



RUNES OF GALLIDON

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The Great Drift, part 9

Maia Jacomus

a novella chapter set in the world of Runes of Gallidon

By the time they reached the Silvershade neighborhood of the Traveler's Respite, Lani and Luka noticed with exchanged glances of worry that the water level was higher. So much higher, in fact, they were able to reach the boardwalk without a ladder. Lani directed the coracle to the inn's boardwalk, and the both of them rose slowly and carefully to stand and peer out over the boardwalk. There were still more twigs, leaves, and vines littering the plank pathways, causing passersby to crunch, crack, and snap as they walked.

"It's not even windy," Luka observed, "and there are more branches down than this morning."

"It must be the Spirits," Lani said. "They're offended by the seizkin's deception. Enzo was afraid it would come to this, and it could get worse yet."

Luka blinked. The town still looked different, but she couldn't pinpoint how. The outer walls of the Traveler's Respite looked fresh and new, the color of the wood more rich than she remembered. Even the people walking by looked different, their hair shinier and their skin more white than grey. It was lovely but eerie.

"This is what I'm thinking," Lani began, "we both get up on the boardwalk behind the inn. You go inside, and I'll stay behind—they might not notice another pale-skinned, black-haired person walking along, but they would certainly notice me. I'll help you reach a second floor window, and from there, do what you can to find Enzo or at least find out where he might have gone. If you see any chance of getting caught, just get back here, and we'll figure something else out."

Looking up, Luka pointed to the second window on the left. "Take me to that one. That should be my friend's room."

After pulling themselves up onto the boardwalk behind the inn, Lani squatted to allow Luka to step onto her shoulders. Grasping Luka's ankles, Lani slowly stood up. Luka leaned against the wall, walking her hands up towards the window.

"I need to get higher," Luka said.

"That's as high as I go, miss," Lani said, her voice strained with the effort.

Luka rapped her knuckles against the wall. Seconds later, Yakim was looking out over them. Upon seeing Luka, his eyes doubled in size. "What are you doing?!" he whispered loudly.

"Help me inside!" Luka whispered back, reaching her hands up.

Yakim gripped Luka by the wrists and pulled her inside. "What's going on? You left Arkadi's and never came back, there are Sentries in your room, and now you're sneaking in here through the window? And who was that with you?"

"I don't really have time to explain everything. But in short, the Spirits are angry, and I need to find Enzo. He may be the only one who can calm them."

"You mean Captain Enzo, from *The Heron*?"

"Yes." Luka's answer was accompanied by a low growl from her stomach.

Yakim sat her down on the bed. "I'll go look for him. You stay here. Ilya went down a short while ago to get some lunch. When she gets back, you can have my share."

"Thanks, Yakim. Be careful. If the Sentries figure out you're looking for Enzo, you might get in trouble."

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“Don’t worry.” He headed toward the door, but hesitated and said, “When I get back, can we talk?”

Luka shrugged. “Only if I have the time.”

With that, Yakim left, closing the door behind him. Luka had to wait in silence only a few minutes before Ilya entered, carrying a basket of food. When she saw Luka, she squeaked in surprise, prompting Luka to shush her.

“The Sentries can’t know I’m here!” Luka said, her voice hushed.

“What’s going on with you, Luka?” Ilya asked, fear displayed in every feature of her face.

Luka, becoming frustrated with questions, sighed and replied, “I’m trying to help the Spirits, but the Sentries think I’m a criminal. No one can know I’m here.”

Ilya set the basket on the table, warily keeping her eyes locked on her. “But then what are you doing here?”

“I’m looking for Enzo, and I thought he might be here. He’s proficient in Spirit Mastery.” Her stomach growled again.

“O-kay...” Ilya began to unpack the food. “Want something to eat?”

“Please and thank you,” Luka said eagerly, crossing to the table. “I’m sorry about frightening you.”

“I nearly fainted dead away when I walked into our room and found two Sentries standing there, loaded crossbows pointed at me.” Looking around the room, her fear seemed to mount. “Where’s Yakim?”

“He’s looking for Enzo for me.”

“Oh. Oh, he’s helping you.” That seemed to calm Ilya a little, and she handed Luka a portion of cooked perch, diced and seasoned marsh root, and a biscuit. With careful aim, Luka dropped the perch and half the biscuit down to Lani to eat, then sat at the table to eat the marsh root and the other half of the biscuit.

Ilya glanced out the window, suppressed a shriek, and sat herself at the table. “Isn’t that... from the Drift... who drowned?”

“Yeah,” Luka said dismissively, taking another bite of marsh root. She paused a moment, already having eaten all the marsh root, and looked up at Ilya. “I’m really sorry about all this. And I don’t want to get you into trouble. But it’s important I find Enzo.”

Ilya prodded at her food, pursing her lips. “Well, it just so happens I saw Enzo leave the Traveler’s Respite hours ago.”

“You did? Where did he go?”

“I was thinking of talking to him. I mean, I know he’s too old for me, uncle’s right about that, but I’ve always wanted to just talk to him. But he was in such a hurry, and then I heard Sentries shouting his name.” She shrugged. “I’m not sure where he went. But it was in the direction of the pier.”

