

Chapter LXXXVII: Spirit of Adventure

“LAND!” Rika cried as she threw herself onto the sand.

“Master?” Bradamante asked, confused.

“Are you planning on doing that for every island we visit?” Emiya drawled.

Ritsuka, who was looking much better than he had a few hours ago, sighed. “Yes, she probably is.”

“She’s done that before?” Drake asked, amused.

Rika rolled over, spreadeagle on the beach. “You can’t stop me!”

“You don’t have any right to complain about all of the sand you’ll be fishing out of your clothes, then,” I said mildly.

She sighed. “I hate sand. It’s rough, coarse, and it gets everywhere.”

I closed my eyes briefly and held my tongue. I should have expected that it was only a matter of time until Rika started pulling out the prequel memes.

“But...you’re lying on the beach, Senpai,” said Mash, confused.

“She’s making another reference,” Ritsuka explained wearily. “One that doesn’t have *anything to do* with pirates, this time.”

Rika stuck her tongue out at him.

Emiya shrugged and shook his head with mock exasperation. “You’d think she could at least stick to a theme if she was going to keep cracking those sorts of jokes.”

“Themes are for amateurs,” she declared as though she was the authority on such things. I was pretty sure a professional comedian would have disagreed.

“Well, fun and games aside...” Drake stepped forward, skirting around Rika only as much as she had to in order to avoid stepping on her, and she looked about the empty beach. “This dump sure is pretty boring, ain’t it? And here I thought we might actually find some clues about where this Grail you’re looking for is hanging around!”

“There isn’t really all that much here,” I agreed.

I didn’t have the entire island under my range, but I had enough of it to get a decent grasp on what was there, and it truly was fairly limited. The insect population was robust enough, if not particularly diverse, but there wasn’t really much else in terms of local fauna — ironically, it was mostly a handful of parrots of a species I didn’t immediately recognize. The terrain probably had a hand in that, because once you got off the beach, the forest didn’t go on for very long before the island turned sharply upwards.

That ridge I noticed when I was looking at the map earlier. It dominated a larger portion of the island than I originally thought.

“Aw, man!” Rika whined. “So this stop was just a huge waste of time?”

“I’m not detecting any Servants within the vicinity,” Mash reported. “I’m sorry, Senpai. It looks like there really isn’t anything here.”

“I guess we can’t find someone like Captain Drake on every stop we make,” Arash said with a wry smile.

“Of course not!” Drake said boisterously, laughing. “That said, you sure there ain’t anything worth finding on this island? Even if it ain’t much, there’s more to it than this beach, isn’t there? Plenty of places to hide treasure!”

And if we dug up the entire island looking for treasure, we’d be here for a decade.

“Sure enough,” I answered. “If someone hid treasure here, then we’re not going to be finding it anytime in the next century.”

“You sure about that?” Drake asked skeptically.

“If anyone buried treasure on this island, they didn’t do us the courtesy of leaving a big, red ‘X’ to mark the spot,” I said dryly.

There weren’t any areas of conspicuously upturned soil either. Nothing large enough that it could be actual buried treasure, at least. At best, it was probably one of the local birds digging for worms.

“Geez!” said Rika. She dug her hand into the sand; it slipped through her fingers faster than she could grab it. “It’s not a pirate adventure without booty to plunder!”

“Not *that* kind of booty,” Ritsuka rushed to add when Drake opened her mouth — no doubt, about to make a saucy remark about how she’d offered to let us plunder *her* booty last night.

“It *does* seem like a bit of a waste, though,” Arash remarked.

It wasn’t like it could ever have been that easy. The idea that we could solve the Singularity in an afternoon was nothing more than idle fantasy and wishful thinking.

“I guess we...just head back to the *Golden Hind*?” Mash said uncertainly.

I shook my head. “Not just yet.” And then I lifted my wrist, the one I had my communicator on. “As long as we’re here, we might as well —”

Beep-beep!

Before I could use it to contact Chaldea, however, Chaldea contacted us.

“Everyone,” said Romani, voice only this time, “we’re getting a few strange readings from that island you’re on right now.”

My brow furrowed. “Strange readings?”

“What kind of strange readings, Doctor?” asked Ritsuka.

