



RUNES OF GALLIDON

Discover a world. Forge its future.

The Great Drift, part 10

Maia Jacomus

a novella chapter set in the world of Runes of Gallidon

Even clamped shut, Luka's eyes burned. She tried prying them open again, but the bright white forced them shut. She started to hear cries of panic rise up, claims of blindness. But gradually, she was able to keep her eyes open at a squint. Her eyes watered with the effort, but now she could see. The armor worn by the Sentries glinted and gleamed. Every ripple and wave of water sparkled silver. Even standing, Luka could see every grain in the wood planks at her feet. All the wood in her sight—the pier, the boardwalk, the tavern across the way—looked more bold and golden than their usual flat grey. All the people, in their natural pallor, seemed to glow, reminding her of her first time seeing the moon. And she could see the trees. She could count them, she could count their branches and leaves, and the leaves varied in the most beautiful and rich hues of green she had ever known.

As Luka's eyes adjusted, she dared to look up. She could see the sky, just as she had seen it at Sunray, but the blue was blushed with pink clouds. She wanted to explore every corner of it, but it was too bright, and she had to look back down again. And what unfolded was even more miraculous than the burst of sunlight.

Her brother Rurik was staring directly at a seizkin standing at his feet. He knelt down to get a better look, then gently prodded it with his finger. The seizkin batted his finger away and folded its arms in contempt. Luka watched as others began to notice the dark creatures that surrounded them. Some pointed, some waved, some tried to catch one or talk to one.

"What's that?" one Sentry asked. He was staring at the seizkin atop Lani's head. He held it around the middle and lifted under its arms to pick it up. The seizkin chattered, then easily slipped out and flew away. The seizkin on Luka's head followed.

Just as everyone was adjusting to the light, a shadow crept across the pier. Turning around, Luka saw the tidal wave encroaching upon Alkat.

Lani broke the astonished silence by shouting, "Say it, Shamaness! Tell everyone who it is they see!"

Shamaness Sarvyva stared at the wave, then frantically searched for an escape, saw none.

"*Tell them!*" Lani persisted.

A spray of water hit Sarvyva's cheek. In an eruption of fear, the Shamaness screamed, "Seizkin! *They're seizkin!*"

The wave rocked backwards and collapsed, creating no more than a surge of water that lifted the level by mere inches. Then, as though hundreds of sinkholes opened in the ground, the water rapidly sank back down, past everyone's feet, past the boardwalk planks, down to its proper seasonal level.

The Sentries released Luka and Lani from their stock restraints and apprehended the Shamaness, who now looked like an absolute monster with her violet makeup dripping like blood down her face. She sobbed and screamed shrill protestations as she was escorted to the court den. Luka and Lani looked to each other and embraced. Seeing Rurik approach with an apologetic expression, Luka locked him in a crushing hug. Freeing himself from his sister's enthusiasm with a chuckle, he offered his hand to Lani to shake.

He said simply, "I apologize."

The Great Drift, part 10

Maia Jacomus

Lani smirked and accepted his hand with a nod.

People continued to marvel at the sunlight and the seizkin. Some demanded the return of stolen property, to which the seizkin kicked them in the nose and flew off.

“Son of a bilge rat...” Lani murmured. Shading her eyes with her hands, she was looking up toward the top of the trees where a silhouette danced between the rays of light.

Luka and Rurik turned to look. Someone was descending through the trees by rope rigging. The closer it came, the wider Luka grinned. It was Enzo. He lowered himself over the pier, then set foot on the planks and worked to untie himself from the rigging. A guandao was sheathed to his back.

“Doing a little gardening?” Lani asked snidely. She burst into laughter and embraced him with a hearty slap on the back. Then she rubbed his bald head and said to Luka, “Didn’t I know it? I knew he had some brilliant plan!”

“You mean,” Rurik said, “it wasn’t the Spirits tearing down the branches?”

Luka replied, “He knew that the only way to prove that seizkin exist was to shed sunlight on them.” She shook his hand with a beaming smile. “Thank you so much, Enzo! You’re amazing!”

Enzo held out his hand face-up with his head bowed, put his fist to his head, then his heart, pointed to Lani and himself, then repeated the first gesture.

Lani translated, “He’s thanking you for believing in us and helping us. And so do I.”

“Does this mean you’ll return to Kinbornu?” Luka asked.

Lani smiled dismissively. “I don’t know. Even with all the sun shining on the plains, I wasn’t able to prove myself. I’d have to have seizkin cooperation, and so far—“

A seizkin landed on Enzo’s shoulder and chattered. Enzo pointed to the seizkin, then to Lani, then held out his hand and lifted it.

“It wants to help me?” Lani asked.

