

78.

You have advanced to skill level 11 in Traps.

You have advanced to skill level 6 in First Aid.

Aside from the pair of skill-ups, working as a support role for the fight had still netted me just under 50,000 XP for killing the kraken. Among my crew, that was the lowest reward. All the others had played a more direct role and inflicted more damage so not a single one of them got below 100,000 XP for the kill, along with a cool 15,000 XP as a reward from my leadership-generated quest "Kill the Kraken". I didn't get that quest reward since I'd generated it, but since I was essentially giving my crew free bonus XP, there were no complaints from me.

My expenditure to maintain the ship's durability had run up to over 36,000 XP, it taking about 3 points of experience for every durability point I'd wanted. I came out ahead, but my reward for killing such a sea creature certainly had nothing to do with my own advancement, and was instead my investment in my crew.

I raised the ship to the surface and invited the prisoners to reorganize under Gnar's supervision and expand their cramped quarters to the first deck, but I maintained exclusivity on the main deck for the moment. Drese and the medicos began to go through the whole lot more thoroughly.

I had the reason for our presence brought up to me. I had a chair prepared from the Captain's cabin, but Mirash had to carry her to it, she was so weak.

But her eyes were clear and met mine with the same intensity. While Mirash backed away from her, giving us space, she folded her hands in her lap like she'd taught noble girls poise in her spare time. A smirk tugged on the corner of her pale skin.

Yet her composure was a thin veneer. Any analysis would show the debuffs crippling her health and stamina would take time to overcome. She used to have hair that would flutter in the breeze, but the wind here only blew through the short remains she had. Her paleness wasn't a choice, but a sign of ill health and marred by sores to boot. She was doing her best to ignore all this, but I couldn't help the pity that crept into my eyes.

"None of that," she said. "I made my gambles, and you rescued me. I won't have pity!"

"You can hardly stop me," I responded, even as I knelt beside her chair and took her hands between mine. "I'm sorry I couldn't get you sooner."

Her façade shuddered and a tear pooled in the corner of her eye. "I knew you'd come for me, you daft lummox ... I just knew that if I asked you'd come."

“Well, it was my turn to save you again.”

Her hands squeezed mine with all her strength, which I gently accepted. She looked away from me for the first time since Mirash brought her up while she tried to compose herself. I did the gentlemanly thing and gave her several moments to do just that before redirecting the conversation.

“Tell me what happened.”

“Ohhh ... when to start? You’re a bastard, you know?”

“I do know all about it, but something in your tone makes me think you’re not talking about my birth.”

“I was in the Broken Isles looking for clues to Seaborn and you didn’t even tell me I’d had a conversation with him!”

“Ah ... that. Well I didn’t want to put you in a position to test your loyalties.”

She grumbled. “Smart, but it left me on the back foot when you started destroying the island that night.”

“Now that’s an oversimpli ...”

“I know all about your side of it, but this is my story remember? After that fiasco I was brought back under suspicion of colluding with the enemy. After some thorough investigating,” only a slight hitch of her voice betrayed her at that statement, “I was found innocent of collusion but deemed incompetent. They’d already had me on thin ice for several reasons – your friend Lawless Jack exposing some of my connections not the least of them – and deciding that I would not serve my role a spy and longer,” her voice, so strident and matter-of-fact until now, finally cracked. “They ... they offered me up as a sacrifice instead.”

I held her hands, letting the story sift into place while I filtered through to the most pertinent questions.

“Hali, do you still have an obligation to Antarus?” If she did then friend or not, I was limited on what I could share with her and how I could help her.

Her mouth opened and closed. “I remember ... I still remember my father coaching me through the oath that bound me ... I was nine. ‘Until death takes me or my lord releases me.’ Well, I fulfilled my oath and the king expunged me from service.”

She took a deep gasp as her body seized before relaxing just as suddenly. Her eyes opened with the half-focused look of someone examining their stats. “It’s gone! My oath to the royal line really was fulfilled, it’s gone!”

I wasn't an expert on oaths. I couldn't reason why she had one in her stats or why it was only gone now that she claimed her end was fulfilled, but I'd take it. This was a special moment for her, a joyous moment. I was glad to see her have some happiness after her imprisonment.

Which brought confusion when she started crying. I wasn't so emotionally naïve as to think tears couldn't come with happiness, but she started heaving and bawling. I leaned over her chair and held her tight, and she cried into my shirt.