“Really unusual ones,” said Romani. “It’s not a Servant, but whatever it is, it doesn’t read quite like a Phantasmal either. The structure is human, but it’s not...really a living thing. I’m sorry, I can’t really explain it.”

Rika climbed to her feet without seeming to care at all about the sand dusting her skirt and stockings. “*On* the island? Like, with us?”

I stretched out with my powers, scouring the island for any sign of what Romani might be talking about. I hadn’t seen anything special before, but it wasn’t like my coverage was perfect or without holes, so it wasn’t impossible that I’d missed something.

“Yes,” Romani replied, “and they seem to be heading right —”

“Wait.” My brow furrowed. “Where the hell did *they* come from?”

Everyone’s head swiveled in my direction. “They?” the twins asked, confused.

I pointed over at the forest, really not much more than a thick copse of trees that formed a sort of natural division of the island into three segments, just in time for a man in ragged sailor’s garb to stumble out onto the beach.

“Treasure!” he moaned, turning towards us with cutlass in hand.

“Loot!” another cried, coming out behind the first.

“Silver!”

“Gold!”

“Booty!”

More and more arrived, swelling the ranks until an army of about fifty “pirates” stood at the edge of the forest, all in varying clothes from different eras and different cultures. Some were Indian, some European, some were Middle Eastern, and there were even a few Chinese and Japanese in there, although they were far outnumbered.

“Treasure!” the first said again.

“Treasure!” the rest echoed. “Treasure! Treasure!”

“Uh,” said Rika, “guys...? I’m gonna go out on a limb here and say they want something.”

Deliberately, I avoided looking at Drake. The Grail. It was the only thing of real value that we had in our group, so it only made sense that it was what they were after.

“I thought this island was abandoned,” Ritsuka said faintly.

“It *was*,” I told them. “These guys came out of nowhere. Literally.”

“That’s them,” Romani’s voice crackled through my communicator. “That’s the source of this strange reading. Whatever they are, they’re human, they’re not alive, and they’re not Servants. It’s almost like they’re...shells of some kind. Containers? Filled with...with stuff. Some kind of pirate stuff.”

“You’re telling me we’re about to fight Tupperware?” Rika asked incredulously.

The first pirate lifted his sword. “TREASURE!”

The rest of them lifted their swords, too. “TREASURE!”

And then they did the most predictable thing ever: they charged down the beach at us, waving their swords about like flags.

“We can worry about what they are later!” I said. I lifted my arm and took aim. “Right now, worry about putting them down first!”

“Right!”

My first shot missed the lead pirate when he stumbled the sand, but the one immediately behind him staggered, fell, and burst apart before he could hit the ground, just like a Servant.

Not alive, not a Servant, but still human. Whatever they were, one good hit was enough to deal with them.

BANG was the sound of one of Drake’s flintlocks, and another of the charging pirates disappeared. Arash and Emiya’s arrows were silent by comparison, and even though they did the pirates the courtesy of aiming for disabling shots instead of lethal ones, it didn’t seem to make much difference. Each pirate took only one good hit before he was dispelled.

“GANDR!” the twins shouted, and they didn’t hesitate to fire into the crowd either.

Even if they’d been spending much more time learning magecraft with El-Melloi II and honing their bodies with Aife, their aim was just as good as it was the last time I had a session with them. A brief flash of pride shot through my chest — had they kept up their practice in their free time?

“Hey!” Rika said. “They’re just like Shadow Clones!”

Ritsuka didn’t comment, but his brow furrowed a little at the reference, whatever it was she was actually referring to, as he fired off another shot.

One by one, we mowed them down. With flintlock, arrow, or Gandr, it didn’t matter which, they all disappeared the same way when hit. Bradamante and Mash stood defensively in front of us — unnecessarily, it turned out, because none of the pirates got close enough to warrant them needing to defend us.

It was almost anticlimactic. An army of pirates, and they all went down like so much chaff.

“Is that all of them?” Ritsuka asked when the last one dissipated.

“I’m not seeing any more.”

“The reading is gone,” Romani supplied helpfully, “so it looks like you’ve handled all of them successfully. Good job, everyone.”

“It’s not like it was all that hard,” Rika muttered.

