

Epics of Isavoire

Chapter 13: Captain of the Great Blue

The Fallar Docks were quiet as the sun fell and dusk came. The young man could feel his nerves and hear his own heartbeat go rapidly while he waited on the wooden pier.

Marse was an experienced and, unfortunately, unemployed mage. Though he was given various jobs in the past, the wizard found himself bored with his previous engagements. He found himself taken by wanderlust and a desire for adventure, but now an opportunity had presented itself.

As it turned out, an old contact of Marse's had recently heard about someone in need of regular rune and magic maintenance. Of course, Marse jumped at the chance, but later found himself nervous when he was told the conditions of the job.

Being at the dock specifically, he was also told not to divulge his new job to anyone and that he would be lodging on a boat from there on. It would naturally be an adventure, but at the same time Marse felt fear, especially as fog set in.

Marse tried to look around, to see if anyone was coming. The fog had very quickly and very suddenly set in, startling the magician. "...Is...is anyone here?"

There was a sound like footsteps, drawing in closer.

The mage took a step back before the sounds of the steps grew louder and closer. A lone figure could be seen, shrouded in mist.

"Wh-who is there?" Marse stammered.

"Calm yourself. I'm not here to harm you," a firm, deep voice replied softly. "Are you named Marse?"

Marse stared, but the fog would not dissipate, nor would the stranger move. After a few moments, the mage nodded. "Y-yes."

“And you are a mage?”

The terrified man nodded which was followed by silence. He then realized the figure likely couldn't see him fully. “Y-yes! I mean, yes!”

“Good. How would you like to work for me, then?” The figure stepped closer, offering a hand. At this point, the magician saw a few, old scars and the cuff of a fine looking coat's sleeve.

“D-d-doing what?”

“My, you stutter quite a bit. You would maintain and check certain runes on my ship, among other duties. I was told you were already made aware of this.”

“Sorry.” Marse took a calming breath. It took a few moments for him to compose himself, but eventually he managed an answer. “I accept.” Whoever was talking to him seemed kind and benevolent so far. It was a tad scary, but nothing to worry about too deeply. Taking the man's hand firmly, Marse spoke, “I am Marse North, Mage graduate of Hyan Institute of Magic.”

The man shook and stepped closer. “I am Captain Gaspar Adrian Josef.”

Marse's smile slowly fell as he heard the man's name. The mage could feel himself growing more pale and his blood practically run cold with fear. Gaspar Josef was no captain, but an exiled Admiral from the Republic of Adymis said to have singlehandedly orchestrated the deaths of thousands, now roaming as a dangerous pirate.

Marse felt himself freeze; he started to become light headed before passing out...

It was hours later when Marse was reawakened by a sudden splash of water. He gasped and sputtered as he sat up, the water dripping off his body. “Agh!”

“Finally among the living again? I had thought you up and died on me.” Gaspar gave the slightest grin to the dismayed mage.

“Admiral Josef!” Marse could feel his fear returning as he gazed upon Gaspar’s face. The man had a cleanly kept beard and moustache along with long hair. He wore a burgundy coat kept in pristine condition and adorned with medals.

“Captain, he’s using your old title,” a woman said to the taller man.

“It’s okay, Guinevere. After all, I still use my old outfit. Our new recruit needs time to proc-“

“Admiral, er, captain, er, sir! Please, please don’t kill me!” Marse begged, clasping his hands together. “I promise, I’ll work for free, I won’t try to escape, I-“

“Captain, he’s the twelfth one so far,” another man on the ship said as he sat on a barrel.

“He sounds kinda like you did when you joined,” the woman named Guinevere said to the man.

“I didn’t beg THAT much. I just asked for a quick death is all.” The man looked down in shame.

“Wait...Gaspar isn’t going to kill me?”

“Captain Gaspar,” the leader of the crew said firmly.

“C-captain.”

“Better...And no, I will not. It would make you doing your job a hassle, though I would save a fair bit in payment.” The captain gave a coy smile.

Marse chuckled nervously, not sure if the man was joking. “I’ll be fine working with you.”

“And we’ll be happy to have you, young man.”

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The crisp, clean scent of the air was always reassuring, much like the sight of the waves below the vessel.

From upon his observation deck, a man known as Captain Josef was standing, staring quietly towards the distance, thinking of days long past. The man held the railings on his ship, one he had known well during his time in service to country. Even now, it was reassuring to have one memento of better days with him, though he could not allow himself to become mired in the past.

Indeed, there was much in the present that needed his attention, such as making sure his ship was sailing smoothly.

Walking down the stairs to the main deck, he saw Marse, checking the sails. "Is the Nomad following our projected course?"

"The ship is traveling well, sir. With the natural wind complimenting the magical one, we should reach land by nightfall."

"Excellent. Stay the course and update me if anything changes."

"Will do, Captain." Marse nodded.

Josef was about to turn, when he noticed Marse's face seemed a tad green. "Something troubling you?"

"Apologies...I suppose it's airsickness, sir." Nervously, the man walked over towards the bow of the ship and looked downward, seeing the sea far below. "You would think I would be used to aerial travel by now."