Waving off the curious and the worried among my crew who checked on us, I let her exhaust herself. I'd thought I was just letting her get a grip of herself, sure that her iron will would exert itself because of course it would – this was Hali! She was tough as nails, wasn't she?

I either had an unfair perception of her or I was underestimating the impact of what losing a life of service meant – even if it was a betrayed service.

When Hali's crying subsided to sniffles, I gripped her head in my hands and kissed her forehead. "Rest now. Here you are safe. Rest."

I wanted to spend so much more time catching up with her, and I intended to. I'd done the minimum I had the time for and she had the endurance for now, but we hadn't covered everything we needed to.

I motioned Mirash over. "Is the handless mage I singled out earlier conscious now?"

"Conscious and astute. Woke up and asked Gnar if he 'had the pleasure of being rescued my Domenic Seaborn' and if the 'good lad was taking visitors'."

I barked out a laugh. "Bring him up next!"

"Are you going to go through the whole crew one at a time? They're getting antsy."

"Should just be this one, then I'll give them free reign of the ship."

Mirash shrugged and ducked below deck. Less than a minute later he was walking a slightly off-balance Marcus Renshaw up. Marcus brightened when he saw me, which was clear given his slightly green complexion. Since he'd been holed up in a coastal town, it had never occurred to me that the motion of the sea might bother him. Maybe it was the carcass of the kraken hanging over the side that turned him green.

Or maybe it was the sight of his own wrists that did it.

"Marcus," I said striding forward and seizing the silver chain linking his manacles. "Haven't we found the key for this yet?" I trailed off as I noticed the problem.

"It's good to see you too, and it still would be independent of your responsibility saving my future prospects!" He exclaimed. "But as you can see, these weren't designed to come off."

“Tell me about them,” I ordered. “I can tell that they’re inhibiting your mana.”

“Oh can you? Picked up enchanting as a side profession while I was away?”

I ignored his words and didn’t bother explaining my Domain. It was the least important of topics. He didn’t hold out and explained to me how they his manacles were specially constructed for him, with a bar driven through the bones of his forearms and attached to the inside of the manacles, before a chain link was forged to link them all together. The end product was an easily enchanted restraining device that with an enchanter’s attention could also restrain his mana. It was designed to be a near-permanent solution, as only losing his arms with the restraints would allow him freedom.

“This is a lot of effort for someone to go through just to throw you in the bilge of a prison ship,” I said.

“The conditions of this ship notwithstanding,” Marcus answered. “I was being dressed up like a present.”

“A present for who? Who would want you?”

“Why for ... ahhh, I’m going to ignore that jab. I was being gifted to the nation of Makam.”

“A nation? I was confused earlier, now I’m baffled.”

“Let’s just say that they have an interest in me and would appreciate seeing me live this.” He jangled his special restraints.

I clapped my hand on his shoulder and led him towards the bow. “Y’know Marcus, that explanation would have been good enough when I was paying you five silver an hour for your time.”

I kept the friendly smile, but I intended to have more answers than riddles and let that sink in for him.

“Hrrm. You were an unruly student ... among the many, many life accomplishments I have done, some might have involved thievery from Makam’s imperial magical school, including a certain level of destruction for said school. With that unfortunate history, I didn’t see any reason not to hire myself out as a war-mage to some of their neighbors and after one thing led to another, I found myself with a bounty on my head amounting to over a thousand gold.”

“You had a thousand gold bounty on your head!?”

“My dear lad, it was a thousand gold a long time ago, and rather than increase the quantity of the reward they started tacking on boons such as titles and recognition. I can only imagine what other crimes I’ve been falsely accused of since, it’s probably grown.” He sounded very satisfied with himself.

“Did Makam capture you when Tulisang was invaded?”

He coughed. “No, thankfully. If they had this miracle of finding me never would have had the chance, I’d have been dragged off to their heartland months ago. No, I was found and captured by an order of assassins. As it turned out, I’d killed a member of their order years ago and they remembered. They captured me, dragged me north and then bounced me around to several of their holdings in the Broken Isles to show me off. Then they cut off my hands and sold me to a representative of Antarus who arranged to have me sent with the rest of this lot.” He waved his stumps at the decks below. “I’m simplifying this a lot, but I figured if you didn’t give a young girl more than a few minutes than an old man like me can’t claim too much of your time.”

