

SUNLESS PILOT

by

Olivia Colburn

Original

Olivia Colburn
678-515-6553
OliviaMColburn@gmail.com

EXT. VILLAGE - SUNSET

Small, stout houses. Some have broken windows, some have broken doors, some have both.

BODIES on the ground. BLOOD pools underneath. One of them is LERA (30s), blood soaked and lying down awkwardly. The only hint of life is the shallow rise and fall of her chest.

ELIZA DEMAER (50s) walks slowly through the village. She wears gilded yet practical ARMOR with SERPENT ENGRAVINGS and a blue tunic underneath. She wields a TRIDENT. Her posture is perfect, and she has an imperial air.

Her trident is tipped with blood. Her armor is scratched, her tunic torn in places.

Behind her is a ragged COMPANY of Seafarers. They wear the same blue and carry SHORT SPEARS, CUTLASSES, HARPOONS, and TRIDENTS. They're battered and bloody—some limp, and they move slowly.

Next to her is her LIEUTENANT. His hand rests on his cutlass even though the threat has passed.

ELIZA

The day is ours. Thank the Serpent
Mother we made it in time.

LIEUTENANT

Barely, Lady Demaer. They caught
wind of our arrival—as it was,
their leader escaped, and she was
likely not the only one.

ELIZA

Barely, yet we made it
nonetheless. In years past, they
would all escape. In months past,
half would escape. Today, only a
few escaped.

They pass a body wearing their same blue and STOP. Eliza
KNEELS and CLOSES the dead seafarer's eyes.

ELIZA

The tide has finally turned in our
favor. Today marks the beginning
of the end of this sunless war.

She stands, and her party continues through the village.

Behind them, one of the body STIRS. Lera. She CRACKS her eyes open and LIFTS her head slightly. Then she relaxes, feigning death once more.

INT. TELEGLASS SPIRE, SEAFARER TEMPLE - MORNING

In the center is a SEAGLASS DISC, pearlescent yet translucent. It sits suspended horizontally. Windows go all the way around the round room, and they're open to the elements, with wooden shutters thrown open.

Desks face the Seaglass disk, empty except one. VAL (20) sits, a blank page in front of him, eyes closed with fingers LIFTED toward the Seaglass. He has straight black hair and a quiet air. He's used to helping others get their way.

Like all Seafarers, he wears sea-blue robes with white threading.

He starts to WRITE, the Seaglass HUMMING in intermittent bursts coupled with water RUSHING in the same increments.

Rushing water overtakes the humming with a ROAR. Val's eyes SNAP open, and he STOPS writing. He stands, moves to the bookshelf, and pulls out a FOLDED MAP.

He opens it on the desk. Various REGIONS and CITIES are circled and marked with different annotations.

Val CIRCLES a region on the map marked "CORAL DESERT." He closes his eyes briefly, then marks a smaller circle within.

He stands, gets halfway to the door, then return to the desk. Concentrating with his eyes closed once more, he SCRIBBLES on the original message, quickly finishing the recording. Then, gripping the map, he rushes out of the room.

INT. ELIZA'S OFFICE, SEAFARER TEMPLE - LATER

Maps and bookshelves line the walls. An ornate desk sits in front of an open window. A map is spread on the desk with different colored PINS on it.

Eliza stands at the window, a HAWK perched outside.

She unwinds a MESSAGE from its leg, and it FLIES away. She sits and unwraps the message, her face growing grimmer with each passing moment.

She stands, rolling the message back up.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

ELIZA

Enter.

Val ENTERS.

ELIZA

Good news, I hope.

VAL

I found one, my lady. In the Coral
Desert—likely a sailor.

Briefly, grimness leaves her face, but it quickly returns.

ELIZA

Good news indeed. But the war
waits for no one.

She holds up the note she received.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD, SOVEIRN - DAY

An ARMY waits on a field covered by morning haze.

Blue-robed figures, SEAFARERS, line the front of the army.
Eliza is at the very front in her ceremonial yet effective
armor. She rides a HORSE, as do many other Seafarers.

Val and AVIENNE (20) ride their own horses. Avienne wears
Seafarer robes, and he's used to getting his way. They're
midway between Eliza and the end of the line.

Seafarers stand in pairs or trios, never alone, except for
Eliza.

Through the haze, a DARK MASS looms—the enemy army.

The Sea SHIMMERS throughout the field. It mostly lies at the
Seafarer army's back, pushing them forward, but there are
smaller whirls and sideways threads throughout the battle.

Eliza FACES the army.

ELIZA

In a year's time, this war will be
over.

She looks out to the opposing army and looks back.

ELIZA

Can you imagine it? The scourge,
defeated. The threat, slain. After
years of fighting, the Serpent

(MORE)

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Mother can finally heal from the
Sunken's perversions.

As she speaks, Avienne and Val converse. Eliza's voice is audible yet indistinct. Val rests his hand on his cutlass.

AVIENNE

My last battle as an acolyte. Can you believe it?

VAL

It's been a long time coming.

AVIENNE

Too long.

ELIZA

...Our Mother's will is at our backs. Our victory is Her command..

AVIENNE

Impress her, and you could advance soon too.

VAL

I doubt that.

AVIENNE

Well not today, I mean. Maybe not even soon. But surely, after the war ends, she'll have no reason not to.

(beat)

Given that you have no, ah... mishaps.

Val's hand tightens on the hilt of his blade.

VAL

I won't.

AVIENNE

Then you have nothing to fear.

Eliza RAISES a hand.

ELIZA

The Sea is at our backs.

She rides forward, quickly reaching a gallop. The line of Seafarers follow suit, including Val and Avienne.

The army starts forward as well, but the gap between them and the Seafarers grows.

Starting with Eliza, the Seafarers all raise a hand and CLENCH their fists.

Water ROARS, and the Sea THICKENS, blurring the view behind the army. The army runs faster, matching the Seafarers' speed and then bridging the gap. The Sea propels them forward; SHIMMERING TRAILS lengthen their strides.

The enemy army grows clearer. They stand, stalwart, waiting, grim-faced.

A woman stands at the front, unconcerned. She stands, back straight, on equal ground as the army behind her. In her hand is a SPYGLASS. This is ROHEIS (30s), a confident but realist Sunken warrior.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD, SOVEIRN, SUNKEN SIDE - MOMENTS BEFORE

Roheis WATCHES the Seafarer army ACCELERATE through her spyglass, then lowers it. She has a HOOKED SWORD.

A LIEUTENANT stands beside her, PACING gently with his hand on his broadsword.

LIEUTENANT
Your orders, ma'am?

She TURNS and looks behind them through the spyglass.

ROHEIS
We wait.

Lieutenant partially draws his blade then lets it sink into the sheath.

LIEUTENANT
For how long?

ROHEIS
For our advantage.

She SIGNALS with her free arm, waits a moment, then lowers the glass and faces the enemy once more.

ROHEIS
Fear not, lieutenant. The Sea
bends to our will.

She draws her weapon, and Lieutenant does the same. SHINGS of unsheathing weapons ripple down the line.

Roheis POINTS her sword forward and starts walking toward the running army. Her own army walks forward as well.

Roheis and her army suddenly grow massively slower, as if trying to walk into a great headwind. The trails of the Sea DRAG her army backward. She PROTECTS her face with her arm and FORCES her way forward.