Enzo drew his hands to his head, then joined them into a fist.

“She wants to help me? How do you know?”

He gestured between the seizkin and his ear, held out two fingers and narrowed the space between them, then gestured to everyone around.

“They speak our language, but their voices are too light for us to understand?”

Enzo nodded.

“But Enzo can hear what they’re saying?” Rurik asked.

Lani scoffed. “Enzo can hear a needle dropping into the water. That’s how he knew about the seizkin without using the pollen.”

Enzo continued to listen to the seizkin, translated what he heard into gestures, which Lani translated for Luka and Rurik.

“This seizkin says they wanted to live in the Stretch because it’s much safer for them. One of them planted a seiznip seed to grow from the trunk of Tu’enta’s rivenwood tree, and Tu’enta was happy to help it grow. Sarvyva was at the tree in time to watch a seizkin birth from the bloom. When she realized that no one else could see them, she pleaded with them to help her. After the council decided she would be the Shamaner, she wanted to keep the seizkin with her, and threatened them with a law forbidding the growth of seiznip plants in the Stretch, that she would have her Sentries destroy them all. So they obeyed her.”

“While none of the seizkin minded stealing, there were some who objected to any acts of violence they were commanded to do. Huh. It seems they even had debates over how to deal with me.

The Great Drift, part 10

Maia Jacomus

And they felt that the worst came when they were ordered to steal from Tu'enta's tree. They tried to talk Shamaness Sarvyva out of it, but she was angry that a Spirit was richer than she was. This female seizkin refused to steal from the tree and so was assigned to the group who would watch over me and Luka. And the more she watched us oppose the Shamaness, the more she realized that she had to do the same. And now she wants to make up for the difficulties they've caused me." Lani smiled, and seemed to have a tear in her eye. "I would be grateful to have your help. Do you have a name?"

The seizkin told it to Enzo, who wrote it in the air.

"Agra...Agrafena? Thank you, Agrafena. I would really be grateful if you came to Kinbornu with me." Lani forced a laugh to clear voice. "I guess that means that I get to go home. Finally. Ah, Enzo? Would you come with? I don't know if I could...I mean, to see everyone again..." She sighed to calm her nerves. "I couldn't do it without you to keep me from screaming and running in the opposite direction."

Enzo put his arm around her in a half-hug, and she rested her head on his shoulder.

"Alright, come on, everyone," Rurik said, heading for the boardwalk.

"What?" Luka asked.

"We need to celebrate now. I thought that was obvious."



The Waning Moon Tavern was full beyond capacity. Rurik was in the performer's seat, playing his basitar and singing the new song he had composed that week. Yuli and Ilya danced freely, unconcerned about making the correct steps with the necessary poise. Enzo and Lani sat at the bar, telling stories with roars of laughter and ordering each other increasingly potent drinks as a dare. Luka sat with Yakim, sharing a platter of the most unusual house specials on the menu, struggling to hear their own conversation over the din.

"We should be set up to trade by the end of next week," Yakim said, talking of his brother Yuli and himself. "Are you going to keep working with Arkadi, or have you decided on something else yet?"

"Actually, Shamaneir Danil wants me to be a liaison between the seizkin and the humans, to help us all coexist. Of course I have to learn how to understand them first. The Shamaneir wants to teach me meditation to help improve my hearing." Luka shrugged. "We'll see if it works out."

Yakim nodded. Then he shifted his cup awkwardly between his hands and asked, "Would you like to meet for dinner, maybe on a regular basis? Two or three times a week?"

She smiled and said, "How about every other day?"

"That would fit with me." He smiled and reached for her hand.

Lani stumbled over and put Luka's right arm over her shoulder. "Come here, come on."

"Where are we going?"

"Everyone, outside!" she announced to the room.

Luka teetered, trying not to put pressure on her bandaged right ankle as she walked with Lani and nearly half the tavern's occupants outside. Alkat's usual black night had a deep blue glow. Everyone outside the tavern tilted their heads upward to gaze at the soft white moon as it came free from the canopy. Luka remembered the first time she had seen the moon, lying on the deck of *The Heron*. It looked the same in Alkat—the exact same. She wondered if it looked the same everywhere,

The Great Drift, part 10

Maia Jacomus

from Kinbornu, from the Isles, from the Wastelands. For a moment, she became caught up in the idea of traveling to each place to explore every possibility of the moon and sun. But as she held the smooth wooden rail of the boardwalk and watched the velvet ripples of the water below, she decided against it.

Luka had relied on the Great Drift to take her where she belonged, and it did. And she was convinced that the moon wouldn't be worthwhile anywhere else.



Luka e'Lagun, as sketched by Yakim



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