I snorted and regarded him. “You’re holding up well for all that.”

“It was an unpleasant time, but I disciplined myself to master all the branches of magic; I can deal with some unpleasantness.” He held up his stumps. “Some prosthetics would be nice. I wonder if I could look up my friend who went into research?”

“First let’s get those things cut off you. We have an enchanter on board if necessary, but that’ll probably be a last resort.”

“Really? You have you own enchanter? You really have grown! Some time and quality tools should be able to get through these, but I’ll need a healer or some good elixers to deal with some infection.”

“We have a master life mage with us.”

Marcus’s eyes snapped to mine. “Hmph. Specialists. I can’t say I blame you for studying with one and I’m sure I’ll appreciate him.” Stretching and sounding overly casual he continued. “Since you haven’t mentioned anything about what happens next, I’ll put a bug in your ear: there’s a retired magic tutor on board who would love not be handed over to Makam and would be willing to trade all of his knowledge in a deal.” He nodded to me and walked – shifting his balance every few paces – back to the hatch below.

I watched him go and shook my head. Finding him after all this time amazed me. Our relationship had been mercenary at first – he’d charged me more for his time than anyone but an administrator should expect – but we’d developed a sort of friendship. He’d been the first to find out that I was Davy Jones’ lieutenant and not held it against me, though his own curiosity had its role in that decision. If he wanted to sign up with me, he’d be the first person I offered a job.

“Gnar!” I bellowed below decks. Rather than climbing up to answer me like a human, Gnar bellowed back from two decks below.

“What, Captain?”

“Assume command of the ship until I see Travis sorted out!”

“Aye!” he yelled. I was proud of him for that little bit of nautical spirit.

Everyone in the first deck below me was giving me looks. I ignored them. “Have Drese awaiting my call. The main deck is opened to all.”

I trotted past the kraken carcass and gauged my dive as I picked up speed, ending in a sprint with my foot pushing off the gunwale and my arms sweeping out and forward into a spear just as I broke the surface of a wave. I started swimming and burned a steady rate of stamina just to get to the cutter faster. When I reached her keel I swam up, broke from the ocean and pulled myself over the side.

Still dripping wet, I approached Travis at the helm and started clapping. “My one co-sailor out of the whole crew ... you did well! You did very well! I am proud of you. You managed the Roc’s Eye in my stead and I couldn’t have asked for more.”

Travis – who’d obviously had his nerves put through the wringer – straightened up a bit and puffed his chest out more with each word. “Twas nuthin, Cap’n!”

“Not only did you stand in my place,” I went on, standing in front of him at the helm now. “You turned a group of strongarms into a band of seamen when it counted, and you sailed straight towards the arms of a kraken! My man, you’re a sailor beyond keen!”

“Aww, shucks, sar!”

“Oh, let him go on when he’s in the mood,” Gerald interrupted, carrying a bucket of seawater in each hand. He spoke to Travis as if I wasn’t there. “He’ll forget that heroism isn’t the standard, so when he remembers to give you credit for it you better take it!”

Those buckets reminded me that I had things to be doing. “Travis,” I said, my tone returning to business. “I’ll see you rewarded for your effort. Anything I should know before taking command of the Roc’s Eye?”

“Sar!” He saluted. “She’ll ‘ave a bellyful of wa’er soon and the port side was done stove in!”

“I saw it, thank you Travis.” I returned his salute and activated my ability.

Would you like to raise Roc’s Eye as your ship?

You may only have two ships in your fleet, choose which ship to replace from your fleet interface.

I chose the *Final Internment*, and the little cutter below my feet was once again under my command.

Exchanging ships back and forth was the kind of cheating ability that people would analyze in libraries and discuss how to maximize the benefits for the profession. I had an effect on the *Final Internment* that was going to make it a pain and a half to deal with all the people on board,

so I got around it by swapping ships to one without that effect. The *Final Internment* wasn't a cursed ship right now, and I could sail back and address everyone on it without a relationship penalty.

Unfortunately, the *Roc's Eye* was too small to fit everyone – it was crowded just with my boarding party! – and I didn't want to leave everyone to fate, so I'd have to take command of the hulk again. Hopefully by that point, I'd know where I was going to stand with them all.

I felt the wounds in the *Eye* and skimmed the new perks she had. It was a melancholy thing; now she was getting bonuses because of my longer history with her but I would be discarding her in only a few hours, this time for good.