ROHEIS
(shouted)
Stay resolute!

As the armies clash, a SHOCKWAVE ripples through the Sea. Starting from the Sunken side and near instantly passing to the Seafarer side, flowing trails of the Sea FREEZE. Shimmering trails DISAPPEAR.

As the shockwave passes, the Seafarer army STUMBLES. The Sunken army SURGES forward.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD, SOVEIRN, SEAFARER - AT THE SAME TIME

In a wave, the army buckles. Roaring water becomes SILENT.

Val, Avienne, and other Seafarers are less affected. They UNCLENCH their fists and slow.

AVIENNE
Shit!

ELIZA
Onward! Onward! They cannot hold
the Sea for long!

Eliza engages the enemy, SPEARING DOWNWARD from her horse. Other Seafarers fight from horseback, and the infantry CLASHES with the enemy.

Val, slightly ahead of Avienne, SLASHES from horseback against the enemy. Soldiers on foot BLOCK, RETREAT, or FALL to his blade.

Avienne catches the STRAGGLERS and other who SLIP THROUGH.

The Seafarers press forward, forcing the Sunken back despite the lack of the Sea.

Blood ARCS through the sky as Eliza YANKS her trident out of enemies.

The Sea begins to SHIMMER back to life, small TRAILS slowly trickling toward the enemy.

Eliza SWINGS her trident in a wide arc then POINTS it to the sky.

ELIZA
Their incursion falters!

Roheis BACKS up through her army, raising an arm and CLOSING her eyes.

ELIZA
Onward!

Seafarers CLENCH their fists once more, and the army surges forward.

Roheis CLENCHES her fist, and another SHOCKWAVE passes through the Sea. This time, instead of going still, the Sea FLOWS in the wrong direction, pushing AGAINST the Seafarer army. It flows STRONGLY—stronger than it was prior.

The Seafarer army, including Seafarers, STUMBLE back. Many FALL.

Val HOLDS up his arm and BRACES HIMSELF as if defending from a strong wind as his horses PRANCES back. Avienne's horse FALLS, him with it.

With a WAR CRY, the Sunken army LUNGES forward. Eliza RETREATS into the fallen army, reaching down to STEADY unbalanced soldiers.

Roheis CHARGES forward, arm still raised, and RUNS a Seafarer through.

Enemy soldiers RUSH Val and Avienne. Val TURNS his horse and RIDES past Avienne. Val GRABS his arm and pulls him up and onto his horse behind him.

AVIENNE
How is this possible? This level
of incursion is—

VAL
It's fading. Lady Demaer is
right—they can't hold.

A line of dead from the Seafarer army litters the ground. Very few are blue-robed.

The Sunken still charge forward—the Seafarers continue to RETREAT.

Val SWINGS down and PLANTS his feet in the ground, still bracing himself against the Sea. A Sunken soldier LUNGES.

Val BLOCKS, JUMPING lightly and letting the Sea CARRY him a safe distance backward.

The enemy soldier LEAPS forward, jumping inhumanly far, and STRIKES again. Val blocks, but the momentum tilts him off balance.

Val LANDS and stumbles. The enemy PRESSES THE ATTACK. Avienne RIDES FORWARD, but against the Sea, moves too slowly.

The enemy soldier SLASHES downward. Val RAISES his hand.

Time SLOWS. The Sea still moves clearly. Shimmering trails LEAD toward Val, as they did before.

Briefly, subtly, almost imperceptibly, they FREEZE.

Time returns to normal, as does the Sea. Val's eyes WIDEN, he LOWERS his hand, and he LURCHES backward.

The enemy Seafarer stumbles as he lands, and his strike GRAZES Val's arm. In a DESPERATE SWING, Val SLASHES the enemy's throat.

He falls, GURGLING.

Avienne REACHES Val's side.

AVIENNE

Are you alright?

He PULLS Val up and hops down himself. Val CLUTCHES his bleeding arm, PANTING for breath.

VAL

Fine. Fine. The—the Sea turns in our favor. Do you feel it?

The Sea's shimmering trails start TRICKLING back in the correct direction.

Val SCANS the enemy and sees Roheis. She sees him too, and slowly RAISES her hooked sword to him in acknowledgment.

Val MEETS her eyes briefly and grows STILL.

AVIENNE

What is it?

VAL

Nothing. They can't advance.

The Sunken army slows their advance, and the Seafarers begin to press forward.

Val and Avienne, followed by other Seafarers, clench raised fists. Val uncovers his wound to do so, his hand BLOODSTAINED.

AVIENNE

Then the day is ours.

The Seafarer army RUSHES forward, overrunning the Sunken. Roheis BACKS OUT through the army.

Winding her arm back, Eliza THROWS her trident then clenches her fist. The Sea SURROUNDS it, guiding it to Roheis's back.

At the last second, it SWERVES and sinks into the ground.

ELIZA

(to Roheis, shouted)

Flee, coward! You'll never win a war from the back of your army!

Roheis DISAPPEARS in the mix. Soldiers RUSH PAST Eliza, now weaponless, as she watches.

ELIZA

Damn it.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD, SOVEIRN - AFTERNOON

The battle is over. Bodies LITTER the ground, mostly from the Sunken side.

SOLDIERS COLLECT bodies. They first collect fallen Seafarers before moving on to ordinary soldiers.

INT. MEDICAL TENT - AFTERNOON

Val SITS on a cot as a MEDIC wraps his wound with bandages. Avienne PACES beside him.

MEDIC

You'll be well. Avoid using that arm while it heals.

Val NODS absently. Sweat DOTS his temple, and he CLENCHES and UNCLENCHES his uninjured hand.

AVIENNE

That's it? He looks ill.

VAL

I'll be fine, Avi.

Medic nods sharply and LEAVES, settling by a more severely wounded, non-Seafarer soldier.

AVIENNE

Serpent Mother, Val. I thought that Sovic bastard had you dead to rights.

VAL

It was Her will that the Sea turned when it did.

AVIENNE

Sheer luck was what it was.

Val doesn't meet his eyes.

VAL

That it was.

Unbeknownst to Val, Eliza APPROACHES.

ELIZA

Avienne. You're alright?

Val STARTS and stops clenching and unclenching his fist.

ELIZA

Valdyn?

VAL

Sorry, my lady. My nerves.

ELIZA

More than understandable. I hope you're well.

She places a hand on Avienne's shoulder.

ELIZA

You did well. Both of you.

She SIGHS.

ELIZA

Still, we suffered losses. Too often, we suffer losses. Without new blood, our Order will be in shambles come the end of the war. Your sailor, Valdyn—a good find. Track them down, bring them home.

VAL

Of course, my lady.

ELIZA
You'll go with him.

AVIENNE
Are you certain? I could-

ELIZA
I am.

AVIENNE
Very well.

She nods sharply.

ELIZA
Good. What their leader did...
unthinkable. A disgusting
incursion of the Sea. We need all
the help we can get to stop her.

She looks at Val.

ELIZA
The Serpent Mother grows sicker
with each such perversion. Her
will is Hers and Hers alone. You
understand, I'm certain.

VAL
I understand.

ELIZA
Good. One more year, boys. One
more year, and peace will return
to the Sea.