Luka sat back in her chair. “And if he did go to the pier, he could be anywhere by now.” She heaved a heavy sigh, but smiled. “Thanks, Ilya.”

Luka took her biscuit and crossed to the window. “Maybe see if you find where Yakim went and tell him he can call off the search.” At the window, she signaled for Lani.

“Luka.” Ilya said.

Luka turned. “What?”

Ilya stared down at her food and said, “I don’t really have any other friends here. I’m afraid of

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living alone.”

Luka had never heard such a serious tone from her friend. “You won’t have to.” With that, she started to climb over the windowsill, but stopped. Looking down, she saw Lani thrashing around in the air. “What’s wrong?” she called.

With a growl, Lani tore something from her arm. “Seizkin! Get back inside!”

Luka felt small, powerful seizkin hands grab her left arm and start pulling her out the window. Luka clutched the sill with her right hand, even as she began falling headfirst to the ground below. Her legs slipped out of the window, and for a moment, Luka was suspended upright in the air. Then she lost her grip on the sill, dangling by her left arm. The seizkin holding her left arm struggled to stay airborne, gave up and let Luka go.

Luka fell heavily the rest of the way, landing awkwardly. Her right ankle buckled, and Luka dropped to her side. Ignoring the pain as best as she could, Luka brought out a pinch of pollen from her purse and sniffed it in time to see a seizkin staring her in the face. Swatting it aside, she slowly forced herself up on her left leg and leaned against the boardwalk railing.

“Are you all right?” Lani asked as she ripped a seizkin off her leg.

“Enzo’s not here,” Luka said. “He was last seen running toward the pier.”

Finally able to reach her sword, Lani drew it and used it to ward off the siege of seizkin. “Just back off already! You want to help the Shamaness live in delusion, fine, but now you’re going to incur the rage of the Spirits. Do you understand?”

“Do they understand our speech?”

“How else could the Shamaness command them?” Lani sliced the sword through the air, causing several to back away. “They just pretend not to understand us. Where’s your flail?”

Luka sighed. “In the boat.”

Lani looked over the side of the boardwalk. “Brilliant. And the boat’s floated away somewhere.”

To their surprise, the seizkin that had been pulling Luka’s hair glided down beneath the boardwalk, returned with the flail and handed it to Luka.

One of the seizkin that had been assaulting Lani flew down and seemed to scold the helpful one, shaking its fist, pointing, and making sounds in harsh tones. While Luka was mesmerized by the moment, watching as others joined their argument, Lani waved a silent gesture, and the two women crept away.

“We’ll have to swim for the pier,” Lani whispered. “It’s the only way to get there without being seen.”

Luka looked at the flail in her hands, her nose wrinkling. “I don’t think I can swim with this.”

Lani looked at her own weapon. “You know, you’re right. Unfortunately. We’ll have to leave them behind.” With a slight moan of complaint, Lani set her sword against the boardwalk railing.

Luka did not like the idea of sneaking around unarmed, but as long as she stayed near Lani, she felt that would be safe enough. Setting the flail down, she followed Lani into the water.

They swam beneath for as long as they were able, and would only stop for breath when they made it beneath another platform or another section of boardwalk. As they swam, they could feel the water stirring around them, and each time they surfaced, they noticed with increased uneasiness that the water level had risen about another full inch. By the time they reached the pier, there was only enough room between the water’s surface and the underneath of the planking to just lift up their heads.

“If Enzo did come to the pier,” Lani said, “he probably didn’t bother to sign out a boat. He

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probably just took off with one. But at least someone may be able to tell us where he went from here.” She pulled her hood up over her head. “I’m going to take a look.”

“Shouldn’t I?”

“With my darker skin, I camouflage better. I’ll take the first look. If it looks alright, then you can go on up and ask about Enzo.” Lani slowly drifted through the water to get out from under the pier, then pulled herself up enough to look out over the platform. As expected, there was a Sentry on patrol. She ducked her head down to report, “There is a Sentry. I’m not sure if there’s a way we can sneak around him, either.”

She felt something graze her hand, so she pulled away, but not fast enough. Looking up, the Sentry had a tight hold on her wrist. As he turned to call for a comrade’s assistance, Luka surfaced, bit his hand, and upon release, pulled Lani away from his reach, and they started swimming away as fast as they were able. However, Sentries of the Stretch were all excellently trained swimmers, and as soon as more Sentries arrived on the pier, they shed their armor and dove into the water. Their arms cut through the water like oars, and they quickly surrounded their quarry. Taking Lani and Luka by the arms, they dragged them through the water and back to the pier. The water was now level with the platform. Once standing on the pier, the two were held still as their wrists were pulled behind their backs and stone-carved stock restraints were clamped on, fastened with a pin lock.

“You are to be tried for conspiracy against the Shamaness,” the Sentry said. “If you assist in the capture of your co-conspirator, the Baron el’Adal Berat, you can avoid a death sentence.”