But first she had a few more things to do.

"Travis," I said, summoning constructs to assist. "Take us alongside the *Internment*."

"Aye, Cap'n!"

I helped directly, and we pulled up alongside – more like under – the hulk and I motioned to the waiting Drese. He'd gotten a half-hour nap since we'd last needed him, I doubted he'd even counted his XP for his help with the kraken. Still, he carried on and I mentally increased the time I promised him to himself once this was over.

"You have instructions for me, Captain?"

I looked him in the eyes. "It's time, Drese. I need to try."

He crossed his arms and held his chin in a hand. "And can you level? That would be a good indication of Davy Jones' own hold over you."

Rather than discuss it, I tapped into my XP reserve and tried to apply some to advancing. Last time we'd tried had been a failure, Jones' mandate for me to not level still impairing me.

This time, it worked!

Congratulations! Level up! You have reached level 11.

I did it! After so long, I was finally able to level up again!

And with that, I had 3 attribute points waiting for me to assign them, too! And I knew just the inconvenient stat that needed them ...

Congratulations! You have earned +3 to your main attribute: Charisma.

Diving into my stat sheet, I saw a beautiful thing:

Name	Domenic Seaborn
Age	24
Race	Human (Cursed)
Profession	Captain of the Deep
Level	11
XP	514,700
Health	230
Mana	260
Stamina	260
Strength	22
Agility	23
Dexterity	21
Constitution	23
Endurance	26

Intelligence	26
Wisdom	25
Charisma	17
Luck	19
Skills	
Seamanship 19	Swimming 17
Sea Legs 15	Rowing 8
Carpentry 3	Fishing 8
Singing 2	Cooking 2
Analyze 9	Observation 10
Climbing 11	First Aid 6
Lock Picking 4	Stealth 8
Leadership 9	Trade 1
Traps 11	Dirty fighting 4
Artillery 2	Unarmed combat 8
Swordsmanship 8	Small blades 10

Spears 9	Axes 7
Light armor 5	Archery 4
Magic	Air magic
	Water magic
	Life magic
	Ocean magic
	Mental magic
Achievements	Lifesaving VII
	Trickster
Perks	Adaptable
	Heart at Sea
	Scarred Visage
Titles:	Slaver

I saw a stat sheet that was all within balance. I didn't feel anything suddenly changing with my features, and the new 'perk' I had explained why.

Scarred Visage: suffering from charisma imbalance has left you with a rough countenance.

Insight into my scarred visage told me that the imbalance penalty where people would dislike me was gone, though people would naturally react to someone who looked like I did differently than someone walking down the street. I was a bit disappointed as I'd been hoping I'd be returned to normal with my rebalancing, but a rough face wasn't the worst thing to live with.

I wasn't imbalanced anymore!

"Congratulations, Captain." Drese said with a small bow, sensing my excitement. "Now, I believe there's something else you wished to try of even greater import to you?"

I nodded and motioned Gerald over. He sensed the air as he joined us.

"We giving this another shot?"

"That's right."

"Well whatever the result Dom, I'm still with you."

"Thank you," I said, and my eyes burned a bit. He'd been a true friend to me ever since we found ourselves sharing company again. This wasn't the first time we'd tried undoing the curse, and he'd been patient each attempt.

He found himself in the odd position of being one of the only members of my crew not wanting to stay cursed. Gnar and his team all saw themselves as with me for good, and wouldn't give up the advantages being cursed had at this point. Jorgagu wanted to be free of the curse, but Drese suggested not experimenting on him because his profession brought an aspect of magic into his curse that might complicate things.

There was a ship full of people who wanted to be rid of my curse, but I couldn't help them just yet. Soon.

"Well, let's get started." I said quietly. "Drese?"

The master life mage began to walk me through the process again, now that my control over life magic had increased. The trouble with curses was that it wasn't just about power but about the source; Drese couldn't undo any of the curses on my crew, it had to come from me. I had to be

willing to remove the curse and powerful enough to manage it as well. For the longest time, I'd been missing one component or the other. Now, this clicked into place as well.

Life magic was like a lens that brought a distant ship to view, or more like a lens that brought clarity to the magical spectrum. With it, I was able to understand more of how the magic of the curse held together.