“Considering you are one of the mages in charge of maintaining the runes, one would hope,” Josef admitted. “Still, it happens to many. I’ve seen some fierce men under my charge come down with seasickness frequently. At least you are able to keep it at bay somewhat.” Josef paused, seeing a faint smile appear on Marse’s face from the reassurance; the captain of the vessel could not help but return the expression. “Finish your rounds and tell Fergus to take duty. You rest below deck.”

“Yes, sir.” Wasting no time, Marse left, leaving the Captain on deck with the rest of his crew.

With the checking of air magic done, Captain Josef continued his rounds, going about the ship to make sure everyone else was keeping up their duties. Once he found everything else satisfactory, he went to the navigator. “Guinevere, how is our course?”

“Steady as a summer breeze, sir! Actually, it is a summer breeze.” The woman was cheery, more than happy to stay at her post. The red-haired woman turned to the taller man. “How goes, Captain?”

“Very well, Guinevere, thank you. Still, the winds could change at any time. Remain vigilant.”

“As always, sir, but thanks for the reminder. Still, it’s amazing to be up in the sky like this....Did they have aerial travel when you were young?”

“Not like this. It was still fairly experimental.” The captain turned his gray eyes towards the freckled woman addressing him. “And what do you mean by “when I was young”?”

Guinevere turned her blue eyes towards the captain. “No offense, Captain, but you’re pushing your sixties.”

The tan skinned man looked away for a moment, partly exasperated. “...I’m only Fifty-three.”

“Oh...Sorry.” Guinevere looked sincerely apologetic. “Well, regardless, you’ve got plenty of life left in you, just like the Nomad! I’m just impressed this giant ship can fly, especially with all the iron and equipment we’re carrying.”

“Just because a vessel is old doesn’t mean it can’t have a vital spirit. Remember that, Guinevere, and keep your course.”

“Aye, sir...But look below.”

“Hm?” Turning, the bearded man saw that there was a ship of some size far down, with several figures flying around it. “Curious...Bring us down, this may prove useful, one way or another.”

“Aye aye!” Wasting no time, the woman pulled on a lever near the ship’s wheel and the Nomad began to descend, going back down through the air slowly toward the water.

As the great vessel crashed into the waves, kicking up a massive spray of water, it sailed towards the other ship, where the flying figures grew clearer.

“Captain, look!”

“I see them, Guinevere,” Gaspar said as he observed the airborne monsters. The smallest among the monsters was the size of a Wynverian’s human form, while the largest was three times that. They varied in color from a dark, grimy gray to polished copper. There was very little uniformity in their appearances, save for the manifestations of horns, long tails, and great wings.

The creatures swooped down to the ship, attacking the passengers on it and avoiding cannon fire. As one strayed away and flew near the Nomad, Captain Gaspar and his crew noticed it’s grotesque face, resembling that of a warthog with glowing orange eyes.

“Stars and stones!” Marse gasped. “What is that?!”

“A gargoyle.” Gaspar then turned to his crew, raising his voice. “All hands, prepare for battle! Prepare to decimate all aerial units and prepare to beard the ship. Make sure the others are safe down below!”

“Aye aye, captain!” all hands shouted in unison. Hastily, they began their work, with everyone frantically going to the sails in order to ready them for sea travel and in order to make sure they manned their stations.

Bearing down with menace, the Gargoyle circling the ship touched down on deck, releasing an ear piercing shriek before two of the crewmen attacked.

One of Gaspar’s men wielding an axe swung, only for the creature to dodge the initial strike. The second time, however, there was an audible clang as the axe’s edge smashed against the beast’s face, leaving a visible crack on its surface and chipping the weapon.

“Damn, it’s skin is as hard as stone!” the attacker swore before the creature backhanded him, knocking him a few feet away.

The gargoyle continued to hiss and roar, looking ready to continue its attack, before suddenly there was a deafening boom. The creature began to stumble as it looked down to see a large crack in its chest, followed by two more as it turned to see Gaspar, holding a pistol in his hand.

“That’s enough of that.” Gaspar stared down the monster, watching as it roared and lumbered closer. His glare intensifying, the captain waited until the creature drew even closer before firing one final shot, ending its life as its stony body began to crumble and the light left the gargoyle’s eyes.

“My word, I never knew gargoyles are made of actual stone?” Marse was befuddled despite his fear.

“It varies, but I’ve seen plenty of them in my day. The Regents of Alcadya employed them as auxiliary guardians to their fortresses. So far as monsters go, Gargoyles make excellent guarddogs for any structure if they’re tamed properly.”

“So why are these ones being so troublesome?” Guinevere asked as she helped up her injured crewmate.

“I wager these fools stole them from the place they were to guard.” Gaspar sighed as he reached to his belt and reloaded. “Focus on cannon fire and ranged attacks.”

“Aye, Captain!”

With full stock of the situation, the group headed into the thick of it, all while their canons fired, the deafening noise filling the air as several gargoyles were shattered upon impact.

