt should treat a lady, such as yourself. Well, honestly, not many ponies follow that code anymore."

"Prince Enrique..."

"But, Muraji spoke of an exiled prince... Do you know what he was talking about?"

"..... It... it is nothing. If... if you'll excuse me, I will be returning to my quarters. Pleasant dreams..."

Moegi bowed to her guests, and quickly began walking away. Enrique continued to stare at her with concern until she was no longer in sight. Aika couldn't help but giggle. She nudged Vyse's shoulder and looked over at Enrique, bringing a silent grin to Vyse's face. They could both totally see what was happening here.

"Those Westerners..." grumbled Muraji as he landed in a deserted part of the city. "They'll pay for speaking to me like that."

"Hahaha..." came a giggling voice from the shadows. "Well, what have we here?"

"Eek! Who... who are you?!"

A pink unicorn with a long brown mane stepped forth from the shadows. Somehow, someway, the Armada's 4th Admiral had found her way into Yafutoma.

"Shh..." she hushed. "I heard everything. My name is Belleza, and it appears we have a common enemy. Hahaha..."

The next morning, the Blue Rogues were summoned to the palace in order to meet with the king. It was time for them to be leaving Yafutoma now, but they couldn't without getting the Element of Laughter back first. "Good morning, Vyse," greeted Lord Mikado. "Did you rest well?"

"Yes, I slept like a rock," Vyse responded. "That was my first time sleeping on a... floor... mattress... thing."

"Hahaha, I see. I'm glad you were comfortable."

"Lord Mikado!" interrupted the sound a soldier griffon, who'd come bursting into the palace. "It's an emergency! Black ships have surrounded the city! And what appears to be their flagship is attempting to dock in our harbor!"

"What?!"

"Black ships...?" Vyse whispered. "Oh no..."

"It must be the Armada!!" Aika deduced. "Vyse, let's hurry back to the port!" The Blue Rogues darted out of the room, and as they did, Kangan and Muraji whispered and chuckled amongst themselves.

It was a sight none of the Blue Rogues would have ever anticipated. Two whole Valuan

fleets had docked at the Yafutoman pier, and several guard ponies had commandeered the Delphinus, keeping Marco hostage on board. And approaching the entrance to the city were the Admirals leading the fleets...

"Belleza!" Vyse shouted in shock. "... And Vigoro?! How did they even get here?!"

"Well, well... hello there, handsome," Belleza seductively greeted. "Haven't seen you in a while."

"Hey, Red!" called Vigoro to Aika. "It looks like fate has brought us together again!"

"Oh, no!!" Aika cried. "What's HE doing here?!"

"It's so cute how she pretends that she doesn't want me. Come aboard my ship. Maybe the two of us can rock the boat!"

Belleza lightly shoved her elbow into Vigoro's chest. "Vigoro, please mind your manners... We are in the presence of Prince Enrique." The two admirals bowed to their prince, who was still surprised to see them. "Prince Enrique, I trust you are in good health. If you are wondering how we got here, we blasted a hole in the stone reef near Ixa'taka and traveled west. Our goal is the same, my Prince. We also seek the Element of Laughter."

"Belleza..." Vyse growled. "Do you plan to burn down Yafutoma as well?!"

"Relax, handsome. As I told you before, I am against unnecessary destruction. We have no intention of fighting you. We were merely planning to dock and speak with the king of these lands."

"You're wasting your time! King Mikado is an honorable griffon. There's no way he would strike a deal with the Valuan Armada."

"We'll see about that... Everyone has their limits, their codes, and their morals. But everyone also has a weakness. If you find that weakness and exploit it, those limits, codes, and morals seem to... fade away. I'd love to chat longer, but I have an appointment with the king. Stay out of our way." She blew a kiss to Vyse, and with Vigoro and several guards at her side, headed for the palace. "See you around, handsome..."

"Vyse!" Aika shouted as soon as the Admirals were gone. "Shouldn't we stop them?!"

"Sorry, but there's nothing we can do right now," Vyse admitted. "There's no way we can take on all of these soldier ponies, and that means we can't get to the Delphinus, either."

"Belleza and Vigoro are here as Imperial representatives," Enrique explained. "Attacking them during a diplomatic meeting would make us criminals in this country. Let's return to the guest house. Nothing we can do but wait until they have concluded their talks."

The Blue Rogues had returned to their quarters, while Belleza and Vigoro met with the king of the griffons. The conversation started out welcoming and civil, but a few verbal slip-ups eventually made Lord Mikado realize that the Valuans were after a bit more than just the Element of Harmony.

"No!" he yelled. "I will never let the Valuans occupy Yafutoma!"

"But, King Mikado..." Belleza tried to reason. "You do realize that your country's pitiful

army wouldn't last a day against the Armada. To prevent unnecessary bloodshed, I recommend that you surrender."