“Romani,” I began, “what were those?”

Romani sighed breezily. “I’m not even really sure how to explain them. Based upon the readings, they were actually physical enough that you could have beaten them without needing spells, magecraft, or Servants. As in, they were close enough to human that an ordinary bullet could have dispersed their structure, but they weren’t quite human enough to actually have souls?”

“They were materialized concepts,” Marie broke in suddenly.

“Concepts?” Drake asked, confused. “How does that work? More of this magical mumbo jumbo?”

“Oh, I understand now!” Romani said. “Yeah, that makes sense, doesn’t it?”

“Hello?” said Rika. “Home team? Exposition time? What makes sense?”

“As Romani said earlier, they’re like shells,” Marie explained. “They’re human-shaped bundles of ideas and vague wills, drawn here — likely by the Grail, or perhaps as a result of there being two of them. They’re spiritual bodies etched with the memories of sailors and pirates from the Age of Exploration, little more than puppets animated by a vague desire to seek treasure. As such, they can only act in accordance with that singular drive, so they’re not complete enough to negotiate or communicate with like a normal person.”

So they were kind of like ghosts, filled with the regrets of sailors who sought their fortunes and failed. Kind of. In that case, it was just like Romani had said: they weren’t alive, they weren’t Servants, but in the vaguest of senses, they were human.

“That’s possible?” Ritsuka asked.

“Under normal circumstances, no!” Marie grunted. “Ugh! But this Singularity is even more messed up than normal, so even things that are far outside the norm become things that can actually happen. The important part is that they’re not people, so you’re not killing anyone if you destroy them, got it? There’s no reason to feel guilty or hold back!”

Mash let out a relieved sigh. “Thank goodness. They were just disappearing whenever we hit them, so I wasn’t sure, but it’s good to know no one is actually getting hurt.”

“Can we expect more of them?” I asked.

“As long as this Singularity exists, the conditions for their existence remain,” Marie answered grimly. “You’re likely to encounter more of them in the future, and as the distortion continues, it’s even

possible they might grow stronger, or even have their own ships. Not strong enough to match a Servant,” she added hastily, “but strong enough that they won’t go down in a single hit.”

If it came to that, we were just going to have to rely on our Servants to handle the issue. An army of pirates that took several solid hits to go down was probably something that our Gandr wasn’t going to pack enough punch for.

On the other hand, if they were physical enough for blunt force to do the job, well, they should be physical enough to drown in bugs, shouldn’t they?

“It’s unfortunate, but that’s how it is,” Romani said ruefully. “So everyone be careful, okay? Just because they’re not that strong doesn’t mean that’s an excuse to get reckless!”

“Right!” Mash and the twins said together.

“Ah, don’t worry so much!” Drake said cheerfully, waving it off. “I’ve only known ‘em for a little while, but I can already tell that these folks have good heads on their shoulders! Things’ll be fine!”

“That’s exactly the kind of thinking that’s going to cause problems later on!” Marie retorted. “Fujimaru, Taylor, Mash, do you hear me? Don’t let this drunkard convince you to drop your guard! I expect you to conduct yourselves with the proper dignity as representatives of Chaldea!”

Drake just laughed. “Well, she’s got me pegged, doesn’t she!”

“Director,” I began before things could deteriorate any further, “how quickly could you prepare extra storage space for food supplies?”

“Just think of it,” said Rika in a stage whisper. “All of the new things we’ll get to try!”

“A few hours, maybe a day, depending on how much space was needed,” Marie answered. “Is there a reason you think we need it?”

My idea from earlier. If Drake’s Grail supplied endless food and drink, then there was no reason why we couldn’t take advantage of it.

“What I mentioned earlier, about Captain Drake’s Grail being a source of infinite food and drink — we have reason to believe that Captain Drake *has* actually made a wish on her Holy Grail,” I explained, “and that was what she wished for. If it really is an endless supply, then it seems to me that there’s no reason why we can’t, ah, procure some of it for ourselves, in lieu of better, more sustainable options in the future. We just need a place to put it all.”

Silence greeted me, and the moment hung for several seconds more. My brow furrowed.

“Director?”