My curse was – and this was from Drese's own mouth – 'exceedingly comprehensive'. It wasn't as simple as someone cursed with lycanthropy or a curse that made a spirit haunt a grave. Those things could be no less complex to undo, but they usually had a much simpler process. There wasn't much room for change or alteration.

Not so with mine. I was not only a cursed being, but my very profession leveraged that curse. It was able to spread the curse to other people based solely on their acceptance of it. The parameters of their curse could be changed.

What I was trying to do was pick apart one piece of my curse. I couldn't even conceptualize undoing the whole thing: no one but Davy Jones even had that option. What I could do was take the restrictions around just Gerald and ... unwind them.

Gerald gasped, and then he disappeared.

Not from sight, but from the perception I had of my crew that told me where they were and what their condition was.

He wasn't one of my crew anymore.

It had worked!

"It worked!" The two of us shouted together a moment before our arms wrapped around each other and we started laughing like madmen. "It worked! It really did, I can free them! I can free them now ..." Tears sprung from my eyes and flowed down my gaunt face. I pulled away from Gerald but he steadied me. "I can finally keep my promise to them. I can undo one of the mistakes I made!"

"We'll get to them soon," Gerald said. "You've saved miss Hali, next you'll save your old crew." He shivered suddenly. "Strange, I seem to have forgotten my coat ... temperature hasn't been something that's bothered me in months!"

"This was the most crucial step," Drese said, not unkindly but reminding us that we were doing an experiment. "Freedom was your most important goal, but is your curse adaptable? Can you lose a crewman and then get him back?"

"I have my doubts. Like I said before, if one of my crew dies I can't 're-conscript' them, even though I can conscript the recently deceased."

Drese got straight to the heart of the issue. “The question,” he said, turning to Gerald. “Is whether you feel comfortable continuing and risking your newly returned freedom?”

“Yes,” Gerald said without hesitation, making my heart swell just a bit. “I’m here for Dom.”

“Captain?” Drese turned it over to me, and I took a moment to shake Gerald’s hand and look in him in the eye before I activated my Raise Crew ability again.

I found his name on the list of people I could raise and selected him. Typically, that was where the person I made the offer to would get a prompt, but this time the prompt that came up was for me.

‘Gerald’ will be unavailable for recruitment for 22 hours.

I read the prompt to the others and it surprised them too. Drese postulated it was a working of my profession, and that my upgraded Raise Crew ability had shortened the time from a standard 24 hours. All in all, it suggested that I could return Gerald to my crew but that I wouldn’t be able to swap crew back and forth.

“The question will be,” Drese continued. “Whether you can re-conscript him again and again or once more?”

“Why would it just be once?” Gerald asked.

“Because he has Raise Crew II. If he only received the opportunity to enlist your services again with the upgrade, we wouldn’t know it because we never had the opportunity before.”

“This allows plenty of choice as it is,” I said. “It’s good enough even if there is a restriction later. It also lets me make the prisoners on the Final Internment an offer that won’t need to be permanent.”

We all climbed up a rope ladder over the side of the hulk, where the deck was crowded with people seeing the sun for the first time in weeks or months. I noticed there were camps even among the oppressed, as the humans kept separate from the others as well as other segregations that I didn’t understand.

Mirash saw and greeted me before adopting a confused expression. “Did you do something different with your face? I used to feel unsettled looking at you.” Before I could make any reply at all he went on. “Gnar! Over here! D’you think the Captain did something new with his face?”

Former prisoners of all races made way for Gnar. “He sure did! Used to be I always had the urge to smash it. Now it’s just ugly!”

“Laugh it up, you two,” I said, accepting the ribbing. Improving my level meant that my fighters pushing the level cap would get their improvement – Gnar would have noticed that immediately of course. “Gnar, keep your men stationed throughout the crowd. I’m going to address them.”

I pulled myself into the rigging above to be visible to all, with the not-so-subtle reminder of my prowess below me. I raised my voice and explained to all who could hear who I was and what I was doing with them.

I recognized that they were all deemed criminals for one reason or another; whether that be for regular crimes or prisoners of war. That didn't mean that I considered them prisoners myself. What did I care if they had fought against Antarus or got caught accepting bribes?

I would be having a quick interview with all on board over the next weeks as we sailed east south-east. Based on that interview (with the help of the ship records documenting their crimes and Hali's expertise) I would make a judgement.