“Do it, Luka!” It was her brother Rurik, who had seen and heard the commotion from the boardwalk. He walked onto the pier, but one glance from the Sentries told him he had to keep his distance. “Get out of this while you still can. You can go back home to Lagun and completely cut all of this out of your life for good.”

By then, a crowd of onlookers had gathered, and was growing larger. Despite the look of disapproval and concern on her brother’s face, Luka decided they had to try what they could. She began talking with loud pronouncement, “What we have done was for the Spirits’ sake. The Shamaness has deceived everyone, and the truth has to be made known.”

The Sentries began ushering them toward the boardwalk. “For your own good, I suggest you remain silent,” one of them warned.

“The Shamaness is not an Adept of Spirit Mastery!” Lani shouted. Her declaration was so forceful, that Luka knew she must have been wanting to shout it for a long time. And in fact, as her loud cry startled the surrounding masses into silence, Luka could see a gleam cross her eye. But the silence only lasted seconds, as whispers and rebuts began to rise up. “Those which she calls Spirits are only creatures called seizkin, whom she commands to steal from all of you in order to support her delusion.”

A Sentry tried to stop her by clamping his hand over her mouth, but she bit down hard until he removed it.

Luka continued for her: “Haven’t you noticed all the fallen branches, the rising water? The Spirits are angry at her!” She could feel her blood pound through her with excitement. She knew that it couldn’t be proved; she knew that they were going to be led to death before the Shamaness, but she was still fighting. Despite the stock restraints and the sea of unbelievers, she felt a surge of power she had never known she was capable of.

The crowds parted as Shamaness Sarvyva herself appeared. Her face betrayed nothing—she was perfectly composed. “I do not anger the Spirits. Their accusations against me anger the Spirits. Luka, do

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not be a traitor to your people. Save yourself and us all from the Spirits' wrath by denouncing these lies fed to you by the outsider."

Lani lunged so fervently for the Shamaness, that she wrestled herself free from the Sentries—only to be caught and held again by five. Her tone like a roll of thunder, she said, "If you call me a liar or 'the outsider' one more time, I swear I'll tie your braids around your neck!"

The Shamaness bowed her head and put her palms together. Moments later, seizkin swooped down upon the pier, one landing at her feet. She whispered something, and the seizkin flew with searing speed head-first into Lani's abdomen, causing her to cough and fall to her knees. The crowd saw the outsider being magically assaulted, and gasped in awe.

"You see?" Shamaness Sarvya said. "Not only can I communicate with the Spirits, but I can bend them to my will."

Luka could feel a cool blast of wind against her face, and could see the water rippling and spilling onto the pier. "That wasn't a Spirit, it was a seizkin!" Luka protested.

"There is no such creature."

"They're too dark to see in the Stretch. They can only be seen by sniffing the pollen of the seiznip plants they're born from."

"What you have seen are illusions. The pollen has dulled your proper senses." A loud crack caused her to look upward, and everyone watched as a branch as large as a boardwalk fell from the canopy above and crashed into the water, splashing nearly everyone standing on the pier.

With this warning that made the surrounding people finally realize what sort of natural terror was building around them, Luka lost her sense of excitement and became furious. "Tell the truth, Shamaness Sarvya!"

"I have," she replied as she dabbed the water from her eyes. The violet makeup on her eyes, lips, and ears began to run and streak color across her face.

Luka felt tears of anger fill her eyes as she screamed, "Even with our home falling down around us, you still deny it?!"

"Sentries, bring them. They must come to judgment and proper punishment before the Spirits overwhelm us all."

Luka flexed her left heel against the ground to make it harder for them to drag her, but her sprained right ankle weakened her struggle. Lani collected herself and shouted, "What about Tu'enta, Shamaness? In Eveshade? If we were to go to the Shadowcast right now, we would find all *her* offerings lining *your* walls!"

Shamaness Sarvya shattered her composure with a nerve-shivering shriek to her Sentries: "*Silence them!*"

Before the Sentries could comply, seizkin swarmed Luka and Lani. One laid atop Lani's head, then wrapped its arms around her face and locked its fingers together beneath her chin to hold her mouth shut. Another did the same with Luka. To all else, it appeared as though they were shut by magic.

The water was now high enough to completely submerge the pier and the boardwalk. The winds were now strong enough to stir up large, crashing waves. A black shadow appeared in the distance, and as it rapidly rolled closer, everyone could see it was a wall of water, a tidal wave of incredible size. Several Sentries got to work ushering the people along, telling them to run as far in the other direction as possible to escape the wave's crash. But now being almost shin-deep in water, running or any quick movement was difficult, especially with masses of people packed together.

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Through the roar of the water, the wails of the wind, and the pounding stampede of panicked people, Luka could only hear the blood pounding in her ears. Looking around, she saw the city vanishing beneath the rising water. She saw seizkin soaring in a flock overhead, also trying to escape the water.

Then, in a blink, she saw white. Only scathing hot, featureless white. And she wondered if the total silence that fell meant that everyone else saw the white as well, or if her mind had finally reached its breaking point.



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