



# RUNES OF GALLIDON

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## *The Great Drift, part 7*

Maia Jacomus

*a novella chapter set in the world of Runes of Gallidon*

Luka navigated through the crowded tavern and up the stairs to the inn's corridor of available rooms. She knocked on the door closest to the stairs, and her brother answered it.

"Come on in," Rurik said casually, turning again into the room. "I ordered up some roast beef this time, thought we'd have something different."

Luka stepped in and set her package on the desk. "You must be telepathic, because I got something different, too. Kappa clusters."

"Really? I haven't had those for years."

Rurik began serving out the roast beef. As he did so, his eyes constantly drifted to his sister's, which were staring down at the table complacently. He sat down as he ground some seasoning onto his portion of beef and asked, "Bakery was busy, huh?"

"Yeah, really busy," Luka replied, her voice lilting. "You know, it usually is at the end of the week." She fell silent as she began to grind seasoning onto her portion of beef.

"How's work?"

"Good. Fine. Shouldn't be too much longer until Ilya and I can afford a house."

He took one bite of his food, then blurted out, "Okay, what's wrong?"

Luka furrowed her brow. "Nothing. This beef is really good."

"What. Is. Wrong?" Rurik spoke slowly, articulating his words.

Luka didn't want to tell her brother, knowing what he thought of Lani and the seizkin. But she also knew that once he asked such a question, he wouldn't stop until he received the correct answer. And without any other useful guidance to follow, she decided to tell him. "If I'm going to tell you, then I get to tell you everything, which means I start at the beginning, and you don't interrupt me until I say I'm done."

He put down his utensils with an eye roll. "It's about that outsider thief's delusions, isn't it?"

Luka glared at Rurik sternly, and his nod of consent told her that he would allow her to tell everything. And so she did, from the first time she spoke to Lani and first heard of the seizkin, up to the most recent confusions of Lani being alive and Enzo being a folk hero. Rurik listened with annoyance, frustration, and disbelief, but all beneath the promised silence.

When his sister finished, Rurik shook his head and said, "How in the world did someone like you wind up so deep in such a sinkhole?" He sighed and ran his hands across the short blades of dark hair regrowing on his scalp. "Whatever this is is big; it concerns the Shamaness. Chances are, the Shamaness is in danger from Lani, possibly Enzo."

"But Enzo's rescued the Shaman before."

"People change, Luka. Maybe Lani changed him. Maybe sniffing too much of that pollen addled his brain."

Despite her better judgment, Luka wondered aloud, "So there's not any chance that Enzo could be on the right side?"

Rurik pointed to her plate as a gesture to stop talking and eat instead. "We're talking about the Shamaness. Do you know how many corrupt leaders the Stretch has had in its time? Three. And they were all from the same twisted family. Our leaders have a clean record. Not to mention that the

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Shamaness couldn't benefit from having some kind of invisible creatures steal for her. Shamans don't value material things; they have no use for them. Especially when the people of Alkat willingly provide her with everything she could possibly need."

Luka quietly took a bite of her food, knowing that he must be right.

"We need to tell the Sentries about it. Have them look out for Lani and Enzo, so the Shamaness can be protected." With that, he put down his utensils with a resolute clink and rose from his chair. "Come on."

Luka paused, poised to eat another bite of roast beef. "Now?"

"The sooner, the better. We can eat when we get back; it shouldn't take long."

With a sigh, Luka rose up and followed her brother out the door.

It was easy to find Sentries; there were always two stationed across the street from the Waning Moon Tavern, as the establishment was prone to loud or violent disturbances once every week. Rurik made the report to the Sentries. He told them that he suspected the Shamaness may be in danger of two conspirators, Lani Ouranos e'Kinbornu and Enzo el'Adal Berat. He explained that the outsider Lani was using a mind-altering pollen and her telekinetic skills to accuse the Shamaness of controlling criminal creatures known as seizkin, and that she possibly used the pollen to convince Enzo to help her. The Sentries listened with sincerity, acknowledging the presence of the outsider described and her possible animosity with the Stretch on the whole. Rurik looked to Luka for any important details he might have missed, but she remained silent. And so, their duty done, they returned to their room in the tavern to finish eating.