“She just took off,” Romani said. “She’s going to talk to Da Vinci, I think. Taylor, I know you said so before, but are you sure about this? Because this... If this is true, it could be game changing. Rationing our food supply has been one of the most important logistical hurdles we’ve been dealing with since the Sabotage.”

I turned to Drake, holding out my wrist. “Captain Drake?”

“Eh?” Drake blinked, and then leaned closer to my hand. “Er, yeah. Yeah, I guess so. I don’t know anything about this wish-granting Grail business, but if that’s what this thing is supposed to do, then I probably made a wish, yeah.”

“From the Grail?” I prompted.

“Yeah!” said Drake, gaining confidence as she did. “Yeah, sure! Just set it on a table, and *poof!* Instant food! And when I want rum, all I have to do is pick it up, and it’s full!”

“We ate apples it made for breakfast,” Ritsuka supplied helpfully.

“They were really good apples, too,” said Rika. “Perfect ripeness and everything!”

“That’s...that’s actually incredible,” said Romani. “Listen, as great as this is, we’re not prepared to just go loading up on extra food and water right now, okay? This is going to take some planning and preparation before we can do something like that. In the meantime, go about things as normal and continue to investigate that Singularity. Hopefully, by the time you reach the next island, we’ll be ready, and we’ll arrange things then.”

Rika snapped off a salute. “Roger that, Boss Man!”

Romani sighed. “Ah, geez,” he muttered, “I thought I’d gotten away with something benign when she started calling me Doc...”

The connection cut out with a click.

“Well,” said Arash, “I guess that means we keep going the way we’ve been going.”

“No sense in sitting on our hands while we wait,” Emiya agreed.

“Right.” I messed around with my communicator a bit and brought back up the map from before, then dragged it around to show a much, much larger island. “This looks like the nearest island, so it should probably be our next stop.”

Rika made a noise in her throat. “We just going to follow them in order, Senpai?”

“As much as we can,” I reasoned. “We need to investigate each island, and zigzagging around will take three times as long. There’s no reason we shouldn’t just make a circuit until we’ve covered each one.”

“I guess this train is staying on the rails for now,” Rika said. She kicked at the sand. “You know, for an obligatory beach episode, I thought there’d be a lot more beefcake walking around.”

Ritsuka looked as though he was hoping the ground would open up and swallow him whole. Unfortunately for him, he was going to have to stay and deal with Rika’s shenanigans just like the rest of us.

Emiya just smirked. “You know, I’m sure if you asked, Bombe would be more than happy to strip down for you.”

Rika grimaced and shook her head frantically. “Um... You know what? Forget I said anything!”

“What’s this about a beach episode?” Drake asked, confused.

“It’s nothing important,” I told her. “So, if there’s no other business for us to do on this island, we should get a move on. The next island is a lot further away than these last two were.”

“Aye, you have a point there,” Drake admitted. “If that little magic map of yours is accurate, I’d say it should take us about ten hours to get from here to there.”

Ten hours?

“Oh my,” said Mash faintly. “That’s at least twice as long as the trip from the last island.”

At least, I didn’t say. All things considered, that would mean we’d arrive at that island somewhere around midnight, and I doubted any of us was going to be in any condition to go exploring in the middle of the night with nothing but the moon to guide us. Depending on how robust the insect population was on that next island, maybe not even me.

“Then what are we waiting for?” Rika demanded. She thrust her hand into the air and started marching towards the surf. “Adventure is out there! Let’s go and find it!”

“Back to the longboats!” Drake agreed. “It’s time to set sail again!”

Rika faltered for a second, and then recovered. “Back to the longboats!”

Ritsuka groaned, and he trudged after them much less enthusiastically.

“It’ll be okay, Senpai,” Mash said, trying to reassure him. “At least the Director didn’t yell at you earlier, so it could be worse.”

“Mash?” Ritsuka said flatly. “That’s not helping.”

“Oh. I’m sorry?”

I shook my head a little and followed.

— o.O.O.O.o —

As soon as we were back on the Golden Hind, Drake made a beeline for the wheel.

“Nothing interesting out there, Boss?” Bombe asked.

Drake shook her head. “Nah! Just some mystical mumbo jumbo and a bunch of posers who wanted my treasure! You didn’t miss much, Bombe.”

