



## *The Great Drift: Part Four*

by Maia Jacomus

While Luka did enjoy the swim with the rest of the group, she remained on the boat's deck the whole remainder of the trip to the Nest. The beams of Sunray dimmed more quickly than she hoped, but the cool shade against her skin was a pleasant relief all the same. A sudden yawn breaking through the air took her by surprise. Further surprise followed when she saw that it had issued from her brother Rurik, who was stretching as he slowly rose from the hatch and joined her at the side of the boat.

"It's awake!" Luka remarked.

Rurik ruffled his hair. "Yeah, I'm awake. I don't want to miss the egrets."

"Of all the sights to see along the way, you're excited about *egrets*?"

He shrugged. "I guess...it's because of that story Dam always used to tell us, about the egret warrior king."

"Well, when she told it to me, it was an egret warrior *queen*."

"To each his own—or her own."

She nodded. "That was always my favorite story." A sudden flutter of nervousness seized her as an idea came to her. "Did you ever hear the story about, about the seizkin?"

Rurik shook his head. "Seize-what?"

"Seizkin. You see, the...Ouranos e'Kinbornu told me about them."

He turned to look her in the eye, and asked with an accusatory tone, "You talked to her?"

Through much stumbling and interruptions from her brother, Luka told Rurik what Lani had told her about the seizkin, including the theft of her turtle box. She then tried to enforce the truth of it, but his constant interruptions so bombarded her, that she relinquished control of the conversation.

"You really are so gullible!" he ranted. "You were right to get me to go along with you on this trip."

"I *saw* the seizkin steal it!"

"You think you saw a pair of floating eyes, after sniffing some weird powder? Luka, that stuff you sniffed probably made you hallucinate. It made you see something, so that it

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looked like someone else was stealing it, but she was actually using her Tizqar telekinesis.”

Luka opened her mouth to rebut, but was struck silent by the logic of his argument. For a moment, she just looked out at the reeds. “But she gave me this glove, which is supposed to let me hit the seizkin if they try to steal from me again.”

“It’s just another thing to lead you on. Or maybe she’s so bogged down with narcotics, that it’s making her delusional and out of control of her own power. Whatever her issues are, Luka, don’t get yourself in the middle of it.”

“But if she’s so bad, then how come she’s the only one who can understand the captain? He seems to know her really well, and trust her enough to let her on the boat.”

“I don’t know, Luka, but I still don’t want you talking to her anymore. I don’t want my first letter to Sire and Dam from Alkat to be about how you’re in a nuthut. Do you promise?”

With a sigh of resignation, Luka nodded. “Okay.”

He put his arm around her, rubbing her shoulder. “You really drive me insane, you know that?” Getting a sudden thought, he took her face in his hands, examining her eyes. “Seem to be fine.” He then squeezed a quick hug and said, “Well, I guess I won’t be taking anymore of those long naps. Gotta keep my eye on you.”

Luka remained silent. She was too embarrassed to speak any further on the topic, and the calls of the distant egrets were coming closer. The Nest was their next stop and was the largest nesting area of egrets. It was the first area in the Stretch to be declared a reserve, a place where hunting was against the law in order to protect the wildlife that thrived there. The egrets seemed aware of such a privilege, as they fearlessly remained in place as the boat floated into their midst, only backing off enough to be out of its way, then going about their business. There were a hundred birds total at least, brightening the dark marsh with their white feathers. Many were lounging or perched in trees, while some were dunking their beaks into the water to fish.

Enzo rang the bell, and all the passengers herded up the stairs to see. Esfir made it up the hatch first, in time to caution the others not to startle the egrets with loud noises. They spread out along the sides of the ship and kept their expressions of awe to a low rumble. Kuzma and Darya reached into their pockets for handfuls of breadcrumbs they had



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prepared earlier, and held out their filled palms in an attempt to entice one of the birds to approach. One egret near the boat sampled Kuzma's breadcrumbs, and after it gave a call of encouragement, another egret came to eat Darya's.

Yuli asked, "You really think you should be feeding them like that?"

"Why not?"

Both egrets then began calling out to others, and the call of those egrets started to fill the air. Soon, a flock from either side of the boat fluttered onto the deck, walking over to the two girls, snapping their beaks expectantly. Ilya shrieked and backed away toward the captain's cabin, her uncle trying to calm her down. When they did not receive any food, the egrets began pecking at the passengers' clothes and hair in search of it. Luka chuckled, actually more amused by it, and pat the egret's head to try to settle it. Rurik tried to swat one away from him, but the egret only squawked defiantly and snipped at his sleeve.

"That's why not," Yuli said as he pulled his arm away from one bird.

"How do we get them away?" Darya asked as she tried to back away from two egrets who took interest in her.

Then, a loud, peculiar sound cut through the air—it sounded like a large crocodile gnashing its teeth. It greatly flustered the egrets, who immediately took to the air and left the boat. All at once, all the surrounding egrets as well flapped into the sky with a whirlwind whoosh of hundreds of fluttering wings. Their breeze tousled the passengers' hair and clothes until they were far into the sky and the surrounding swamp.