As their numbers thinned, Gaspar saw the few remaining landed on the ship, a few perching near the crow’s nest, while others continued to attack the people on the ship. “Clever bastards. We’ll have to board.”

“Making our way there, sir!” Guinevere continued to steer the ship, until they at last came to the other ship’s side, where the seven remaining Gargoyles were attacking the other people.

Once they boarded, Gaspar and his men were attacking once more, doing their best to trap the Gargoyles. Instead of his usual saber or firearm, Gaspar was holding a rope net, with several of his men held other nets and hammers.

“Bring those winged statues down and shatter them!” Gaspar commanded. “No mercy!”

Obeying, the pirates tossed the nets, ensnaring the Gargoyles. Some were taken down in fight and fell to the deck before being attacked, while others managed to fly a short distance before falling into the waters and sinking.

Gaspar watched as he neared the last two, hammer in hand as he sized up his enemies.

Behind them was a woman with platinum blonde hair and dressed ornately, scared of the two monsters.

Wordlessly, Gaspar raised the hammer aloft before the first Gargoyle lunged. The captain sidestepped the attack before roaring, striking its back and shattering its wings. The monster began to groan before Gaspar struck again, killing it.

The last gargoyle, whose face was dragonic with the horns of a stag, growled when the pirate captain realized what was happening. Ducking, he narrowly avoided a spout of water that knocked the metal head off of his hammer.

“Very clever bastard.” Gaspar threw the useless handle aside as the roaring creature flew near, claws raised and mouth wide, showing metal fangs as sharp as swords.

With no fear, Gaspar stood in place, waiting for the deadly attack. The enemy drew inched closer, a monstrous bloodlust in its eyes. Instantly, though, the gargoyle was waylaid by a strong gust of wind.

Gaspar looked to see that Marse had used wind magic to knock the creature aside, before two crewmen netted the monster.

“Captain, are you alright?” Marse asked.

“I’m well, thank you, Marse.” Gaspar looked to his subordinates. “Men, break its wings and throw it into the brine.”

Obediently, the two members of Gaspar’s crew raised their hammers and broke the grotesque’s wings before tossing it and the net into the water.

For a few brief moments it tried to spout more water to escape, but by then it was already sinking into the watery depths like its counterparts.

“How invigorating.” Gaspar turned to the woman while several other people on the boarded vessel gathered. “Is everyone alive?”

“As alive as we can be,” the woman said. “Three of my men were slain in that attack when those Gargoyles got loose.”

“A pity, but not much can be done. You are a trader, yes?”

“Yes. Captain Hannah Giovahn.”

“Captain Giovahn, I am Gaspar Adrian Josef, Captain of the Nomad. I’ll be taking possession of your valuables and your vessel, though my crew and I will also make sure you make it to a civilized island, provided you behave.”

“Wait, you’re stealing our ship after you saved us?!” Giovahn asked incredulously. Her men began to grow more aggressive, their postures changing, despite how Gaspar’s crew held their weapons.

“Standard practice for pirates, though I doubt you’re innocent victims in all of this. You trade in Gargoyles, so I assume other illegal monsters are being ported on your vessel.”

Giovahn’s shocked expression quickly became a frown. “Even if that were so, I’m not letting any second rate sky pirates steal my haul.”

Gaspar stood confidently, his arms behind his back while he stared down the woman. “You don’t have any choice in the matter.”

A few tense moments passed before the woman reached to her side, picking up a dagger and rushing Gaspar.

The pirate captain sighed as his final opponent drew near. Grabbing the handle of his pistol, he pulled it out and shot, the one projectile quickly ending his enemy’s life. As her body fell to the deck, the Captain of the sky pirates stared down Giovahn’s crew. “Would you like to join your captain in death?”

There was a deep silence in the air.

“Very well. All of you can wait here before we take you to the brig. If you decide you would rather leave, the brine is just overboard.” Satisfied with the haul and watching his crew subdue the traders, Gaspar grinned as he considered his new haul.

Three days passed and soon after, Gaspar was with two of his men at Benedict, a port town on a small island. On the opposite side of the island, away from civilization, the trade ship's crew were dropped a day's walk from Benedict, while Gaspar had managed to negotiate the sale of not only the ship, but any unusable goods within.

As It turned out, there were a few people eager to take in exotic pets or sailors who wanted to buy the late Captain Giovahn's leftover possessions.

More than satisfied by his haul, the skypirate and his men decided to while away the hours at a local tavern.

As he entered, however, he noticed two figures walking out, both covered in ecru hued robes. For a moment, Gaspar's eyes lingered on them, noticing the two seemed to come out almost moments before he came in, but after a bit he put the thought aside; time at war and at sea could have made him paranoid.

Once he was within the tavern with his followers, he was completely unaware of the conversation being held outside.

"Sir, do you suppose that was the man we were told to look for?"

"I believe so," the other robed person said. "We should prepare him for a meeting with our emissaries."

"And if he isn't agreeable to our terms, sir?"

"We'll make it worth his while."

And so began what would be another adventure for the Captain of the skies and his men...