“Shame,” Bombe said ruefully. “Well, I guess not every island can be exciting, can it? There’s a dud in every barrel!”

Drake burst out into laughter. “Too true! Guess we just have to hope the next stop will have a little more going on, won’t we?” She shouted out. “Weigh anchor! Let’s get out of here and put this boring hunk of rock behind us!”

“AYE!” the crew shouted back, and a moment later, they were all scurrying about the deck and going about their work. The anchor was hauled back up from where it had been dropped, and then the sails unfurled, and Drake spun the wheel about, turning the ship northwest towards where the next island sat.

To avoid cluttering the deck and getting in the way, our group went up and huddled near Drake at the wheel. There wasn’t much for us to do except watch and try to stay out of the crew’s way as they worked.

As the ship swerved away from the island we’d just visited, the sails on the mast fluttered and filled, and Drake looked up at them, grinning broadly.

“Oho!” she said. “Looks like we’re catching a strong westerly wind! Good news, esteemed guests! We might be able to shave an hour off our travel time!”

“*Just* an hour?” asked Emiya.

An hour was an hour, but it *did* sound less incredible when this was already going to be a ten hour trip. It was the difference between arriving before midnight or after and not much else, so it was entirely possible that we were going to be sleeping on the ship tonight.

“This ship ain’t magic, magic man,” Drake told him. “She’s gotta obey the winds and the ocean currents, same as any other ship. If this favorable wind dies down or the currents start to turn against us, well, there ain’t much we can do about that except deal with it, is there?”

Emiya shrugged. “Point taken.”

“Is there a place for us to sleep tonight if we don’t make it to the next island early enough?” I asked, because as accommodating as Drake was being, I didn’t much relish the idea of bunking in the crew quarters tonight.

It wasn’t that I was worried about being assaulted or something. Even if that was a concern, Arash, Emiya, and Bradamante were more than up to the task of making sure no one tried to climb into my or Rika’s bunk uninvited. It was just...easier if we had our own place to sleep instead, for a number of reasons.

The smell wasn’t the least of them. Unwashed bodies was a thing I’d had to get used to after Leviathan, but that didn’t mean I *enjoyed* it.

“Mm.” Drake peered over at me. “I guess there’s no better place for esteemed guests to stay than the Captain’s cabin, eh?” She turned narrowed eyes on Emiya, Arash, and Bradamante. “Might be a

bit cramped, though. Four extra people is already pushing it. Seven sounds downright uncomfortable.”

“Oh, don’t mind us,” said Arash. “Servants don’t need to sleep, so we’ll be fine standing guard the whole night, just in case our friend from earlier decides to come back.”

“You think he will?” Drake asked.

Honestly? Not really. There wasn’t a way to be absolutely sure, but if he was looking to pick a fight, I think he would have when he first showed up. It all really depended on what he wanted and why he was here, and neither of those were questions we had answers to.

“It’s not impossible,” I replied, “so it’s better to be safe than sorry.”

“True enough.”

“And if he does show his face again,” Bradamante added, “we’ll be ready for him this time!”

“Suppose that solves that little problem, then!” said Drake.

“Good thinking, Senpai,” Rika said approvingly. “The only motion of the ocean this girl wants to find out about tonight is the one *outside* the ship!”

Ritsuka groaned.

“You wouldn’t have to worry about that, Master,” Emiya said. “I’m your Servant, remember? My job is to protect you, and not just from other Servants.”

“Ha!” Drake burst out. “You lot don’t have to worry about that from this crew! Any of them tried anything like that, and they know their ass is shark food! Ain’t that right, boys?”

“AYE!” the crew hollered back.

I guess that only made sense, considering their boss was a woman. Viewed in that light, this crew was probably the most forward-thinking, least sexist crew on the ocean, at least for their era. Not radical feminists or anything, but with Drake as their captain, far more willing to view women as equals instead of property or a convenient object to slake their lusts.

“I-I don’t get it,” Mash admitted, confused.

“Lady Mash,” Bradamante began.

“Tii-chan,” Rika cut her off, “let the cinnamon roll remain a cinnamon roll for a little longer, okay?”