"We will never surrender! We will never give Yafutoma over to a band of bloodthirsty warlords like yourselves. We are protected by the Blue Moon. In the past, whenever our country was threatened, the Rainbow Storm came to our aid and saved our lands. If you attack us, the Storm will blow you into the Everfree Rift. Valua will never occupy Yafutoma. Do you hear me? Never!"

"I'm sorry you didn't see things our way. It appears that this meeting is at an end. Then... I will gain possession of Yafutoma... by my own means." Belleza raised her hoof into the air, signaling a group of Valuan soldiers from just outside to storm the palace. The Yafutoman guards did nothing to stop them as they placed their swords to Mikado's throat.

"What sort of treachery is this?!"

"Heh heh heh..." Muraji cackled. "If you do not keep quiet, you'll be a head shorter!"

"Muraji... you traitor!"

Kangan turned and bowed to the scheming mare. "Belleza, in accordance with our agreement last night, this country will fall under the rule of the Valuan Empire."

"Kangan!" Mikado shouted. "What are you saying?!"

"King Mikado... as Miss Belleza stated, we have no hope of winning a war against Valua. To save the griffons, I shall usurp your throne and assume my role as leader of Yafutoma."

"Wow!" Vigoro cheered, impressed with his partner's work. "Belleza... I'm glad we're on the same side!"

"Don't relax yet, big guy," Belleza warned. "Not while the colt is still around. Take King Mikado prisoner and find those Air Pirates!"

The Yafutoman and Valuan soldiers alike headed out to begin combing the city in search of the Blue Rogues. And during this commotion, no one ever noticed Princess Moegi sneak out through the back.

"... It seems like they've been talking forever!" Aika moaned back at the guest house.

Vyse sighed along with Aika. "Well, you know how formal those diplomatic talks are. It takes forever for them to decide who gets to sit down first."

The painful silence was interrupted by the sudden intrusion of Moegi, who'd just burst open the front doors. "Everyone! Quickly! You must get out of here!"

"Princess Moegi?!" said Enrique with a worried look on his face. "What happened?!"

"Kangan and Muraji have betrayed us! My father... has been taken prisoner! It was Belleza's doing..."

"Belleza! It figures. She probably met with those two before the meeting and had the whole thing planned out."

"Vyse!" Aika shouted. "What should we do?!"

Vyse's mind began to race. There were a large number of options available, but with the

current situation, most would be futile. The palace, no, the entire city was flooded with guards, of ponies and griffons alike. The docks where the Delphinus was lied on the opposite corner of the whole city, so there'd be no way they could get back to it, and attempting to fight all of the guards would be suicide. As much he hated to admit it, there was only one plausible option.

"I'm sorry," Vyse began, "but we have to run and hide for now. Belleza has probably already convinced the Yafutoman Guards that we're criminals."

"I agree," input Enrique. "We should run for now and figure out what to do next."

"Very well, then," Moegi condoned. "Quickly, follow me!" Moegi headed over to the one wall of the guest house that was colored differently than the others, and found four holes behind one of its paintings. She inserted all four of her claws into the holes, and the wall began to rotate like a revolving door, revealing a hidden passage behind it. "We can escape from the city this way. Hurry!"

At the end of the secret passage was a very tiny dock with a small escape pod. At first, Vyse was put off by the unlikely convenience of the escape pod's location, but realized after some thinking how much sense it made. If they were to have an escape pod, the first place the enemy would look for it is in the palace itself. Keeping it in a nearby building would better conceal it.

Vyse, Aika, Fina, Enrique, and Moegi all boarded the tiny ship, and it began to rise higher and higher into the sky, until it was above the clouds. No one saw them due to its tiny size. "Wow!" said Aika. "Incredible! I can't believe how high we are..."

"We will be safe here," Moegi assured.

"It's great that we escaped from the guards, but now what do we do?"

"... There is an ancient temple on a small island to the North. My brother... Daigo should be there."

"What?! You have a brother?!"

"... Yes. He is the true heir to the throne. A long time ago, my brother directly disobeyed my father's orders. He was exiled from Yafutoma, and sentenced to live on the island."

"Marooning him on an island was kind of harsh, don't you think?"

"My brother had a tendency to go out sailing on his own and disregard his duties as Prince. But, I don't think that my father should have disowned him. I think that Muraji and Kangan convinced my father to exile him... With my brother out of the way, they had a chance of taking over Yafutoma."

"That makes sense," Vyse pondered.

"Vyse," Enrique began. "It looks like we have no other choice. We're going to have to rely on this Daigo. Princess Moegi, do not worry. We will save the griffons... including your father!"

"Prince Enrique..." said Moegi. "Thank you."

The escape pod was very slow, and Exile Island was a lot further north than Vyse expected. They were forced to spend the night aboard the tiny ship, with Moegi and Vyse taking turns at the controls. Late into the next morning, they reached the so-called "island". What was known as an island was more like a few small boulders all connected with thin walkways. The largest boulder laid at the top of the walkway, and had a small temple built into it. Upon reaching this temple however, they were halted by two familiar voices at its entrance...