By the time Luka was returning to the Traveler's Respite, there was already a commotion. Apparently the Sentries had discovered that Lani was staying there. Luka just stepped over the threshold of the entrance when she nearly bumped into one of the two Sentries who were holding Lani with rope in a belt knot—her wrists were tied together, then tied to her belt. Her ankles were also tied together, allowing them barely three inches between, forcing the Sentries to drag her. Lani shouted multiple protests, insisting that they hear her out. As soon as she caught sight of Luka, she fell completely silent and still. Her eyes, wide with her wild struggle, gazed stern as stone.

"Did you tell them?" she asked in a dangerously steady tone.

Luka averted her eyes and pushed past the Sentries into the inn, and told herself with every step to her room not to look back. As she shut the door behind her, she tried to let the relief wash over her. With Lani imprisoned, Luka would never have to worry about her or her delusions ever again. She was finally completely free. But she couldn't help the guilt of feeling that perhaps she had done something wrong.



Yakim rapped on the door. It was time to walk to Arkadi's for work. While Yakim tried to maintain a conversation, Luka remained silent, looking all around her as they walked along the boardwalk. Something seemed different, looked different. But she couldn't say what. And when she asked Yakim if he noticed anything, he merely shrugged. She watched the passersby, noted every building they passed. While the multitude who traversed the boardwalk seemed completely new every day, the buildings were always the same, and so they were today. But she couldn't help staring. They

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seemed newer somehow, as though every building had been rebuilt overnight—but that was hardly plausible.

“Must have been a windy night,” Yakim remark. He had been talking all the while, but she only just started paying attention.

“It seemed a quiet night to me,” she replied.

“But look at all the brush.” Looking at the ground, they saw that it was littered all over with branches, leaves, and twigs. Even with all the morning bustle to push it around and sweep it off the boardwalk, plenty remained. “Must have been windy.”

“Hmm. I guess I slept through it.” She looked upward toward the canopy. Stranger still, even the trees looked different, fresher. She could trace one tree from its trunk to the tip of its high branches much more easily than she could remember. But maybe it really wasn’t different, maybe the effects of the pollen just wore off.

Entering Arkadi’s workshop, they both bid him good morning as they walked by to their spaces.

“Have you heard about the Baron?” he asked, looking up from his loom.

Yakim shrugged, but Luka said, “Yes, I did.”

Arkadi shook his head. “I never thought he would let it bother him like this.”

While Yakim kept walking, Luka halted. “Let what bother him?”

“The whole business with his nephew and the Shamaness. That must be why he’s doing all this now, I bet.”

As Yakim noticed Luka’s growing interest in the conversation, he stopped as well. “What about his nephew?”

“Does no one in Lagun know anything about the Baron el’ Adal Berat?” Arkadi snorted in disbelief. “A very unfortunate story. The Earl el’ Adal Berat, that’s the Baron’s nephew, was eligible for the Shaman’s seat at the same time as Sarvya. When the Earl wasn’t chosen as the Shaman, he killed himself out of disgrace. Hurt the Baron very deeply. Affected him even more than we all thought, if he’s now conspiring against Shamaness Sarvya like this.”

Luka’s brow furrowed as she processed his story. Concerned, Yakim asked, “Something wrong?”

Luka shook off her expression and said, “No, nothing. It’s just... I had always suspected that Lani Ouranos, that she was sort of the one in charge, that it was all her idea. But now I guess it seems like it could have all been Enzo’s plan to begin with.”

Arkadi sighed heavily with disappointment. “I never thought a man like Baron Enzo would be subject to such revenge. He was a better man in his younger days.” He then scoffed with a slight choke in his voice. “My youngest grandson was named after him.”

Luka continued up the stairs to her spinning wheel, ready to let its graces carry away her concerns. But her rhythm was constantly uneven, creating thread that varied in thickness along its length. Finally, with a huff a frustration, she declared that she needed fresh air, hurrying from the building before anyone could protest or follow her. She didn’t slow her pace until she reached the courtyard of Alkat, not a block away from the Shadowcast. Her first step inside sent her quivering heart into her throat, but she stuck with her purpose and asked to speak with the warden.

The Sentry warden was easy to find, as his build and overall demeanor could have subdued even Enzo. The insignia on his vest was the final clue.

Luka asked, “Is Lani Ouranos being held here?”

He nodded. “Her trial’s this afternoon, before the Shamaness.”

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“I’d like to visit her.”

“You’d like to, eh? And why would you like to?”

Luka heard a tone of suspicion in his deep voice. “Just to talk to her. We came over on the Great Drift on the same boat. I mean, I don’t have anything to do with what she was doing, but, well, we were sort of friends, but before I really knew what she was doing.”