Enzo emerged from his cabin with his hands cupped around his mouth, the frightening thunderstrike gnashing coming from him. When he saw that no egrets remained, he silenced and lowered his hands. He then shook his head with heavy disappointment, directed at Kuzma and Darya—undeniably, he was scolding them for having fed the egrets. He then returned to his cabin.

"We apologize," the girls said in waning tones.

"We didn't know it would be a problem," Kuzma said.

"Yeah," Darya agreed, "we didn't mean to ruin it."

"Hey, I thought it was great!" Yakim exclaimed. "When they all went up at once, that was really neat."



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Yuli had wanted to observe the egrets more, but to make the girls feel better, he added, “Yeah, it was like a cloud ascending. And sounded like a rainstorm.”

They all offered words of comfort as they descended through the hatch. Luka planned to as well but was distracted at the sight of a single feather floating down from one of the egrets. As her brother descended ahead of her, she remained on deck alone to watch the feather slowly fall. She smiled impishly as she tried to catch it, but the swipe of her hands through the air only made it float away and over the side of the boat. For a moment, she watched it flow along the surface of the water, then turned away toward the hatch. But looking past to the captain’s cabin gave her an idea—she did not promise not to talk to Enzo. She knew it was a foolish endeavor to talk to a mute man—a man who was a rather imposing figure—but she wanted to know the truth about Lani Ouranos. Another fact which heightened her curiosity was how he had scared away the egrets: the sound he made had voice behind it. Perhaps he was not incapable of talking.

The door to the captain’s cabin was open, and Luka saw Enzo sitting at a table, looking over a route map. She knocked on the door, and he gestured for her to enter.

Luka entered in silence, slowly approaching the table, second-guessing her decision more and more. She never noticed before from the respectful distance she usually stood at that he had a scar. It was healed over into a dark line but was strange, in that it began at the top of his right eye, circled around the eye to the right and down to his cheek, which then trekked straight in a diagonal, stopping near the center of his cheek.

Enzo suddenly turned his head up to her, and for a moment, she was caught in his steely eyes. He raised an eyebrow.

“I, uh...” Luka began. “...h-have some questions.” She then hurriedly added, “If that’s okay.” He pulled out the chair next to him, and she sat down. “I just want to know...I want to know about Lani Ouranos.”

He nodded and clamped his fist to his chest.

“You mean you love her?”

He swayed his head slightly.

“You mean you’re good friends?”

He nodded.





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“Well, does she...? I don’t mean to be insulting or anything, but is she...?” Luka was too afraid to ask out loud.

Enzo twirled his finger by his temple with his eyebrow raised. He then shook his head and waved his hand.

“Oh. So, all that seizkin stuff, and the pollen—it’s all true?”

He nodded, then with his finger crossed the palm of his right hand, then put his palm to his chest. It was a gesture commonly paired with the vow, *I swear to it*.

“Have you ever seen a seizkin? Or even, you know, sniffed the pollen?”

He swayed his head and showed his wrist, which bore a tattoo of the Kaday rune symbol.

“Oh, you know about them because of your Spirit Mastery. How long have you known Lani, then?”

Their somewhat one-sided conversation was interrupted when Luka heard her name being called. Stepping out of the cabin, she saw her brother looking around the deck. When he saw her coming out of the captain’s cabin, he gestured for her to come out. She walked to him, and before he could say anything, she made up an excuse. “I just wanted to learn how he did that noise he made. Might come in handy.”

Rurik nodded, though his expression was doubtful. “Show me, then.”

Luka clamped her hands to her mouth and attempted the sound but did not succeed. “Well, I can’t do it very well yet. I need to practice.”

He hooked his arm around hers, pulling her along toward the hatch. “You need to add your egret experience to your journal, don’t you?”

“Right.”

“And you want to listen to me practice my basitar, right?”

“Of course.”

“Good.” With that, they descended back to their room.



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Luka filled her journal with the events of the day, including any thoughts on Lani and Enzo. She was grateful for her brother playing his music—the low, gentle pitch of his basitar was always soothing, especially since he played it well. Usually, the instrument was used as back-up in a band, but Rurik knew how to make it sing as a lead. However risky it was to try to make one’s living entirely off a music career, Luka had confidence in her brother’s talent succeeding.

The bell rang from above, then the boat suddenly lurched to the left, causing Luka and Rurik to tumble to the floor. Luka rose to her feet and looked out the window, gripping the sill to steady herself. The scenery was rushing by, and she could see that a strong current in the water was carrying the boat.

“I think we’ve hit the Cold River Current,” Rurik remarked.

“Look how fast we’re going!” Luka said, pointing out the window at the blurred trees and reeds.

Rurik looked out the window. “Wonder how we’re going to cross out of it. We need to continue on the other side to get to the Totem Tidepool.”