"Westerners..." said Jao.

"... It appears that we meet again," said Mao.

"Aww, not them again!" groaned Vyse. "What are you doing here?!"

"This is the headquarters..." began Jao.

"... of the Tenkou," finished Mao.

"It was very foolish..."

"... for you to come here."

"The time has come..."

"... for us to finish you!"

"Halt!!" came a voice from inside the temple. The doors burst open to reveal a strong, young-looking griffon. He had a large scar going down his shoulder, and wore a thin, curved sword at his waist (a weapon Vyse recently learned was called a katana). "Jao, Mao... Who's there?"

"Lord Daigo..."

"These are the Westerners..."

"... that dared to defy us."

"They came through the Everfree Rift..."

"I'm Vyse of the Blue Rogues," Vyse stated with a snarl. "Are you the leader of the Tenkou?!"

"Daigo!" Moegi gasped.

"What?! He's your brother?!"

"Moegi!" Daigo chuckled. "How have you been? I never would have thought that you would bring foreigners to my temple."

"I never thought I would, either," Moegi replied. "But what are the Tenkou doing here?!"

Daigo sat down and began to explain. "A long time ago, these twins here challenged me to a fight. They wanted my sword, so I beat them senseless. And for some strange reason, they pledged their loyalty to me. I've been their leader ever since. And I figured, as their leader, I could control them a little, so they'd stop attacking everygriffon. Besides, who else do you know that has twin bodyguards?! Hahahaha!"

"Moegi..." Aika moaned. "Is he really your brother? It's hard to imagine that the two of you are related."

"I know he is a Prince... like Enrique..." Fina mused, "... but it seems that Princes in

Yafutoma act differently than Princes in Valua."

"... But what is the purpose of your visit, Moegi?" Daigo asked. "Has Father changed his mind?"

Moegi lowered her head. "Daigo... he..."

"... What's wrong? Did something happen to him?!"

Vyse and his friends explained the situation in Yafutoma: that the griffons were now working for the Valuans, and that Kangan had overthrown the King.

"Kangan..." Daigo growled. "That little runt! How could he backstab our father and give our country over to the Valuans?! Moegi... I'm sorry. If I was still there, this would never have happened. When I was exiled, I welcomed the freedom! I disregarded all of my duties and did whatever I wanted, here in this temple. But, now the griffons need me. I must go back there and reclaim my title as Prince of Yafutoma!

"Vyse, I can't thank you enough for saving my sister. Now, I must get ready for battle. I will fight against Valua and give Yafutoma back to the griffons! I would be honored if you'd fight alongside me."

"Of course we'll help!" Vyse agreed. "We share the same enemy."

"Excellent! We will fight together and reclaim Yafutoma and the Warai Sphere! Also, Prince Enrique... As Vyse just told me, I am to understand that you defended my sister from Muraji, am I correct? My family thanks you for your bravery."

"I only did what is expected of a gentlecolt," Enrique modestly thanked. "Think nothing of it... And, Prince Daigo, I know how you feel. I, too, have been exiled from my lands. I wish to change the views of my country by changing the world around it. And that is why I wish to aid you... from one exiled prince to another.

"Also, the fleet that you are about to face... the Armada... was sent here by my mother, Empress Teodora. As a Valuan Prince, it is my duty to stop them. This is not only your battle... it is mine as well."

"... I understand," Daigo smiled. "I will gladly accept your aid. Prince Enrique... you are a very noble stallion. Much more noble than I. If a stallion such as yourself were to be at my sister's side, I would sleep well at night."

"Um... I... um..." Enrique and Moegi both began to blush heavily. The idea of being with one another hadn't completely sunk in until just now. What's more, the thought that they were also of different species never once even crossed their minds, nor would they care should it do so.

"And from the looks of it," Daigo added, "the two of you wouldn't mind, either!" Everyone laughed as the pony prince and the griffon princess suddenly became even more sheepish. "Now then... Vyse. I need to prepare for the battle... Meet me at the port. We will depart for Yafutoma as soon as you are ready."

Vyse and his allies returned to the tiny escape pod in which they arrived, but before they could take off, Daigo's voice came from above them. "Hey! You can't expect to fight in that ship! Come ride with me on my ship!"

Daigo's large wooden ship pulled up next to the Blue Rogues, and they all hopped on board. Daigo gave a signal, and from beneath the clouds, what looked like an entire army rose from the mists. Jao and Mao's ship, the Yin Yang, as well as dozens of other ships flew into formation. This army made up the entirety of the Tenkou; they had all been assembled so that they might take back their homeland. War was upon them.

"Our scouts have reported that the Armada and the Yafutoman fleet are patrolling Kazai Lake," Daigo explained as they neared the mountain. "Vyse, your ship is also patrolling with the Armada."