AVIENNE
One more year.

They SALUTE, pressing fists to their hearts.

INT. TENT - CORAL DESERT - AFTERNOON

The walls are orange fabric and backlit by sun. There's empty space near the entrance of the tent, then a DESK and curtained-off section just behind.

IO (16) slouches at the desk, picking at her fingernails and facing the side of the tent, not the front. She wears white linen clothes, which stands out against her dark complexion.

RASP. RASP. RASP. The tent is silent but for a repeating scraping noise.

Hidden behind the curtain and desk, KIR (early 20s) sits on the ground facing Io. His skin is dark, and he has several tattoos prominently featuring a SEA SERPENT. A SILVER SCAR crosses his neck.

He WHITTLES a small FLUTE, flicking wood shavings to the side.

IO
Word must've got out. Nobody's coming.

KIR
(sign language in italics throughout)
There's a war, Io. Someone will come.

IO
So where are they? Even the Sunken are better than sirens to the humans.

The tent flap flips inward, letting in sun. Two figures enter—Lera and BETO (late teens), both sunburnt with haunted eyes. They wear small, makeshift bags.

Io SWINGS around, straightening and facing the guests.

IO
Welcome. Looking for passage?

LERA
(accented)
How much to get to Orusal?

IO
Orusal...

She glances to Kir.

KIR
Twenty scale, three days.

IO
Twenty each. Next ship leaves in three days.

Lera and Beto exchange a look.

BETO
(in Sovic)
Twenty each? I thought sirens were supposed to be cheap.

Io BRISTLES. Kir shakes his head.

 LERA
Be quiet.
 (to Io)
There's nothing sooner?

 BETO
We don't have forty, Lera.

 LERA
Be quiet, Beto!

She wrings her hands.

 LERA
Um... this journey has, ah... been a
long time coming. Serpent Mother
willing.

Beto scowls. Io looks to Kir, who lifts his head and furrows his brow.

 KIR
Ask how much they have.

Io signs under the table.

 IO
Why?

 KIR
Please.

Io frowns.

 IO
How much money do you have?

 LERA
Thirty-three scale. But we have
some items to trade—to make up the
difference.

 KIR
*Fourteen each. That'll leave them
five for supplies when we arrive.*

 IO
What?

 LERA
Small things... rings, necklaces.

IO
Not you. I meant—

BETO
Is someone else here?

Io avoids looking at Kir.

After a brief hesitation, Kir sets the flute down and STANDS anyway. Lera and Beto TENSE and shift backward. Lera half-raises a hand defensively.

BETO
Who—
(Sovic)
Damned sirens. At least this one's
been fixed.

Kir's jaw TIGHTENS and his eyes narrow.

LERA
(Sovic)
Speak again and I'm leaving you
here.
(common tongue)
I'm so sorry about him. Please..

KIR
Fourteen each.

Io side eyes him.

IO
Meet Kir. He says fourteen each.

The tension leaves Lera's body, and she sighs in relief. She MOUTHS a prayer.

IO
Ship leaves in three—

Kir TAPS her.

KIR
We leave tonight.

IO
*With whom? We don't have crew
ready.*

KIR
Us two. We can make it.

Io stares flatly for a moment then throws her hands up in a shrug.

IO

Never mind. We leave tonight, as
it turns out. Be ready at sunset.

EXT. SERPENT TEMPLE - EVENING

It's just before sunset. The temple is a stone building of modest size with a domed top. Stained glass windows are made of blues and greens, and they're in a mosaic style.

Val and Avienne approach. Val's arm is BANDAGED.

They stop at the door and BOW their heads.

VAL/AVIENNE

We are grateful for your
sanctuary, Serpent Mother.

They lift their heads and enter, pushing the doors open with a CREAK.

INT. SERPENT TEMPLE - CONTINUOUS

Blue light filters in through warped glass, painting watery patterns on the ground.

In the back is a mosaic of a blue-green SEA SERPENT. Dozens of candles FLICKER below, casting shadows over the serpent.

A single PRIESTESS tends to the shrine. She wears a blue robe simpler and paler than Val and Avienne's.

She finishes lighting a candle, stands, and turns.

PRIESTESS

It has been a long time since a
Seafarer graced this place. The
war goes well, then?

AVIENNE

Well indeed. The tide has turned,
finally.

PRIESTESS

So the rumors are true. Will you
be staying long?

AVIENNE

As long as it takes. We're looking
for someone.

EXT. DRY DOCKS - CORAL DESERT, EDGE - EVENING

The sun is setting. The sky is a blend of oranges, golds, and pinks. Stars start to peek out.

There's a row of tents anchored to PINK SAND in various colors.

Behind them are SHIPS of varying size. Large ships are propped upright by stilts with sails furled. Smaller ships lie on their sides on the sand.

Beyond the ships, pink dunes extend as far as the eye can see. In the distance, a large ship SAILS across the desert.

On a small CATAMARAN, little more than a tarp spread across a wooden frame, two runners, a rudder, and a sail, Kir works to unfurl the sail.

Io TIES bags to the mast.

KIR

*The current is strong tonight. Do
you see it?*

Io stares up at the sky and UNFOCUSES her eyes.

Faint, glittery trails appear, pushing across the desert. Io looks down, and they disappear.

KIR

We'll make good time.

IO

We would make good time. If we had a proper crew. And I didn't even know we had a ship this small. Why exactly are we doing this?

Sand CRUNCHES. Lera and Beto approach, their only luggage their small bags.

IO

Let's go.

LERA

Thank you again.

She and Beto climb aboard and sit, settling in. Kir stands at the back by the rudder. Io rests her hand on the mast.

Kir and Io meet eyes, and Kir nods. They RAISE their hands and CALL the Sea, turning their hands inward.

The SEA, composed of faint shimmering trails, becomes visible. The catamaran LURCHES forward then steadies, gaining speed quickly. They sail toward the sunset.

INT. SERPENT TEMPLE - EVENING

Val and Avienne KNEEL in front of the shrine on cushions. Both have their heads bowed. Avi's eyes are closed, his hands clasped. Val's eyes are open.

He PICKS AT the cushion then WATCHES Avienne pray out of the corner of his eye.

AVIENNE

...The Sea is Your will, and I live
to call upon it. Let me sail in
the shallows and save the Sunken
from the sunless depths.

His words fade out, replaced by the sound of GENTLY LAPPING WATER. Val CLOSES his eyes. Around him, shimmering trails of the Sea come into view. The trails are CLEARER than when the Sea appears for Io.

The sound of the sea has a GENTLE RHYTHM. Val relaxes, no longer picking at the cushion. He HOLDS his wounded arm.

RUSHING WATER. Faint, as if far away, but a great deal of moving water—river rapids moving into a waterfall.

Val's eyes snap open.

AVIENNE

...our Mother, the Great Serpent—

VAL

Do you feel that?

Avienne doesn't open his eyes.

AVIENNE

Feel what?

VAL

The Sea. Someone's calling it.

Val stands and lifts a hand. After a moment of concentration, he POINTS westward.

VAL
There. Probably a sailor crossing
the Coral Desert.

Avienne furrows his brow.

AVIENNE
I... I don't sense anything. Are you
certain?