“Let’s go up and see.”

“No way, Luka; if you fall overboard, the current will take you away for good.”

Luka was already halfway out the door as he spoke. She promised, “I won’t leave the hatch.”

Rurik followed closely behind as Luka opened the hatch, only rising enough for her head to peer out. She had to kneel on the steps to keep her balance as the boat sped along the river. Looking toward the stern, she saw Enzo gripping the handle of the rudder and keenly watching the passing landscape. A brightly painted wooden post appeared to the right, and Enzo immediately pulled back hard on the rudder. The boat tilted haphazardly, triggering Rurik to pull Luka down and lock the hatch shut above them. They were mashed against each other as the boat struggled to turn to the right. A scream issued from one of the cabins—they both supposed it was likely Ilya. The boat thrashed one final time, then steadied itself again in the smooth, slow water—it escaped the Cold River Current.

As the boat steadied, passengers began filtering out of their rooms to find out the welfare of their comrades. Luka went out the hatch to check on the captain, Rurik in tow.





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Enzo was a skilled sailor obviously, but she wanted to be sure he had come out of the turbulence with his feet still on deck. The rudder was abandoned at the stern, but there was a rope knotted to it which hung taut over the side of the boat. Two large hands suddenly shot up and grasped onto the sides of the boat, and Enzo's head emerged. Luka and Rurik helped him back up onto the deck, where he coughed a couple times to clear the river water from his throat.

“Are you alright?” Rurik asked.

Enzo nodded, rising to his feet and working to untie the rope from around his waist and the rudder.

Luka remarked, “It was a fine idea to tie yourself to the ship like that.”

He took a wet rag that had been tucked under his belt and handed it to Luka. Curious, she wrung the water from the rag and realized that it was a patchwork fur glove, the twin of the one that Lani had given her.

Misunderstanding, Luka asked, “Doesn't she need this one?”

Enzo just met her eyes as he tossed the untied rope overboard.

Something within her sank, and she dashed down through the hatch to the farthest cabin down. The door was unlocked. Going inside, her brother along with her, she saw all the furniture turned over, as she suspected was the case for all the cabins. However, its occupant was nowhere—not even hidden behind the fallen table or under the bottom bunk bed.

“She's gone...” Luka concluded, her voice quiet in shock.

“Ouranos e'Kinbornu?” Rurik asked.

“She must have been on deck with him when we hit the current.” In a half-daze, she began searching around the room, righting the furniture and examining any items she came across.

“What are you doing?” her brother asked.

“There must be something. She had to leave behind something, maybe, about the seizkin, and how she was going to research them, and—”

“There *were* no seizkin, Luka.”

“I just...I don't know, I...” She sat on the bottom bunk, staring at the ground. “She



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really didn't seem like a bad person. Whether she was hallucinating or whatever, I mean, she just seemed like a good person. She really did. And she seemed so happy that I was talking to her, and that I believed what she was saying." She picked up a stray paper and glanced at it, seeing that it was blank. "I was just hoping I could find something that would tell me more about her."

Rurik asked cautiously, "Was she your friend?"

"I don't know. I guess. Maybe. It's just sad to think that someone didn't make it. And now she can't finish what she came to do." She forced a smirk and grazed her hand across his bald head. "With two of you on board, this sort of thing isn't supposed to happen."

"A bald head can only do so much," he said with a light tone, causing her to laugh a little. "Come down to the common room."

"I will, in a couple minutes."

Respecting the distance she needed, Rurik left for the common room, leaving her alone in the cabin. With a hollow sigh, Luka rested her head on the pillow. Something crinkled with the weight of her head. Sitting up, she picked up the pillow by its case and shook it out, along with a packet of folded papers and a drawstring purse. She opened the purse and immediately recognized the yellow pollen—the purse held at least ten handfuls. Then, unfolding the papers, she saw a journal of notes regarding the seizkin, including the day and time of each sighting or encounter. As she sat and read all the entries, she noticed a reoccurring theory surrounding Alkat. Lani had suspected that it was where all the seizkin were taking their stolen goods. In her latest entry, the one with the current date, read:

*I have not been seeing as many Seizkin as I expected to on the Great Drift, but I am still determined that this is the right course, and Enzo agrees. As soon as we dock at Alkat, I will waste no time. I will go directly to the Shadowcast.*

Luka reread the passage several times until she noticed that it ended with a comma rather than a period. It was unfinished. Lani had been somehow interrupted before she could complete the passage.





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Stowing away the things in her travel bag in her cabin, she found that all their furniture was upright—it had slid out of place, but was still upright. As she spoke with the others in the common room, she discovered that their cabins too had only been shifted out of order, but nothing tipped or overturned. Her thoughts dwelt to the purse full of pollen, wondering if she should use it to check for seizkin. But before she could make a decision in the debate of seizkin versus illusion, the deck bell rang to announce their arrival to Totem Tidepool.



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