"Now it's personal!" Vyse snapped.

"Hahaha... I understand your frustration... If we can get your ship back, we can win this battle. The Tenkou will attack the Armada from the front and keep them distracted. While they're keeping the Armada busy, I want to get the Delphinus back. Without it, we don't stand a chance."

"Sounds like a plan!"

"Alright, griffons! Get ready! Let's show them what the Tenkou can do!"

Among the Valuan fleet were three notable ships. The first was Belleza's ship, the Lynx. The second was Vigoro's ship, a giant mobile cannon known as the Draco. And the third was, of course, the Delphinus, which had shamelessly been put in Muraji's care.

"HAHAHA!" Vigoro bellowed as he spotted the approaching army. "It looks like our pirate friends want some action. Things just got a little more interesting. I'm coming for you, Red. Soon, you'll be all mine..."

"Hehehehe..." Muraji chuckled aboard the Delphinus. "The Westerners' ship is nice. Very nice. I think I'm going to enjoy this! But, I never dreamed that I would be able to kill Prince Daigo so soon. Now, Moegi will be mine for sure... as well as the throne! Hehehehehehehehehehe!!!!"

"I'm sorry, handsome..." Belleza said to herself. "I didn't want to have to fight you... But, for Valua... and Lord Galcian... I must."

"Tenkou ships, straight ahead!" reported one of Belleza's unicorns. "They are in range of our cannons!"

"Alright everypony, listen up! This is it! If we win this battle, we will rule the East! Let them feel the power of the Valuan Armada. Fire at will!"

The battle began without hesitation. Cannonfire and explosions flooded the sky, and

anyone watching from a distance could easily mistake it for a massive firework display. A mere five minutes into the fight, several ships had already been sunk, and an unknown number of lives may have been lost, sacrificed for the fate of Yafutoma. Such is the nature of war.

"So far, the battle is even," Daigo reported. "We're more maneuverable, but we can't seem to break their lines. Vyse, keep an eye out for your ship! It's got to be around here somewhere."

"Alright, everyone!" Vyse announced. "Be ready for action! When we find the Delphinus, let's take it back... Air Pirate style!"

"How fares the battle?" asked Kangan. The advisor had been safely hiding within the summit of Mount Kazai, and was making his own special preparations.

"My Lord..." the guard griffon reported. "The Tenkou are swarming all around the Valuans, but the Armada is holding their position. We seem to be at a stalemate."

"Heh heh... I see. Very well. It is time for me to join the battle and end this... once and for all!" Kangan found it a strain not to laugh as he turned to face the giant statue that sat at the edge of the summit...

Daigo looked on in worry at the ensuing events of the war. The Tenkou ships may have been fast, but they couldn't match the combined defense and offense of the Armada. "Hmm... We can't break their lines, and our ships are taking serious damage. I don't think we can take much more of this. I'm going to give the signal to retreat. Today... Valua has won."

Vyse growled as he stomped a hoof into the floor. He was faintly reminded of how Drachma would do that when he was angry, and wondered if he'd picked it up from him.

"My lord!" reported Daigo's watchgriffon. "A ship fitting the description of Captain Vyse's ship is heading our way!"

"What?!" Daigo asked. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, my lord! I'm positive it's the Delphinus!"

"Daigo!" Vyse began. "If you can get us close to the Delphinus, we can take it back and win this thing! We're Air Pirates, remember? We do this stuff all the time. All you have to do is get us close!"

"Hahaha... I see," Daigo laughed. "Okay, Vyse... You got it!"

Daigo's ship pulled up to just above the Delphinus's deck, and the Air Pirates all leaped onto it. Vyse and Fina could easily soar down to it with their wings, and Aika was experienced enough to leap to it on her own. Enrique, on the other hoof, fell flat on his face.

The Blue Rogues quickly helped Enrique to his hooves, and the four of them raced to the inside of the ship. Muraji was in the bridge, just as expected, surrounded by Yafutoman guards.

"Muraji!" Vyse shouted. "We'll be taking back our ship now..."

Muraji began to cower in fear, shaking and flailing his wings awkwardly. "Do... do you think I'm afraid of you? You aren't so tough! W-Why are you fools just standing there? Get them!"

The Yafutoman guards all sprung to action, but they could never match the experience the Blue Rogues had, not after all they'd been through in their travels. Fina cast a spell to trap them all in a bubble, Aika used her boomerang to cut the griffons' spears (called naginata) in half, and Vyse flew around them in a circle to tie them together with a rope.

Enrique slowly approached a cowering Muraji as he levitated his rapier out of its sheathe and bared it. "You betray those that trust you and needlessly endanger the lives of innocent griffons... all for your own personal gain! For the honor of Princess Moegi... and for the griffons of Yafutoma... I will strike you down! Face my blade, coward!!"

Muraji stumbled backward and crawled into a corner as Enrique neared ever closer to him. "Um... I... no... um... help...! I, I... I'll give back your ship! Just... just spare my life! Please... let me live...!"