Val offers his arm to Avienne, who opens his eyes.

VAL
I am. If we hurry, we can still
catch up.

Avienne takes Val's arm, and Val pulls him up.

EXT. DRY DOCKS - CORAL DESERT, EDGE - NIGHT

Stars are fully out. The barest hint of color still tinges the horizon, though the sun has set.

Val and Avienne walk down the line of ships. They stop at a SMALL CATAMARAN.

AVIENNE
This'll do.

He UNTIES it from a wooden post and steps on.

AVIENNE
Let's go.

Val reaches under his robe and removes a NECKLACE with a SERPENT PENDANT. He loops it around the wooden post and steps on the ship.

He and Avienne raise their hands. The Sea becomes visible, the trails leading forward. They turn their hands, and they set off with the sound of rushing water. They SKIM over the sand, almost BOUNCING, much faster than Io and Kir.

EXT. CORAL DESERT - NIGHT

Kir, Io, Lera, and Beto SAIL across the desert. There's nothing but pink sand around and the moon and stars above.

Kir, one hand still RAISED, LOOKS UP at the stars and TURNS the rudder slightly, still watching the sky. The only sounds are the SH-SH-SH of wood over sand and GENTLY FLOWING WATER.

Faint SHIMMERING TRAILS of the Sea lead in the direction they travel.

Io stands at the mast, one hand still RAISED. Lera and Beto sit, speaking inaudibly to one another.

IO
Do you feel that?

Kir looks confused. He shakes his head.

IO
I think someone just started a crossing.

Kir takes his hand off the rudder.

KIR
It's too late for that.

IO
I know.

Kir looks behind them and CLOSES his eye. The sound of water grows LOUDER, but it's still soft. Faintly, water distantly ROARS.

KIR
Let's go faster.

IO
Why?

Kir CURLS his fingers, and the catamaran LURCHES forward.

KIR
Best to avoid confrontation.

IO
We don't even know if they'll pass us.

KIR
All the same.

LERA
Is something wrong?

Io looks to Kir, but he doesn't respond.

IO
I don't know.

Io CURLS her fingers, and the catamaran LURCHES forward again.

EXT. CORAL DESERT - NIGHT

Val and Avienne's catamaran cuts through the sand like an arrow. Their hands are raised, and the Sea SHIMMERS around them, leading them forward.

They move much faster than Kir and Io, but they stand relaxed.

Water ROARS.

VAL
You felt it that time?

AVIENNE
Yeah. I suppose you were right.

VAL
There's two of them.

AVIENNE
I thought we were only looking for one.

VAL
We were. I'm just telling you what I feel.

He closes his eyes.

VAL
Still, we'll overtake them within the hour at this rate.

AVIENNE
Then let's go faster. I don't want to spend a second longer out there than I have to.

Their catamaran LURCHES forward and bounces over the dunes.

EXT. CORAL DESERT - NIGHT

Kir wipes sweat off his face. He looks fatigued. Io still looks fine.

Their catamaran has slowed.

IO
They're catching up.

LERA
Who's catching up?

KIR
Stop. Let's stop.

IO
I'm fine to keep going.

Kir LOWERS his hand, and the catamaran SLOWS.

IO
Or not.

She lowers her hand, and the catamaran COASTS to a stop.

LERA
What's going on?

IO
Give us a moment, will you?

She and Kir step down.

IO
What's going on?

KIR
They're refugees. Here's what we need to do.

EXT. CORAL DESERT - NIGHT

Val and Avienne COAST to a stop at Io and Kir's resting catamaran.

Io and Kir sit on mats on the sand sharing JERKY and DRIED FRUIT. A sand dune rises a short distance away.

Val and Avienne dismount and approach the campsite.

IO
Do you need something, sailors...

Io notices their sea-blue robes.

IO

Uh... Seafarers? It's an honor. I heard about your recent victory.

She glances to Kir, who looks unsurprised, then back at Val and Avienne.

AVIENNE

Something wrong?

IO

N-no. Just surprised to see Seafarers out this far. Or so late. Or at all. What are you... Sorry. I'm Io. This is Kir.

AVIENNE

Avienne. And this is Val. I was hoping to have a word with you two.

He pauses, eyeing Kir.

AVIENNE

Does he talk?

IO

(re: Val)
Does he?

VAL

Yes.

IO

Oh. Well. No.

Kir SMILES WANLY. Val and Avienne exchange a glance.

AVIENNE

...All right. I see.

He clears his throat.

AVIENNE

You two are sailors? Why cross so late?

IO

Trying to avoid the sun for my first crossing. He's, uh, training me.

Val TILTS his head.

VAL
Your first crossing?

IO
Yeah.

Val looks CONFUSED.

AVIENNE
(quietly, to Val)
It's him, then.

Val furrows his brow for a moment.

VAL
No. It's her.

AVIENNE
Her?

Io exchanges another glance with Kir, whose only sign of tension is unnatural stiffness.

VAL
(to Avienne)
Yes.

IO
What did I do?

Avienne raises an eyebrow.

AVIENNE
Nothing. I've come to make you an offer.

Val, brow still slightly furrowed, looks around Kir and Io toward the dune.

VAL
Carry on. I'll be right back.

AVIENNE
Sure.

Val walks around the campsite. Behind him, Io's voice fades.

IO
So... what are you offering?

Kir watches Val warily. After he passes, Kir STANDS and follows him.

EXT. CORAL DESERT - MOMENTS LATER

Val approaches the dune behind the campsite. He has a puzzled expression, and he stops a couple steps up the dune.

He closes his eyes. It's SILENT. Too silent.

FOOTSTEPS through sand grow louder.

Val opens his eyes as Kir comes beside him. Kir raises an eyebrow and holds his hands palms up in a silent question.

VAL

It's quiet here. Still.

Val takes a step. Kir tenses, then reaches forward to BRUSH Val's arm. Val turns back, and Kir NODS toward the campsite.

They hold each others' gaze for a moment. Finally, Val NODS, and they return to the campsite.

EXT. CORAL DESERT - MOMENTS BEFORE

Avienne sits, straight backed, across from Io, who curls up on herself—legs crossed, arms folded.

AVIENNE

Do you know how the Serpent Order recruits members?

IO

Uh, no.

AVIENNE

When particularly resonant people call the Sea, it makes ripples that can be felt from miles away. We monitor these ripples—if they're strong enough, we invite the person.

Silence stretches.

IO

Are you saying that happened for... me? You sensed me?

AVIENNE

(beat) That's right.

IO
 Are you... um. Are you inviting me
 to the Serpent Order? To be a
 Seafarer?

AVIENNE
 That's right.

IO
 You're serious?

AVIENNE
 Deadly.

IO
 I could be a Seafarer?

AVIENNE
 As I've been saying, yes.

Behind them, Kir and Val start to return. Avienne notices.

AVIENNE
 Your, ah... Friend, is he?
 Colleague?

IO
 Cousin.

AVIENNE
 Forgive my forwardness, but is
 there a reason he doesn't talk?

Io's eyes narrow, and she scowls.

IO
 Is that really what you want to
 know?

AVIENNE
 What?

IO
 Come on. What are you really
 asking? Just say it.

AVIENNE
 I don't know what you're talking
 about.

IO
 Fine, then.