If I judged that they weren't worth my interest, I would release them on the shores of Andros (for the humans) or Carr (for the non-humans) along with all the others I wasn't interested in. They would be free to make their way from there however they saw fit.

If I deemed that they should not have been prisoners in the first place but deserved to die, I would have them executed. I would not release them like a lionfish amongst the others I let go, nor did I want sedition among my crew.

If I was interested in them, I would make them an offer of service. I would use their services for an agreed upon time, after which I would free them. They'd all heard of the fate of the Death's Consort, so I made a demonstration to prove my sincerity.

Jorgagu was my crewman, and he identified as 'cursed' to all who analyzed him. In front of everyone, I released the orcish enchanter from my service. It took a solid five minutes to do, and was indeed a bit different than releasing Gerald had been, but once he felt the curse vanish the massive orc released a bellowing war cry.

The message was clear: I could afford to release a powerful orcish enchanter from my service. I would keep my word.

Once I'd made my speech I ducked below to repeat it for anyone who wasn't able to crowd up top and catch my every word. Then I mingled, a pair of orcs flanking me, as I got a sense for the many groups involved.

The nonhumans were the most receptive of course, but the orcs among them were challenging. Checking with Gnar about it, I discovered that every orc on board had been captured from different engagements. Rather than being a straight supplement to my current war band, they each viewed themselves as carrying the leadership of their former group, and would try to assimilate our orcs into their nonexistent ranks rather than the other way around. It was a headache, and for once Gnar agreed, since he was the one who was going to have to duel all of them to pull them into his team.

The madu were respectful to me, but when they saw Drese supporting me they turned practically honorific.

The chortin harbored resentment to humans in general, which left them in a catch with me as their rescuer.

Among the non-humans, there was a halfling – a fully grown man no larger than a child! He looked like he'd started out a lot rounder, and wore his brightly colored rags with a foppish sense of fashion, but I was fascinated. I could count on one hand the number of halflings I'd met in my life even with all my travels. Tarzor Stoutfoot had an interesting tale, for sure.

The humans were the most standoffish, of course. There was no other group that I was more vilified in than my own race, and even among criminals that held true. It was also true that most of the non-humans were prisoners because of their races, while among the humans there were more genuine criminals. Some I saw as hard men who were doubtless being sent south-east to make some coin at the slave markets, but others I walked away from with the certainty I'd never let them step foot on land again.

There was one curious exception among the humans. A character by himself who ignored everyone except to step out of their way and stared at the remains of the kraken hanging over the side. He had an unfortunate appearance, starting with a severe overbite, a pair of buck teeth, thin neck, and the inability to grow facial hair on his neck or chin, resulting in scruffy muttonchops and a wispy mustache. All in all, a very mousey looking fellow.

His antics analyzing the kraken drew my notice and I analyzed him before speaking.

Name	Philomon "Mouse" MacGregor
Age	19
Race	Human
Profession	Alchemist
Level	4
Health	60

Mana	100
Stamina	40
Strength	4
Agility	5
Dexterity	8
Constitution	6
Endurance	4
Intelligence	10
Wisdom	7
Charisma	4
Luck	11

“Good grief, man!” I exclaimed, making him jump and spin. “A stiff breeze is going to do you in! How’d you manage to survive the trip this far?”

“F-fortifying potions with s-scrap and waste.”

I wasn’t actually expecting an answer so hearing that he’d somehow made potions with the waste the prisoners had in the decks below ... you know, I wasn’t going to think too deeply on that.

“Well, I see you’re fascinated with our recent ...”

“Need the eyes.” He blurted. “Eyes would be valuable. Skin too. Blood would have been better, but it wasn’t kept. Waste. What about its internal organs? Stomach would be good. Liver too. Brain? Maybe as a binding agent. Waste. When can we start harvesting?”

He turned such expectant eyes on me after his ramble that I found myself at a loss for words.

“That’s Mouse,” Hali said, being supported by the teenage madu who’d been trying to provide for her when we rescued them. “Number one synthesizer of street drugs in Pristav. After a third failed manhunt by the city guard, he was caught by a group of adventurer’s posing as sellers of water dancer proboscis.” At my look, she added “Truth is stranger than fiction.”

Mouse didn’t deny any of it, in fact he didn’t react to Hali at all. He continued to stare at me, waiting for my judgement on harvesting the kraken.

“Mouse,” I said, “how interested would you be in a job?”