Enrique glared at Muraji, rapier pointed at the griffon's throat, and began to scowl. Muraji probably deserved what was coming to him, but Enrique was too merciful to exact such petty vengeance. "You're too pitiful for me to run you through... I'll spare you, but you'll pay for all of your treachery!"

Aika and Fina found where Marco had been held captive on the ship and released him, replacing him with Muraji, who'd remain bound until the war was at an end. Meanwhile, Vyse was reconfiguring the settings of the Delphinus's control panels, which had been customized to suit Muraji's inexperience. Once done, the Blue Rogues were back in business.

"Alright!" Vyse cheered. "We got the Delphinus back! Now, let's even the odds!"

Aika returned to give a report to her captain. "There's a ship coming in fast from the starboard side! And... there's something about it... that really disgusts me..." Vyse looked out to his right, and saw what looked like a giant cannon made to be a ship coming their way.

"That ship..." Enrique observed. "It's the Draco... Vigoro's ship!"

"Talk about trying to compensate...! That stallion's got an inferiority complex."

"The Armada is being led by Belleza and Vigoro," Vyse explained. "If we can take out their ships, the rest of them will fall! Our first target... the Draco!"

The Draco and the Delphinus moved into battle position in a wide open space away from the other combatants so that they could fight each other without interruption. "Hey Vyse!" Vigoro shouted. "My cannon's bigger than yours! Hahaha! Now, feel the destructive power of my ship, the Draco!!"

Vigoro immediately gave the order to load his ship's gargantuan cannon. The barrel looked large enough for a small ship to fit inside, and it was no doubt powerful enough to destroy one in a single shot. Even with the Delphinus's size and defense, a lone blast from that

thing may very well be enough to split the ship in half.

Remembering the strategy he'd recently used against Admiral Gregorio, Vyse ordered that all the power in the Delphinus be redirected to the engines. As soon as Vigoro's cannon was fired, the Delphinus dodged out of the way with its boost of speed, and then resumed its own assault during the Draco's cool-down period.

"Now this is more like it!" Vigoro cheered. "A face-to-face confrontation! This is how REAL stallions should fight!"

Vigoro's cheering came to an abrupt end as the Delphinus unleashed its own artillery on the recovering Draco, violently shaking the ship and surprising its captain. "Wow!" he exclaimed. "I knew the Delphinus was powerful, but... Damn! That thing's strong! But that will make my victory all the sweeter! I will prove that I am the strongest stallion in the world!"

The Draco's cannon had fully recovered from its previous blast, and borrowing a tactic from Admiral De Loco, Vigoro brought his ship to a complete stop in order to improve their accuracy. Not even the Delphinus's top speed could get it away from the blast this time.

Remembering this tactic from his previous encounter with De Loco, Vyse followed suit and applied the same counter-strategy. He gave the order to begin charging the Gemstone Cannon, but they wouldn't fire it until the opportune moment. Once the Draco's cannon was fully loaded, the attached mechanisms pulled back and prepared to launch it.

Vyse gave the order. Much to Vigoro's surprise, the Delphinus actually turned straight toward his own ship's cannon, and began charging its own. The Gemstone Cannon unleashed its electric blast of pink energy directly into the barrel of the Draco Cannon, blowing up the shell that had been loaded and crippling the entire ship from the inside.

"I... I don't believe it!" Vigoro yelled as the Draco slowly began to descend toward Deep Sky. "They survived my Draco Cannon! ... Belleza! Get me out of here!"

Belleza had seen Vigoro's ship explode, and was already on her way to assist him. Vigoro boarded the Lynx, and joined Belleza on the bridge.

"I wouldn't expect anything less from you, handsome," said Belleza. "Not even Vigoro could stop you! As an Admiral in the Valuan Armada... I shall be the one to defeat you."

"Yeah," Vigoro added. "We can't let these punks take back Yafutoma. And we've got them totally outnumbered, anyway. I've got a good feeling about today. I just know that whatever happens here... will open the path toward my destiny!"

Before the battle could continue, however, a large explosion erupted from the direction of Mount Kazai. What looked liked a white beam of light shot skyward from the summit of the volcano. Belleza had seen this happen before, and that went double for the Air Pirates... Flying down from the mountaintop to join the ongoing war... was an enormous eagle. The Roc, the Blue Gigas.

"A ROC?!" shouted Vigoro. "My destiny is a ROC?!?!"

The Roc was followed by he who'd awakened it: Kangan, holding the Element of

Laughter in his claws as he rode his ship into the war zone. "Hehehe..." he chuckled, barely able to contain his maniacal laughter as he held its respective Element. "Soon I shall be rid of both the Westerners AND the Tenkou! Go, Blue Gigas! Blow them out of the sky! HAHAHAHA!!!"