Avienne CLEARS his throat.

AVIENNE

Fine. On second thought, between you and me, it's not an ideal time to join the order.

IO

What?

AVIENNE

There's a war going on. You'll be part of it. Is that what you want to do?

IO

Don't you think I know that?

AVIENNE

And the Order can be unwelcoming at times. Especially to... in times of stress.

IO

Unwelcoming to?

AVIENNE

It was a slip of the tongue.

IO

You think I don't know what you mean?

Avienne looks away.

AVIENNE

Think what you will.

IO

And you think what you will. My cousin doesn't talk, and you jump to conclusions?

AVIENNE

I said nothing of the sort. But, truly, perhaps the Order isn't the best fit for you.

IO

Wait, wait, wait. I can still join, right? I didn't mean to be... rude.

Val and Kir rejoin the group.

VAL

It's an open invitation. You could accept now, or you could accept in ten years. If finances are a concern, the Order offers stipends to your family.

IO

I don't need ten years. I want to—

KIR

Don't give an answer now.

Avienne ELBOWS Val and WHISPERS something to him. Val SHAKES his head.

IO

Are you serious? I'm going to say yes, Kir, now or later.

KIR

Everyone dreams of joining the Order, but have you really thought about it? Just wait—until after this trip, at least. Let's talk through it.

Io throws up her hands.

IO

Fine. We finish this trip, then I'm headed for Nautilus.

KIR

Thank you.

VAL

...Anyway, it's your choice. Don't feel pressured to join.

IO

Oh, no. That's not it at all. I—thank you. I'll keep the... open invitation in mind.

Val GLANCES at Avienne expectantly, waits, then pulls a SERPENT COIN out of his pocket. He TOSSES it to Io, who FUMBLES the catch but doesn't let it drop.

VAL

Your invitation.

Io ADMIRES it in her hand, turning it over to reveal a TRIDENT on the other side. Val NODS a farewell and Avienne presses his lips together as they leave.

They board their catamaran.

AVIENNE
What did you notice?

VAL
It was nothing.

Avienne looks doubtful. They set off in the same direction they were heading before.

Kir RELAXES, exhaling and putting his face in his hands.

IO
What in the depths was that about?

Kir SHAKES his head.

KIR
Let's dig up our passengers first.

Io shrugs, exasperated.

EXT. CORAL DESERT - LATER

Kir, Io, Lera, and Beto SAIL through the sand once more. Lera and Beto huddle on the edge, their clothes dusted with SAND.

Kir mans the rudder again, watching the sky and making small adjustments. Io stands at the mast. Both have their hands up, CALLING the Sea, which is lightly visible as shimmering trails around them.

IO
So. You're refugees from the Order.

LERA
From the war, yes.

IO
But not just normal refugees, if Kir's so intent on hiding you.

LERA
What exactly would you call a normal refugee, girl? What's normal about being forced to flee your family, your home, your life?

Io looks away.

IO

I guess you really are desperate to run to sirens for help. I know what you think of us.

LERA

And I know what you suspect of us. And to be clear—of the two of us, Beto is the only asinine one. Immature brat.

BETO

I—

LERA

Don't speak.

Beto DOESN'T SPEAK.

Io SIGHS and leaves her post. She stands with Kir at the back of the ship.

IO

They're Sunken.

KIR

So I suspect.

IO

Are you serious? If we'd been caught—

KIR

Then we could've been prosecuted by the Order. I know. For that, I am sorry.

IO

No wonder that's why you don't want me to join the Order.

KIR

That's not why.

IO

Then why?

KIR

Why do you want to join? For glory? For the Serpent Mother? For us, Her first children? Maybe to

(MORE)

KIR (CONT'D)
*protest, to fight the way we are
 treated?*

IO
No! Because—well... sort of.

KIR
*Do you think them unaware of our
 circumstances?*

IO
 ...

KIR
*Peacekeepers they may be, but it
 is not our peace they're
 interested in.*

IO
*When I'm a Seafarer, I'll make
 them care.*

KIR
*I hope you do. But there is a
 reason why a siren Seafarer is a
 rarity.*

Kir LOOKS UP to check their course, ending the conversation.

EXT. ORUSAL DRY DOCKS - MORNING

A line of ships with colorful sails, a line of colorful tents. Behind the tents are a line of stalls selling DRIED FRUITS, NUTS, JERKY, and JEWELRY.

Hawkers SHOUT their wares. Sailors advertise prices. Travelers and sailors alike browse through the tents and stalls. Many wear SCARVES or HOODS as protection from the sun.

Kir TIES the catamaran to a free post as Io, Lera, and Beto DISEMBARK. Lera and Beto SHADE their eyes and look around in wonder. They each carry bags—Kir and Io have small purses, while Lera and Beto have battered packs.

LERA
We can't thank you enough.

She GLARES at Beto.

BETO
Thank you. Truthfully.

Kir SMILES.

KIR
No thanks needed.

IO
Yeah.

Lera smiles and nods at Kir, understanding even without Io's interpretation.

Kir SIGNS while Io interprets for him.

IO
Do you have three scale?

BETO
We already paid.

Lera FISHES three pearlescent coins out of her bag. She offers them to Kir.

Kir accepts them, then digs around in his bag for SEVERAL METAL COINS, rings filled with PINK GLASS. He returns them to Lera.

IO
The vendors at the docks take scale, but they aren't secure. Go further in the city to buy supplies.

LERA
Thank you.

IO
Head northeast—to Corvis. They're sympathetic, but not enough to be a target. It's safe there, for now.

Lera NODS.

IO
The passphrase will work... wait, what passphrase?

KIR
They know it.

IO
Fine. The passphrase will work further north. Good luck. May the Sea carry you.

LERA

And you two as well.

Sticking close together, Lera and Beto DEPART. They disappear into the crowd and slip away.

Kir and Io start walking toward the stalls.

IO

A passphrase? Are you serious?

KIR

Deadly.

IO

You seem to care about them more than us.

KIR

That is not the case. I care about both.

IO

Well, you fight for them, but you won't even let me fight for sirens.

KIR

I don't aim to stop you from doing what you wish. If nothing else, you'll learn mastery over the Sea—better than I could ever teach you. But you won't get what you want from the Order, and you must keep that in mind.

IO

At least I'd be doing something.

Kir pulls a SCARF out of his bag.

IO

You of all people should know things need to change. I mean, you...

His silver scar stands out against brown skin. Kir COVERS his neck and head with the scarf.

KIR

I'm well aware. And this—

He TAPS his neck.

KIR
Is not what you think.

Io flushes, embarrassed and guilty.

IO
 Do you need me to come with you?

KIR
No. I'll find our family to resupply. It's cheaper anyway.

IO
 ...Sorry.

Kir SIGHS.

KIR
You're not wrong, Io. Your faith is simply misplaced.

Io presses her lips together.

IO
 I'll meet you later. At the ship, when the Sea turns.

EXT. SERPENT TEMPLE - ORUSAL - LATER

It's large, with a blue and green STAINED GLASS dome. Columns with SERPENT CARVINGS hold up the roof.

Io ENTERS.