“N-no, not that, Senpai.” Mash shook her head. “Captain Drake, I don’t understand. This era should be an era where sexism and misogyny are much more prevalent than they are in our era, especially amongst sailors, and yet...all of these men, they follow you so fervently, despite the fact that you’re a woman. I-I know you’ve done some incredible things, but... It still seems so hard to believe.”

“Ha!” Drake grinned. “They weren’t always this way, but after I showed ‘em who’s boss, well, they all settled down real quick, you know?”

Mash blinked. “Really? It was that easy?”

“Easy” might not have been the right word for it. I thought I remembered something about Drake dismissing his — *her* — officers mid-voyage after doubts began arising about her leadership, and then rehiring them to make a point about who was in charge, but I wasn’t sure whether or not that had even happened at all, let alone whether it had happened this early in her career, so I didn’t bring it up.

“Sometimes, taking charge of a group is just a matter of being the one who seems to know the most about what’s going on,” I said instead.

Confidence, reputation, charisma — when you had all three, people tended to *listen*. Having enough of the other two could make up for it if you lacked one of the three.

“Ain’t that the truth!” Drake guffawed. “A man’s gotta respect you if you can drink him over the table, under it, and then outdrink his best friend! This rowdy bunch would still be back in England if I hadn’t rounded up their sorry asses and brought them along!”

“Aye!” the crew agreed.

“And sometimes,” I added dryly, “it’s just a matter of who has the biggest mouth.”

“Ha!” Rika exclaimed, so surprised that she couldn’t stop herself.

Drake didn’t even look offended. “That ain’t wrong either! I’m the captain of this ship — of course my mouth is the biggest, because I’ve got the biggest appetite of them all!”

Emiya shook his head. “I guess that’s what you should expect from a famous pirate.”

“Of course,” said Drake, shark-toothed. “That’s why they call me the Pirate Queen!”

After that, the conversation died down a little bit as Emiya projected his stove to make us lunch. Drake was only too happy to lend us her Grail for the raw ingredients he needed, and perhaps as a nod to the importance of citrus fruits on a voyage out to sea, he concocted another lemon dish, this time with fish instead of chicken, with a side of potatoes that he fried in a sour brine.

As expected of Emiya, it was as delicious as it usually was. Drake was only too happy to agree, and I couldn’t have been the only one who realized that he was bribing her with his cooking. Fortunately, although she could be just as boisterous as Nero and she was a pirate besides, Drake also wasn’t under the impression that she could steal Emiya out from under us.

“It’s a shame,” she said instead. “Food like this could keep the whole crew going for a hundred years!”

“I didn’t hand him over to my best buddy,” Rika replied, unamused, “I’m not going to hand him over to you either!”

Ritsuka, perhaps predictably, didn't eat anywhere near as much as he usually did. Being fair, the entire reason why Drake could eat any of it at all was that none of us was quite as eager to fill up on food that we might revisit later, if we were unfortunate enough to hit a particularly rough patch of sea.

Fortunately for what we *did* eat, that never happened. After lunch, Drake returned to the wheel, and the pirates kept to their jobs aboard the ship, manning the rigging and the sails and doing tasks whose purposes I didn't always understand. Our group lapsed into a post-meal malaise, left without much else to do except sit back and watch the ocean go by.

There wasn't much to see. It was kind of boring, actually, but the sort of mindless, unthinking boring that I remembered from long car rides as a child, where I could watch the passing scenery without really seeing any of it and my mind just kind of...slipped over the passing time. It was almost meditative.

It would have been easier to distract myself if there was anything to do with my powers, but this far out at sea, there was nothing in range, not even, strangely enough, lice or other parasites. Against all sense and logic, the pirates of Drake's crew were astonishingly clean, even if they smelled like a men's locker room after it had spent a month marinating in old gym socks and sweaty shorts.

Eventually, the sea got smooth enough and the waves calm enough that there wasn't much for the pirates to do, and those who weren't keeping an eye on things or retiring to rest before their next shift were left without much of any way to entertain themselves either.

Perhaps it was inevitable, then, that one of them found a way to alleviate that boredom.

"Farewell and adieu to you, Spanish ladies," he belted out, and I turned away from looking out at the water to try and pinpoint who had started singing. "Farewell and adieu to you, ladies of Spain! For we have received orders for to sail to old England, and we may ne'er see you fair ladies again!"