Following its orders, the Roc rose high into the sky, higher and higher until it could no longer even be seen. And with a quick arc, it began dive-bombing, faster and faster until it was falling quicker than a bullet could be shot. And when it passed the war zone, the sound barrier broke, and a disc-shaped typhoon of countless colors erupted from that point, expanding and destroying anything it hit. Everything it missed was blown away, causing several ships to crash into one another and explode from the strength of the impacts.

Belleza looked on in horror. Her ship and Vyse's were far enough away the center of the burst to avoid most of its devastating effects, but it didn't mean her ship was immune. "This must be the 'Rainbow Storm' that the King was warning us about!"

"The winds are too strong," reported the Vice Captain. "Our ships are losing control... We can't hold our formations!"

"If this keeps up, all of our ships will be destroyed... I didn't want to do this, but we have no choice. All ships retreat!" With the order given, all that remained of Belleza and Vigoro's fleets began to retreat to the East, while the Yafutoman ships returned to the city. The Tenkou stayed to watch the war conclude, as the skies had been cleared for the Delphinus to take on the Blue Gigas.

"It's the Roc!" Fina exclaimed.

"What WAS that?!" Aika asked. "What did it just do?!"

"That explosion was called a Sonic Rainboom. In the Old World, a member of the Mane Six used to be able to create them all on her own. She was quite famous for it."

"And that's the member of the Mane Six who made this Gigas, right?"

"Not quite. It was a different member, one who'd elected to protect Yafutoma as a favor to a griffon she knew. She gave the Blue Gigas the power to perform Sonic Rainbooms in honor of that griffon's best friend. Although, it appears that these Rainbooms have been amplified to act as a weapon."

"Anyway, I think we might be able to take him on with the Delphinus!"

"I really hope so..." Vyse moaned. "It doesn't look like we have much of a choice. Alright everypony, let's go! It's up to us! We don't have time to think of a plan at this point, so we'll just have to look for a weakness as we fight it!"

The Delphinus began to fly toward the Roc, prepared to do battle against it. Chuckling to himself, Kangan used the Element of Laughter to command the Roc to charge into battle as well. Vyse, too used to fighting ships (which have their cannons on the side), turned hard to starboard in order to dodge the enemy. But this was a living creature, one that had little limit to how it could move about.

The Roc stretched apart the talons on its legs and grabbed the Delphinus as if it were a

twig. The claws dug into the steel hull of the ship as it was flailed around like a fish trying to escape its captor. All of the crew members on board were thrown around, crashing into walls and sustaining many injuries. By the time the Roc finally let go, Marco and Muraji had been knocked unconscious, and the ship was flying crooked.

"Ugh..." groaned Vyse as he got back to his legs and grabbed the helm in order to straighten the ship. "Is everypony alright?"

"Y-yeah..." grunted Aika. "I think so. Marco's out cold, though."

"Alright. Note to self: keep our distance from that thing!"

"Speaking of which," Enrique began. "Where did it go?"

The conscious crew members began searching all around them, trying to find where the Roc had flown off to. Eventually, Fina decided to look up. "There!" she shouted. "Above the clouds!"

"No! It's going to make another Sonic Rainboom!"

"Everypony!" Vyse called. "Redirect all the power to the engines! We can't get far enough away in time, but maybe if we tried to resist the blast by flying against it, we won't be thrown off-course!"

Down the Roc dived, faster and faster, picking up speed as it plummeted toward the middle elevations. And as it shot past, the sheer force of the speed erupted into another rainbow explosion. The Tenkou watching from a distance only felt some minor vibrations, but the Delphinus was almost in the eye of this storm. The engines shot to full power and pushed against the forces of the sound waves, with everyone on board holding on as tight as they could. After only a few seconds, it passed, and the Delphinus sustained no damage.

"Alright!" Vyse cheered. "We got thrown back a little, but we're still in attack position!"

"Yeah!" said Aika. "It looks like this ship can handle Sonic Rainbooms if we just brace ourselves for them!"

"Enough talk!" Enrique insisted. "Now's our chance!"

With the Roc at a reasonable elevation and a proper distance from its adversary, the Delphinus let loose with all of its cannons, subcannons, and torpedoes. Amazingly, the Roc managed to dodge every single blast, spinning, twirling, and flipping through the air to do so.

"I can't believe how quick that thing is!" Vyse exclaimed. "I never thought something so big could move so fast!"

"Urgh!" Aika groaned. "How are we supposed to hit something that agile? It's much faster than the Hydra or the Manticore! And it doesn't have movement limitations like ships do!"

Movement limitations? Vyse thought. And that's when an enormous grin grew upon his face. There was one way to completely ensure that the Roc would get hit, but it would certainly be risky, and possibly fatal if it didn't work.

"Alright!" Vyse happily shouted. "Begin redirecting all power to the Gemstone Cannon!"

"Are you out of your little pony mind?!" Aika asked. "The Gemstone Cannon is our slowest weapon! How do you plan on hitting it with THAT??"