The warden chuckled slightly and said, “Come this way. You can have five minutes.”

He led her out the back and across a boardwalk to a solitary cell. He stopped halfway across, allowing her to go on her own the rest of the way. Lani’s eyes became visible in the small slit window of the door, narrowed.

“What have you come for?” she asked with resentment.

Luka pushed past the fear clinging to her voice, stood up on the balls of her feet, and met Lani’s eyes. “I want the truth. The real truth of everything. I’m sick of going back and forth, hearing one thing then another, and I’m sick of this...this whole stupid business! I have to hear the whole truth. You’re imprisoned now, awaiting trial by the person you were fighting against, so you have no reason to lie anymore.” By the end, it was becoming difficult to control the quaking in her voice, mixed with anger and frustration.

Lani’s eyes cast cautiously for a moment to the warden, then allowed the door to muffle her voice as she explained herself confidentially. “Enzo and I have been friends a long while. We met years ago when he came out into the Sea of Grass. When my tribe rejected me for my theories about the seizkin and I came out to the Stretch, he wanted to help me so that I could maybe rejoin my tribe. As we worked together, it became clear that the seizkin weren’t just my problem.”

“Last year, Sarvyia wasn’t the only one eligible to be the next Shaman. So was Enzo’s nephew Senek. In order to decide who would be Shamaner, the chiefs proposed a demonstration of Spirit Mastery. Whoever possessed the strongest ability would be the heir. Senek did well; he asked the Spirits to grant the chiefs a sign, so they told him the exact gifts each chief presented to the Spirits most recently, and he recited it to them. The chiefs were impressed. Then came Sarvyia’s turn. She made the Spirits blow a strong wind into the room, rustling the curtains, then made them fly multiple objects across the room. They gave her the inheritance.

“Senek met with Enzo afterward and told him about the meeting. He said that when Sarvyia was demonstrating her ability, he couldn’t sense any Spirits around her at all. Enzo meditated on his claim, and the Spirits told him what had really happened: Sarvyia was commanding seizkin.” She paused, and her gaze fell. “Before either Enzo or Senek could report it, Enzo found his nephew hung from the rafters of his room. The Spirits, who see all, again told Enzo what really happened: It was the seizkin. They killed him, likely by order of Sarvyia, who was afraid of being exposed.

“Since then, it seems Enzo and other Spirit Masters have had extreme difficulty making any connections with the Spirits, especially the farther north we traveled. I guessed that they must be angered by Sarvyia’s deceptions. Furthermore, I told Enzo that she must still be controlling the seizkin, in order to keep up appearances, encouraging them to bring their families all to Alkat, where everyone would be convinced that the Shamaness’s abilities are so strong, that Spirits interact in their daily lives. I knew it had to be, because seizkin don’t live like we do, they wouldn’t want our material possessions, like the sort of things they’ve been stealing. So I knew that Alkat would be the best place to call out Sarvyia and try to prove her guilt.”

Luka exhaled softly with a subtle grin—she finally knew the truth, and she knew it to be the

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truth. The raging plague of confusion was finally lifted, and furthermore, she could trust in her friends again. This quickly shifted to fear. “But if the Shamaness has had Senek killed, then she’ll probably have you...in your trial...” She cursed, then fervently whispered, “What can I do? There’s got to be something I can do.”

After checking to see that the warden was still keeping his distance, Lani whispered, “Enzo has a house in the Eveshade Neighborhood. In his study, hanging on the wall, is the guandao he received from the Chief of Adal Berat. Take a boat, so that you’re not carrying it along the boardwalk. Then come here—”

She silenced as the warden’s pounding steps sounded.

“Time’s up. Come along.”

Luka followed along without a word, wondering what exactly a guandao was. If she could find out, then maybe she could figure out how to help Lani. The only thing to do was to go to Enzo’s house.

She left the court den and stopped at the nearest inn for directions to the Eveshade Neighborhood. As she wrote down the directions, she became surprised with herself. While she was afraid of possibly committing the biggest mistake of her life—helping an accused conspirator escape from prison—she was actually excited. She had been so conflicted because she felt all along that Lani and Enzo should be trusted. Now that all that was reconciled with the truth, she knew she was doing the right thing. And she would do whatever she could to help, no matter what Rurik or anyone else would say. This was why she took the Great Drift, this was the reason she left her hometown—to be independent, to make her own decisions. And this decision was a great one.

And a tremendously dangerous one.



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