There was a moment of pause, and then several other voices cried out, "We'll rant and we'll roar, like true British sailors! We'll rant and we'll roar across the salt seas! Until we strike soundings in the Channel of ol' England! From Ushant to Scilly is thirty-five leagues!"

"Ugh," Drake groaned. "They *know* I hate this one!"

"What's going on?" Rika asked, roused from her own woolgathering.

"The pirates are...singing, Senpai," said Mash.

"We hove our ship to, with the wind from sou'west, boys," the first voice sang out. "Then we hove our ship to, for to strike soundings clear! 'Twas forty-five fathoms with a white sandy bottom! So we squared up our main yard and up Channel did steer!"

"Really, boys?" Drake asked. "Of all the songs you had to pick, it had to be this one?" Louder, she shouted at them, "You scumbags *do* remember that we were *fighting* the Spanish, yeah?"

"All the more reason to go a-conquering through some of their fertile fields!" one of the pirates rejoined, to the laughter of his comrades.

“We’ll rant and we’ll roar, like true British sailors!” they chorused, and it was more of them now, emboldened by the others. “We’ll rant and we’ll roar across the salt seas! Until we strike soundings in the Channel of ol’ England! From Ushant to Scilly is thirty-five leagues!”

“What’s going on?” Ritsuka asked as the instigator started up the next verse.

“Sailing is long, hard, tedious work, Senpai,” Mash answered. “It wasn’t uncommon for sailors to alleviate boredom on long journeys by singing.”

“Hence the ‘sea shanty,’” I added.

“We’ll rant and we’ll roar, like true British sailors!” the chorus came again.

“It’s kinda catchy!” Rika said, bobbing her head along with the song. “Don’t you think so, Onii-chan? From Ushant to Scilly is thirty-five leagues!”

“Rika,” Ritsuka said slowly, “you’re not a pirate.”

“The first land we made was a point called the Deadman,” the instigator picked up. “Next Ramshead off Plymouth, Start, Portland, and Wight.”

“Says you!” Rika retorted. “We’re sailing on a pirate ship with a pirate crew under a pirate captain! From where I’m sitting, we’re *all* pirates!”

Suddenly, she lurched up off the deck, raced past Drake, and threw herself against the wooden railing that kept her from tumbling onto the deck below.

“Oi!” Drake squawked a protest.

“We’ll rant and we’ll roar, like true British sailors!” Rika belted out, joining the chorus. “We’ll rant and we’ll roar across the salt seas! Until we strike soundings in the Channel of ol’ England! From Ushant to Scilly is thirty-five leagues!”

Laughter and cheers rose up from the crew, and Rika grinned down at them as they whistled up at her.

“Never had a soprano for this one!” Bombe called, chortling merrily. “Boss always refused to join in!”

“For good reason, you tosser!” Drake hollered. “Now finish the damn song so I don’t have to listen to it anymore!”

More laughter answered her, and it took a minute for it to die back down enough for the original guilty party to pick up the last verse.

“Now let every man here drink up his full bumper! And let ev’ry man drink off his full glass! We’ll drink and be jolly and drown melancholy! And here’s to the health of each true-hearted lass!”

“We’ll rant and we’ll roar, like true British sailors!” the group sang, Rika included. “We’ll rant and we’ll roar across the salt seas! Until we strike soundings in the Channel of ol’ England! From Ushant to Scilly is thirty-five leagues!”

A cheer went up as the final line trailed off, and Rika, face flushed from excitement, stepped back, off to the side, then grabbed the hem of her skirt and dipped into a shallow curtsy — to thunderous applause. Even Arash was clapping politely, and I resisted the urge to turn to him and arch an eyebrow.

As the cheering started to die back down, Rika turned back to our group and was nearly skipping as she came back over. Still riding high on the fun she just had, she plopped down on the deck again, smiling from ear to ear like she’d just won the lottery.

It was almost a shame to rain on her parade.

“Rika,” I said calmly. “If the Director asks how it was we became pirates, I’m blaming it on you.”

From the expression that crossed her face now, it was very obvious she hadn’t thought about that at all.