"Just do it! Oh, and find something to hold onto!"

Aika, Fina, and Enrique all looked at each other, puzzled. Nevertheless, they immediately did as they were ordered.

"Hehehe... Well, this was fun," Kangan mumbled to himself. "But I'm aching to sit upon my new throne, so I think it's time I ended this. Roc! I command you to perform your ultimate attack: the Sonic Rain Nuke! Evaporate those pesky ponies from the sky!! HAHAHAHA!!!"

The Roc let out a high-pitched shriek before beginning another forceful climb into the sky. "This is it!" Vyse shouted as he began flying toward where the center of the explosion would be. "Get ready!" When the Roc reached the absolute highest altitude it could reach, it began its high-speed dive. Sparks of electricity began to form around its body as it gathered the energy necessary to form a nuke. It began to spin like a drill as it continued its perfectly straight descent.

"NOW!" screamed Vyse as he pulled the bowsprit of the ship into the air. Everypony on board held on tight as the entire Delphinus turned up to a 90-degree angle, aiming the fully powered Gemstone Cannon at the Gigas diving straight towards it. The cannon fired upwards in a pillar of exploding light, much like what appears when a Gigas is awoken.

The Roc was diving at far too great of a speed for it to even consider dodging out of the way. The cannon's blast of energy pierced right through it, allowing all of the Roc's built up energy to erupt from its body, causing a premature Sonic Rain Nuke high up in the sky and almost completely disintegrating the Blue Gigas. Defeated, what remained of the Roc unconsciously glided toward Mount Kazai and crashed into its base.

The Delphinus managed to flip itself back onto a flat angle. All of the supplies onboard the ship had fallen off their shelves, a mess Marco would not pleased to see once he woke up. After everypony had finally caught their breath, the realization of what had just occurred dawned on them. The Hydra had to be called back into its slumber, and the Manticore needed to be trapped in a canyon. The Roc, the most dangerous Gigas they'd fought yet, had actually been defeated for good.

The Element of Laughter fell from Kangan's claws. "I... I can't believe it... The Air Pirates defeated the Roc! I need to get out of here!!!"

But before Kangan could get back to the helm of his ship, he was boarded by Daigo and a group of Tenkou. "Kangan!" Daigo shouted. "You have nowhere to run! Surrender or die!"

"I... I... surrender..."

The war was finally over. The Armada was gone, the Gigas was defeated, and as thanks for helping save Yafutoma, the Tenkou were given a full pardon, allowing them to roam the skies freely once again. Back in the palace, Mikado sat at his rightful place on the throne, with both Daigo and Moegi at his side.

"Brave ponies from the West..." Mikado began. "I thank you, on behalf of all the griffons,

for saving Yafutoma."

"But..." Enrique interrupted, "... it was my country that caused all of this... I am terribly sorry for all of the trouble wrought by the Valuans... I don't know how I can make it up to you."

"Prince Enrique, please... raise your head. Daigo has explained everything to me. You feel responsible because you are a Valuan Prince, but it is not your fault."

"Thank you for understanding... but we have only won the battle. As we speak, the Armada is regrouping... Until Valua sets itself back down the path of righteousness, I will continue to fight them."

"I see... very well then. I will pray for your well being. And perhaps the Warai Sphere will aid you in your fight. Please, take it with you."

"Really?" Aika asked. "Are you sure it's okay? Didn't you say it's necessary in appointing a successor to the throne?"

"Hahaha... we never needed it before now, did we? Even without a symbol, I have such an accomplished successor already."

Daigo smiled, knowing it was he his father spoke of. "I've decided to return to my father and accept the responsibility of defending the griffons."

"That's great!" Vyse congratulated. "Hey, whatever happened to Kangan and Muraji?"

"They were exiled to Tenkou Island. We figured that if they spent some time in exile, they'd realize what they've done and become better griffons. Or, you know, kill each other."

"Ahahaha!" Aika bellowed. "I like that plan! It serves them right!"

"That reminds me, I noticed that your ship isn't capable of going to great heights or depths. Here, take this with you." Daigo gave Vyse a scroll with what looked like engine schematics drawn all over it. "This is from us griffons. It contains all of the knowledge necessary to enable your ship to fly higher or lower than you've ever thought possible."

"Wow!" thanked Vyse. "I'll make sure we put it to good use!"

Princess Moegi had remained silent during the entire meeting, deeply lost in her own thoughts. At last, she spoke up. "... Father. I have something to ask of you. I... Please, let me go with these ponies."

"What?!" yelled Mikado, taken aback by what his daughter was saying.

"If what they say is true, then there are matters of great importance occurring in the West. You and Daigo both said that you will stay here to protect our country. But I am helping to defend our country... by helping these ponies on their quest."

"Well said, Moegi!" Daigo commended. "I am proud to have you as a sister. Prince Enrique... I speak to you not as a fellow prince, but as a brother concerned for his sister's well being. Please, take care of her..."