INT. SERPENT TEMPLE - ORUSAL - CONTINUOUS

Inside are PRIESTESSES and PRACTITIONERS. A FOUNTAIN surrounded by cushions with a stone SERPENT sits in the middle, directly underneath the oculus of the dome. The surrounding light is dyed SEA BLUE.

Io WANDERS to the fountain and KNEELS on a cushion. She looks up at the serpent and smiles.

The dome catches her eye. Around the oculus is light blue and green—gentle ocean colors. Further down, still in the light section, are figures of MEN. They are supported by the SERPENT, which wraps around the dome.

Beneath the serpent, the glass grows dark. At the bottom, along the outside rim, it is nearly black. Pinkish-blue

figures of SIRENS—with gills and fins—lurk here in the sunless depths.

Io looks back down and closes her eyes, brow furrowed.

IO
Great Mother, the Seafarers are
Your army, yet we are Your first
children.

She pauses, as if waiting for a response.

IO
I want to join them, Mother. Is
that so wrong? Should I not?

She scowls.

IO
Kir is too damn reasonable.

EXT. ORUSAL DRY DOCKS MARKET - NOON

Io CUTS through the crowd. The hawkers have thickened, and so have the throngs in general.

The market is hectic. Shouts and arguments overlap while travelers shove pushy hawkers away and SNAP rejections.

A HAWKER approaches Io.

HAWKER
Rings! Necklaces! For you, cheap!
One ring, one scale!

He WAVES toward a stall of glittering JEWELRY. They have COLORED GLASS GEMS.

HAWKER
Real Seaglass, too, from the
Greater Sea!

He FOLLOWS Io and TRIES to put a necklace on her. Io SHOVES him away. Tendrils of the SEA appear, trailing toward the desert.

IO
Don't try it, leech.

She CLENCHES her fist, and the Sea THICKENS briefly. The hawker STUMBLES back.

HAWKER

Sailor! Apologies, my apologies.
Half off!

Io ROLLS her eyes and continues, the hawkker trailing briefly.

The clamor is LOUDER. With the Sea still FAINTLY VISIBLE, furrows her brow and follows INCREASINGLY ANGRY SHOUTS.

Io furrows her brow and tries to look through the crowd, but her view is blocked by the crowd.

She SLIPS between people then PUSHES through them, gaining speed. PASSERSBY protest and curse.

Angry shouts grow louder. Io's foot gets stuck on a WHITE CLOTH—Kir's scarf. She PAUSES, looks down, then SPRINTS forward, SHOVING through the crowd.

The crowd breaks into a small clearing. A RED-FACED VENDOR stands in front of a market stall displaying GLASS FLUTES and CHIMES. He holds a FLUTE in his hand like a baton. Two coins lay SCATTERED on the ground.

Kir stands in the middle, head and neck exposed, held by a BRUTE. He has a CUT on his cheekbone, and the brute has blood on his knuckles.

RED-FACED VENDOR

Sunless eel!

He SPITS at Kir and shakes the flute.

RED-FACED VENDOR

You think I haven't had your kind try to charm me before?

Kir RAISES his hands to try to speak. Red-faced vendor CRACKS the flute against Kir's temple, and Kir SAGS.

Io BREAKS into the center.

IO

Stop! What do you think you're doing?

RED-FACED VENDOR

He's a fucking siren, girl. We're just finishing the business he started.

The flute is now cracked. Io SCOOPS the discarded coins up off the ground. The Sea shimmers faintly, leading toward the brute, red-faced vendor, and Kir.

Io gets toe-to-toe with red-faced vendor and HOLDS UP the coins.

IO

This is how you treat your paying customers? Let him go.

Red-faced vendor PUSHES her back.

RED-FACED VENDOR

Run along. Last chance.

Io SMILES TIGHTLY, takes a step back, TOSSES the coins up, and CLENCHES her fist.

The coins FLY FORWARD, striking the brute and red-faced vendor, leaving CRESCENT CUTS on their faces. They FLINCH and RECOIL. Io YANKS Kir away from the brute.

Dazed for only a split-second, red-faced vendor SURGES forward.

RED-FACED VENDOR

Who do you think you—

Io WHIPS OUT her serpent coin, holding it in front of her between two fingers. Red-faced vendor and brute FREEZE.

IO

I'm a Seafarer. You'd do well to respect me. Boy.

Kir GRIMACES and wipes blood off his cheek. Io STEPS forward. Red-faced vendor STEPS back.

Io RAISES a hand, and red-faced vendor FLINCHES. She SMILES COLDLY, then SNATCHES the flute out of his hand. Io KICKS a fallen coin toward him.

IO

Keep the change.

She leads Kir, who presses a hand against his temple, to the edge of the clearing. They pause, then the crowd PARTS for them.

EXT. CORAL DESERT - DAY

Io and Kir SAIL over pink dunes. Kir SITS, back to the desert, one hand still on the rudder, flute in his other hand. He doesn't call the Sea. The cuts on his temple and cheek are uncovered but don't bleed.

Io stands at the mast, hand raised and calling the Sea. The Sea surrounds them as faintly shimmering waves.

Kir LIFTS the flute and blows into it. It lets out SHRILL AIRY WHISTLES that barely change when he MOVES HIS FINGERS over the holes.

He lowers it and inspects the crack.

IO
It doesn't work?

Kir SHAKES his head in agreement. Io sighs.

IO
Just toss it. From sand to sand
and all that.

Kir PLAYS it again, this time covering the cracked area with his hand. It makes a deep, richer NOTE.

KIR
I can fix it.

IO
Of course you can.

Kir carefully sets the flute down.

KIR
Thank you, Io.

IO
For a broken flute?

KIR
For—

IO
I know.

They sail in silence.

IO
Why didn't you fight back?

Kir ADJUSTS the rudder.

KIR
I prefer not to.

IO
You're a sailor. You could've—

KIR

*I know what I could've done. Then
I'd be just what they expect of
sirens.*

IO

So instead you get beat up.

KIR

*In a lose-lose situation, I'll
pick the option that leaves my
hands clean.*

Io SCOFFS.

IO

Your faces is bleeding again.

Kir frowns and touches his cheek. His fingers come away red.

KIR

I know what you're thinking.

Io TURNS away.

KIR

Io.

She can't see him.

Kir sighs.

KIR

(whispered)

Io.

IO

I'm joining the Order, Kir. You
won't change my mind.

She still doesn't look at him.

KIR

I know.

INT. TELEGLASS SPIRE, SEAFARER TEMPLE - MORNING

Seated at the only taken desk, Val WRITES on a piece of paper. There's a smaller stack of paper to the side, an inkwell, and a book titled: "An Introduction to the Soviet Language."

His eyes are closed and his brows furrowed in concentration. The Seaglass disc HUMS softly in bursts as he slowly WRITES the incoming message. There is a soft SOUND OF RUNNING WATER.

FOOTSTEPS echo, but Val doesn't notice. He continues writing.

Eliza ENTERS from a staircase in the floor. She WAITS silently.

Val FINISHES writing and opens his eyes, examining the message, lips moving silently.

Eliza CLEARS HER THROAT, and Val FLINCHES, putting an arm over the book.

ELIZA

Valdyn. How goes your healing?

Val RUBS his arm.

VAL

Well, my lady. Only a little soreness remains.

ELIZA

Quick, as expected. Do you feel well enough for a bout? It has been far too long.

