

Northwest 31

Chapter 31

The pilot¹ from Marchand arrived by yacht and boarded the Bell Rock. He tried to climb the rope ladder, but when his chubby body barely rushed over the railing, two sailors needed to grab his arms and drag him onto deck. The red-faced pilot stood up and pretended to touch up his clothes, while looking around awkwardly. When his eyes fell on Cesar, he quickly gave his greeting.

Hello, Mr. Mesonnier.

Its been a while, Durin.

Cesar shook the outstretched hand of Durin, their appointed pilot. Cesar played the role of Mr. Mesonnier, the owner of a merchant ship. Lil Schweiz was widely known and recognised as the Black Whale, therefore it was necessary for Cesar to step forward when it came to legal matters.

As a means of disguise, Lil was wearing a fake moustache and had her hair concealed under a hat. The hats wide and deep brim conveniently obscured most of her face. Lil already met the pilot a few times when she came to Marchand before, so just like Cesar, she greeted Durin in a familiar manner. When she did, Lil noticed that his face was still red. To confirm her suspicion, she stepped forward and grabbed his chin, turning it left and right.

Why is your face like this, have you been drinking?

Oh, no!

I already heard the news of you sinking a Loyola merchant ship between the sandbars the other day. It was because you were drunk, wasn't it?

Her hand shifted from his chin to his collar, pulling him towards her. She tilted her head forward, burying her face deeper into the shadow of her hat and sniffing him in search of the scent of alcohol.

What the hell is he doing?!

Durin jerked the hand from his collar. In response to his aggressive reaction, Lil only snorted sarcastically and folded her arms in front of her chest.

I also heard that you had to pay a huge sum to the nobles supporting Loyola as compensation, so I can assume that such a tragedy won't happen again, right? If you drank too much, take this opportunity to get off now and call for another pilot. Or I'll kick your ass.

Oh, god! I told you, I'm not drunk!

His fat body staggered a bit before he grabbed the steering wheel. When Durin began to give his instructions, Lil leaned against the mast and crossed her legs.

In many cases, the Ingres Seas pilots were reckless; they were either drunk when they boarded a ship or they stayed up all night gambling, giving their orders in a sleep-talking manner the next day. As a safety measure, I have to threaten them every time I leave the Bell Rock to them. They can't be trusted and the Bell Rock means more to me than any house on land ever will.

Whether it was because he was paying extra attention or because he truly hadn't drunk, but the Bell Rock made it safely to the Marchands wharf. Sailors waiting at the berthing port threw their lines at

the linemen on the dock, who in their turn attached the lines firmly to the mooring bollards. As soon as the crossing went down, the crew of the Bell Rock became busy with moving their cargo.

To show her appreciation, Lil patted Durin on the shoulder before she went up the stern to oversee the unloading of the ship.

Meanwhile, Ed had carefully listened through the open window of his cabin. From there he could clearly hear the entire landing process, including the directions from the pilot. A room with a window on the stern side of the ship was one of the benefits Ed enjoyed as an officer. This spot made it easy for him to follow the situation on deck without being noticed.

When the commotion died down, he moved away from the window and opened his suitcase, taking out a small glass vial from his collection. He removed the stiff cloth that was wrapped around the mouth of the glass bottle and transferred a bit of the content into a small tin container, before resealing it.

The scent of the liquid has the ability to attract messenger pigeons. Pigeons used on land didn't require such oils because they could travel to and from their trained location. However, the navy's fleet is constantly on the move, so a special kind of pigeon was needed. This breed is trained directly from birth and associates the fragrant oil with their food.

Normally, Ed kept the oil on him at all times in case he needed to communicate with his fleet. But early on he found out it was nearly impossible to receive a full-fledged messenger pigeon while being aboard the Bell Rock, forcing him to hide the scent for the time being.

My poor pigeon must be hovering pitifully somewhere above the southern islands. Thankfully, it became clear last night that we were travelling to Marchand, giving me the perfect opportunity to release the scent and lure the pigeon towards me. Contrary to my expectation of us heading to the western continent, we were travelling east instead. As a result, my prediction is slightly off, but it's no big deal really. I only need to relay a message through the pigeon to inform Sagastar of our change in direction. Conceivably during a time when the Bell Rock is at her busiest, like right now.

To do so, I need a map, the most accurate map of the southern seas will probably be in possession of a naval post. Besides, the safest place for me right now was one of the naval offices, as I don't know how many acquaintances Lil has in Marchand. Also, my first and foremost priority is that no one will ever witness me dealing with a messenger pigeon, therefore the nearest post will be the best choice.