"You have my word," Enrique assured. "I will defend her with my life. Princess... Let us join forces and return peace to Equestria."

"Yes," said Moegi. "Prince Enrique... I entrust my life to you."

"... Very well, then..." mumbled Lord Mikado. "It appears I do not have much say in this

matter, anyway."

"Wow, Enrique!" Aika exclaimed. "You're getting much more reliable by the minute! You seem like a different pony! Just until recently, all I ever saw of you was the back of your head leaning over the railing of the ship!"

"AIKA!!!" Enrique snapped. "Do you have to constantly remind me about that?!"

Once repairs were made, supplies were restocked, and Marco had finished cleaning up the lovely mess, the Air Pirates returned to the bridge of the Delphinus along with their newest crew member: the griffon, Princess Moegi. As a sheltered princess, she wouldn't be much help during battle, but as royalty, she could represent the Blue Rogues as an ally of the country of Yafutoma. And so, Moegi was hired as Vyse's personal delegate.

Back on the bridge, the Air Pirates stood around the meeting table as they planned their next course of action. "It's great that we got the Element of Laughter and all..." Aika began. "But where do we go from here?"

"Perhaps we should return to Crescent Isle," suggested Enrique, "and study that Scroll on Ship Polarity in order to modify the Delphinus."

"Go home? But that's to the west of here... How are we supposed to get back?"

"Hmm..." Vyse thought to himself. The west, north, and south were blocked by cloud walls formed from the Everfree Rift, which was a one-way trip the first time around. The winds of the Rift blew strongest to the east, so trying to go through from this end would be suicide. The only other direction was further east, where a white stone reef, like the one to west of Ixa'taka, blocked the path. And that's when something Vyse heard earlier popped into his mind. "Maybe we can try to go east from here."

"Wait a second!" said Aika. "We'll just be getting farther away from Crescent Isle!"

"Umm..." interrupted the normally silent Fina. "Didn't Belleza say that she came here by going west from Ixa'taka? If that's true, then if we go east from here, we should reach Ixa'taka, just as she said!"

"What?! So, you mean that the eastern and western ends of Equestria are connected?!"

"Hmm..." Enrique pondered. "I seem to recall hearing legends about the world being round. According to the geological studies of Valua... the world is a sphere. That means that the East is connected to the West, and the North is connected to the South. Of course, nopony has ever proven this... and those that believe it to be true are branded as heretics."

"That's interesting..." Vyse smiled. "Well, it looks like we're going to see if Belleza was telling the truth or not. We came to Yafutoma from Crescent Isle by heading east. We'll continue sailing to the east. And if we reach Crescent Isle... we will prove that the world is round!"

"Wow!!!" Aika cheered. "You mean we're actually going to try to sail around the world?!!!"

"Alright, everypony! Prepare for departure! We're going East! Destination: Crescent Isle!"

After a couple days of sailing east, the Delphinus at least reached the white stone reef. Near the southern corner of it, where it interlocked with a dark rift wall, a gargantuan hole had been blown right in the reef. Vyse could only imagine how many explosives it must've taken.

Flying through the hole, the Blue Rogues were met with the sights and smells of seemingly endless rainforests. There was no question; this was Ixa'taka. The crew of the Delphinus waved to the zebras of Horteka Village as they passed by. The King, Isapa, Centime, and Hans all waved back along with the villagers.

They continued sailing to the east, and passed through Middle Ocean, where Vyse and Aika's old home was... Pirate Isle. Vyse waved to his parents and old crewmates, who were busy overseeing the construction of a new airship, as the previous one had been destroyed when Galcian attacked. Even further east, they passed over the hot deserts of Nasr, waving Hi to the buffalo of Maramba, and to the survivors of Nasrad. Moegi couldn't believe how much of the world she and her fellow griffons had been missing. It was so huge, so diverse... so beautiful.

After about two weeks of non-stop sailing, they finally reached the Frontier Lands, where Crescent Isle was found. "Vyse!" called Fina. "Straight ahead!"

"Yup," said Vyse. "That's Crescent Isle alright. But it looks... different."

"If we reached Crescent Isle by flying east from Yafutoma, that means..."

Aika leaped into the air. "We sailed around the world!!! Hey, Vyse! How does it feel to have sailed around Equestria with your very own ship?!"

Vyse thought about all the amazing things he'd seen since his life on Pirate Isle. Valua, Nasr, Ixa'taka, and Yafutoma. Shrine Island, the Temple of Pyrynn, Gemstone Mountain, Rixis, Chaos Island, the Everfree Rift, and Mount Kazai. His encounters with Galcian, all six of the Valuan Admirals, and three of the legendary Gigas. And all of the friends and allies he'd made along the way. Vyse closed his eyes, and drew a deep breath. He looked straight ahead, and with a look of the fiercest determination, exclaimed...

"I want to see more!"

End of Chapter 7