Val hesitates.

VAL

Of course, my lady. But the teleglass..

He motions toward the Seaglass.

ELIZA

Not to worry. I'll have someone cover it.

VAL

Right. Thank you.

He stands, flipping the book over as he crosses in front of the desk. He follows Eliza down the stairs.

EXT. SEAFERER TEMPLE - MORNING

Val and Eliza stand in front of the temple on flat, sandy ground. The SEA whirls around them, blurring the air slightly at times. Neither wears protective gear.

Eliza holds a blunt, short, wooden staff. Val wields a cutlass with a blue tassel.

VAL
Will Avi be joining us?

ELIZA
No. He has his ceremony to prepare for.

VAL
Right. Of course.

ELIZA
Worry not, Valdyn. You'll have yours in due time.

VAL
Thank you, my lady.

ELIZA
Right. You are not to call upon Her Sea.

Val swallows nervously and FLEXES his fingers over the hilt of his cutlass.

VAL
Of course, my lady.

ELIZA
Excellent. Then let us begin.

No sooner than she says it does she burst into action, but Val is ready. He bends his knees and raises his weapon quick enough to block her first blows.

THUNK. THUNK.

The cutlass BITES into the wooden staff when Val BLOCKS with the edge. Eliza YANKS the staff away, pulling Val SLIGHTLY off balance each time before he recovers.

Eliza RESETS backward, her back straight and one arm behind her back. She LUNGES forward again. This time, Val DODGES her blows. She still forces him back.

Val DUCKS under a blow and LUNGES forward in an UPWARD SLASH. Behind her back, Eliza's fingers CURL. The Sea SHIMMERS to life, SHOVING Val back. He STUMBLES and FALLS backwards. He GRITS his teeth.

ELIZA
Good.

She waits for him to stand, which he does after catching his breath. Then she presses him again.

Val BLOCKS or DEFLECTS several blows. Eliza FORCES him backwards once again, STRIKING at him. Val DEFLECTS the blow with the flat of his blade before WHIPPING it back at her.

Again, Eliza's fingers curl behind her back. Val STUMBLES back, his attack useless.

ELIZA

Again.

They stand ready, and this time, Val attacks first. Eliza stands fast, blocking his blows readily with several CLANGS. Her fingers flex behind her, and she goes on the offensive.

She STRIKES and flexes her fingers. The Sea SHIMMERS around Val's feet. Val STUMBLES backward and catches the blow on his cutlass.

She STRIKEKS again, this time a JAB, and flexes her fingers. The Sea shimmers behind her arm, forcing it forward with SUPERHUMAN QUICKNESS. Val DODGES, but barely manages to stay on his feet.

Val COUNTERATTACKS. Eliza FLEXES her fingers, knocking his strike astray with the Sea, which THICKENS around his cutlass.

As Eliza JABS forward, time SLOWS. Val FLEXES his fingers, but this time, the Sea DOESN'T CHANGE.

It only lasts a SPLIT SECOND before time resumes.

Eliza finishes her jab, catching him in the solar plexus.

Val FALLS to his knees, clutching his chest. His free hand CLENCHES in the sand, and he grits his teeth.

Eliza holds her staff behind her with both hands.

ELIZA

Avienne tells me you noticed something on your excursion.

Val looks up.

VAL

Of course. I noticed the sailor that we-

ELIZA

Not that. Something in the desert.

VAL
It was nothing. A pocket of
stillness. Rare, but—

ELIZA
I'm well aware they're possible.
You do know these pockets could be
something else?

VAL
I know, my lady. But I checked
myself. There was nothing there.

She EYES Val, her expression unreadable.

ELIZA
Very well. I have faith in you.

She extends a hand to Val and HELPS him up. Val brushes sand
off him, rubbing his stuck side.

ELIZA
You've done well, Valdyn. I know
this type of training can be...
discouraging, at times. But hold
fast. You prove yourself to me
time and time again.

VAL
Thank you, my lady.

ELIZA
Of course. Remember, Her will is
immutable.

VAL
Yes, my lady.

Eliza nods sharply.

ELIZA
Good. Now get cleaned up. You'll
want to be presentable for
Avienne.

INT. SEAFERER TEMPLE, CEREMONY HALL - DAY

The ceiling is stained-glass in an ocean design, painting
waves of light on the ground. The air shimmers faintly; the
Sea is visible here.

At the end of the room is a stage. Behind it is a serpent
mosaic that covers the wall.

Avienne stands in a line of two other Seafarers on stage, including KERULAN (20s) in Seafarer robes and a cutlass at her side. She's royalty and aware of it, but she's not cocky.

Eliza also stands on stage. A few Seafarers watch the ceremony—Val, wearing a SILVER SEAGLASS PENDANT, and a dozen others.

Eliza approaches Kerulan with a SEAGLASS necklace lined with gold. It has a SERPENT design.

ELIZA

Kerulan, of house Nachtfell.

Kerulan STEPS FORWARD.

ELIZA

You have served our Serpent Mother with great honor.

KERULAN

Thank you, my lady.

ELIZA

She recognizes your commitment, as do we all. May you continue in your dedication and become a beacon in the Sea for others to follow.

Kerulan BOWS her head. Eliza places the necklace over her head. Kerulan LIFTS her head, SALUTES by placing a fist over her heart, and steps back.

Eliza moves to Avienne, pulling another necklace out of her robe.

ELIZA

Avienne, of house Demaer.

Avienne STEPS FORWARD.

ELIZA

You have served our Serpent Mother with great honor.

AVIENNE

Thank you, my lady.

ELIZA

She recognizes your commitment, as do we all. May you continue...

Her voice FADES OUT. Val watches blankly as the sound of GENTLE WAVES grows louder.

EXT. NAUTILUS, CITY CENTER - DAY

Streets are cobbled stone, buildings too. Strips of embroidered cloth, mostly blues, greens, and pinks, hang outside windows and from ledges.

It's busy—people SCURRY from place to place.

In the distance, uphill, the Seafarer Temple is visible, overshadowing the rest of the city. Io and Kir come to a halt and look up at it.

Kir's cuts are mostly healed. His hair is longer and in a short braid. Instead of a scarf that covers his neck, he wears a high collared shirt buttoned all the way up.

Both have bags slung over their shoulders. Kir TUGS at his collar, frowning briefly and revealing his scar for a split second.

IO
I guess this is it.

She STARES up at the temple, flipping the serpent coin over and over in her fingers.

IO
Thanks for coming with me.

KIR
Of course.

IO
I guess you'll be going home? Back to Haythen?

Kir SHRUGS.

KIR
Something like that.

IO
Right.

She keeps turning the coin over and over.

IO
I should get going, then.

Kir SMILES.

KIR

Indeed.

They EMBRACE.

KIR

If you need me, I'll be there.

IO

Right.

Io takes a deep breath, SHRUGS her bag higher on her shoulder, and sets off.

Kir watches as she DISAPPEARS into the flow of people. He DIGS in his pocket, pulling out a creased, slightly yellowed PIECE OF PAPER.

He unfolds it, revealing its full wear. The creases are so worn they look soft. The ink, once black, has faded to a gentle gray. On it is an ADDRESS: [address here, idfk, ends in Nautilus].