Ed stepped out on the deck, walked the crossing and sneaked off the pier as stealthy as possible, making sure he stayed out of Lil's eyesight. Fortunately for him, she was still busy with the cargo. Ed quickly made his way through the marina, the marketplace, and into a crowded street. It wasn't difficult to find a naval office, as the fluttering flags of the empire and navy were visible all the way from the dock.

Obviously, the navy post wasn't a building that anyone could just enter. So as expected, Ed was stopped by a soldier at the entrance, who immediately asked for his reason to visit.

Ed leaned in and lowered his voice.

I'm a messenger on a mission ordered by Admiral Retiro.

When the soldier heard that the admiral was involved, he instantly realised he couldn't make a decision on his own and summoned his superior. Eventually, a man with a drowsy face appeared, to Ed it was as clear as day that the man just woke up from a nap, especially after he heard the hoarse voice as the man whispered.

What's in the deepest dungeon?

There's a prisoner who plotted a rebellion on board.

What kind of torture is he being subjected to?

His wing bones* are being broken.

The officer nodded and signalled Ed to follow him. Ed walked across the windswept garden into a building and was finally able to exhale the breath he'd been holding in. With each breath he took, his nostrils became hot, it was an unfamiliar and unbearable feeling. His hometown was located on the much colder northern continent, so he wasn't used to the warm weather of the South. Fortunately for him, the building they just entered was significantly colder. When Ed was left alone, he was able to cool down a bit by pressing his cheek against the marble column in the corridor. Shortly after, a young man approached and stood in front of him.

I am first Sergeant Sorola of the Southern Legardon Fleet. Who are you?

I'm second Lieutenant Sagastar from the Mondovi Fleet.

Wait, say that again?

Lieutenant Sagastar.

Sagastar? Sagastar? Are you perhaps related to Commodore Sagastar?

He's my brother, satisfied?

He's your brother?

Don't you know you shouldn't be too interested in other people's personal lives? If you're done asking me about my family business, how about you get your commanding officer?

The young man, who was still a non-commissioned officer, glared at Ed with eyes full of suspicion. In response, Ed cleared his throat and straightened his back. Only, the intimidation didn't keep the man from scanning him thoroughly, clearly perplexed by the pirate-like man in front of him. But the soldier knew he wasn't in a position to do much about it.

So, you're Admiral Retiros messenger?

Yes.

Really?

Really.

The Admiral of the western Mondovi fleet?

The man already asked three questions in just as many seconds. No matter how badly dressed he was, Ed was still an officer holding a classified document signed by the admiral himself. Ed narrowed his eyes, gradually disliking the guy more and more.

Why on earth did he come all the way to the South

Do you expect someone of his rank to share his planes with a non-commissioned officer like yourself?

Irritably, Ed interrupted the question. Perhaps offended, the officer gave him one last glare before he left the room. As he looked at the retreating back, Ed mumbled to himself.

Cant they hurry up? Their tardiness is going to be the death of me

Still groaning, Ed plopped on the sofa. Laying down languidly, with his feet resting on the table in front of him.

Yes. Okay, Ill admit it. Its quite natural that the southern navy is hesitant towards the Admiral that was reluctant to go to the South till now. Also, what would a messenger be doing in Marchand, when the pirates widespread presence is mostly in Amiaeng. No wonder theyre suspicious of me. Even the Emperor himself told me specifically to send my fleet to Amiaeng, but such territorial disputes just dont interest me Hm, Amiaeng

Why Marchand, Liloa? Why are we in Marchand?..

My third guess would have been archipelago, where it would be easy to hide because the naval management is poor. On the contrary, Marchand is the most famous naval base in the South. What is the meaning of crawling into the front yard of the southern Navy only to escape the western Navy? I must admit, its quite fun that I cant predict what shes thinking.

Lieutenant Sagastar? I heard you brought a message from Admiral Retiro.

When he heard a voice over the sofa, Ed slowly stood up. That same sergeant was glaring at him again, this time from behind a well-dressed man wearing the epaulettes of a lieutenant.

Im Lieutenant Eme. How can I help you?

My name is Sagastar. Im carrying out a mission ordered by the Admiral, so please be considerate of my modest appearance.

Pardon?

Dont worry, its not that big of a deal. I just need the most accurate maps containing the route from the Gulf of Gardel to Marchand and also charts with weather observations up to yesterday.

What do you need those for?

I have to report my route back to the fleet.

Ill need authentication.

Ed handed him a scrawled letter. The lieutenant examined it carefully before making a stern expression.

Ill be back after the decryption. Please wait a moment.

This contains detailed orders His Majesty personally gave to the Mondovi fleet. I sincerely hope it can be dealt with discreetly.

Of course.