He brushes his thumb over the words before FOLDING it back up. He returns it to his pocket then STARTS WALKING.

EXT. NAUTILUS, EDGE - AFTERNOON

The streets are now GRAVEL pressed into dirt, more dirt than anything else.

Fewer people are out an about. A few YOUNG CHILDREN kick around a ball, their skin a strange pinkish gray—not quite human.

The strips of cloth have multiplied, but the embroidery is cruder, looking homemade. Many feature the Serpent with a figure underneath. The stitching is vague, but the figure seems to have POINTED ears.

Kir smiles and unbuttons the top few buttons of his shirt, revealing his scar.

As he walks, a few sirens SIGN GREETINGS to him. He SIGNS back.

He finally comes to a stop outside a small house. He raises his hand to knock, hesitates, then tucks a piece of hair out of his face.

He takes a deep breath and raises his fist again. He pauses again, briefly, then KNOCKS.

He waits, apprehensive, rubbing his arms. After a moment, he raises his fist again to knock when the door SWINGS open.

A woman opens the door, her throat unscarred. There's little resemblance to Kir. This is LUT (50s), a hard worker with calloused palms and hair tied back sensibly.

When she sees Kir, her eyebrows furrow slightly in confusion and hope. Her lips part.

KIR

Hi, Amma.

She FREEZES for a moment before stepping forward and THROWING her arms around Kir.

They pull apart, and Lut EXAMINES him, eyes GLISTENING.

LUT

Welcome home, my child. Are you...

She wipes her eye.

LUT

Are you sure you want to do this?

KIR

No. But I have decided I want to try.

INT. SEAFERER TEMPLE, CEREMONY HALL - EVENING

Small tables with REFRESHMENTS are scattered. Seafarers stand in small groups, chatting. Eliza stands aloof by the serpent mosaic and a glass of wine, watching the others.

Avienne and Val stand together by a table of drinks. Avienne ADMIRES his serpent pendent, rubbing his thumb over the face and turning it over to view it from all sides.

VAL

Congratulations. You deserve it.

AVIENNE

Thanks.

He lifts it so it GLINTS in the light. Val looks away; Kerulan catches his eye and raises her glass to him.

AVIENNE

It shouldn't have taken this long.

VAL
No, it shouldn't. Kerulan's coming over.

Avienne GRIMACES and drops the pendant, letting it settle on his chest.

AVIENNE
Of course. Remind me again why she's advanced to herald?

Kerulan joins them with a cold smile.

KERULAN
Because, Avienne Demaer, I'm royalty. Remind me again why you've advanced to Herald?

Avienne REDDENS and sets his jaw. Eliza watches from across the room. Kerulan smiles and nods in a small bow to her before returning to the conversation.

KERULAN
Lovely to see you as always, dear Valdyn. I see you've recovered well.

She reaches behind them to the table of refreshments, picks up a drink, and hands it to Val.

VAL
Congratulations, Kerulan.

KERULAN
Why, thank you. And I suppose congratulations are in order for you, too, Avienne.

AVIENNE
How kind of you.

KERULAN
Naturally.

She LEANES over to whisper in Val's ear.

KERULAN
(whispered)
What fun he is to needle. You should try it.

VAL
More fun for you than me, I would imagine.

Kerulan sighs and straightens, speaking to both once more.

KERULAN

Very well. In truth, I'm a little surprised you're not a herald as of today. Merit is dead, it seems, if of the three of us, you're the only acolyte left.

AVIENNE

What are you insinuating?

KERULAN

Ne-po-tis-m, Avienne. Have I not been clear?

AVIENNE

For you, perhaps. The difference is I fight on the front lines.

KERULAN

And Val hasn't? I suppose he was wounded falling down the stairs then, the clumsy boy. Really, now. What good is nepotism if you don't advocate for your... friend?

Avienne GLANCES at Val, then back at Kerulan.

AVIENNE

That's different.

KERULAN

Oh? Do enlighten me.

VAL

No... he's right, Kerulan. My situation is, ah... complicated.

She waits, head tilted and eyebrows raised, for an explanation that never comes. Val and Avienne avoid her eyes.

KERULAN

As you say. Well, my sincerest condolences, Valdyn. I hope you overcome your complications soon. Cheers.

She CLINKS her glass against Val's.

VAL

Cheers.

Avienne SIMMERS as she leaves before taking his own glass from the refreshment table and taking a long sip.

AVIENNE

Mother of the Greater Sea. Has she even left Nautilus since joining the Order?

VAL

Not that I know of. Though I wouldn't say I keep track of her.

AVIENNE

Case in point.

He sips his drink again.

AVIENNE

But... well, I am sorry for all this.

He TUGS his pendant.

AVIENNE

It should be you too. You know how my mother is.

VAL

It's all right. I understand. I'm working on it.

Avienne's glass WOBBLER in his hand, and the Sea shimmers faintly around it. He looks to the side, to Eliza, who lowers her raised hand and beckons with a single nod.

AVIENNE

Oh, for the Serpent's sake... She saw us talking with Kerulan, didn't she?

He leads Val across the room to an expectant Eliza.

ELIZA

I'm glad to see you opening up to the princess, Avienne. Don't squander this opportunity.

AVIENNE

Of course, Mother.

ELIZA

Good. As for your promotion—you'll be needing your own disciple soon.

(MORE)

ELIZA (CONT'D)

You're certain your excursion was a failure?

AVIENNE

I'm sorry. I don't think the sailor we approached will join.

ELIZA

A rarity. How did you go about convincing her?

AVIENNE

She's a siren. And she was advised by another not to join.

Val furrows his brow.

ELIZA

A shame. We need new blood, siren or no.

VAL

Respectfully, my lady, I'm not so sure. She seemed receptive.

She FROWNS imperceptibly, more of a suggestion of a frown than anything else. Avienne SCOWLS briefly.

ELIZA

Is that so? I see.

Water RUSHES distantly. Val and Eliza's head SNAP to the side.

AVIENNE

What is it?

Eliza raises an eyebrow.

ELIZA

A failure of your perception, it would seem. What fortuitous timing.

Avienne presses his lips together.

EXT. SEAFARER TEMPLE - EVENING

The temple LOOMS, casting Io in shadow. SHIMMERING TRAILS WHIRL around the temple—the Sea is a swirling tempest here.

The temple is a huge construction of stone and Seaglass. There's a stained-glass dome and four SPIRES, one on each corner. The Serpent in the dome is visible from the outside.

Sand dusts the ground in a SWIRL pattern around the temple. Stone outcroppings along the base of the temple make coral patterns.

Io KNEELS, scoops up some sand, and stands. She TOSSES it in the air. It starts to fall.

She CLENCHES her fist, and the Sea THICKENS, the air shimmering like heat waves in front of her. The sand is WHISKED away to the side, up and away.

She sets her shoulders and forges onward, clenching her coin in her fist. She walks forward, the Sea slowly getting THICKER around her, though it doesn't affect her. View of her becomes BLURRY, as does the temple.

She steps forward, just in front of the Seaglass doors, and it becomes clear once more. She raises the first holding the coin to knock.

Before she can do so, the doors SWING open. Avienne stands inside, Val just behind.

AVIENNE

I see you changed your mind.

Io SMILES.