

Chapter LXXXVI: Mysterious Ghost Ship

By the time we climbed out of the longboats and up onto the Golden Hind's deck, Ritsuka was pale and sickly and looked like he had seen much better days. It seemed like all he could do just to keep his mouth shut and that apple he'd had earlier in his stomach, because he hadn't said anything on the entire trip over.

Rika was better off, but not as much so as she might have preferred to be. I didn't blame either of them, because *I* wasn't at my best either. I'd been on Dragoncraft and airplanes before, but if I'd ever spent time on the ferry before it was shut down, I was too young to remember it, so I really didn't have much experience with ships to speak of.

The one solace was that it wasn't as bad as it had been aboard Gallagher's ship. The longboats were equally stomach-churning either way, but the *Golden Hind* seemed far more stable than whatever Gallagher's ship was named.

"Are you okay, Master?" Bradamante asked.

"Y-yeah," Ritsuka rasped hoarsely. "I-I think...I-I should b-be able to handle this."

He didn't look it. In fact, he looked like he was about five seconds from racing over to the side so he could strip a few layers of paint off the wood.

Mash sighed. "I'm sorry, Senpai, but this is the consequence of drinking so much last night." She grimaced. "A-although being on a ship *is* taking some getting used to."

"Ha! Now I *know* you brats have never sailed before!" Drake laughed. "Don't you worry, though! I'm sure you'll find your sea legs. Eventually."

"Hopefully sooner than later," Rika grouched. "If I have to spend this entire Singularity seasick, I'm going to mutiny."

Drake laughed and stepped away towards the center of the ship's main deck. "Everyone onboard?" she bellowed.

"Aye, Cap'n!" Bombe shouted back. "Crew aboard, longboats secured! We're ready to set sail!"

"Well, look at that!" Drake grinned. "Looks like you useless scumbags can get moving in a timely manner after all!"

The crew roared with laughter, and Drake strode over to climb up to the upper deck towards the back of the ship — whatever it was called — so she could take the wheel, a sturdy thing that looked like it had been reinforced with a brass frame.

"All right, you rotten scallywags!" she called. "We're setting sail! Time to cast off and say goodbye to this half-assed paradise!"

"AYE, AYE, CAP'N!" the crew shouted back.

The sails unfurled, and the ship lurched into motion, making us Masters stumble as we tried to keep our footing. Arash steadied me, and Rika flung her arms around Emiya's as Mash helped Ritsuka stay standing.

"Whoa!" Rika squealed. Her brother groaned and held a hand to his mouth, squeezing his eyes shut.

"T-try to stay calm, Master," Mash told him. "It's important to stay hydrated and maintain proper nutrition while out at sea, so you can't afford to waste the food you had earlier."

Ritsuka nodded shallowly, but even that seemed like it was nearly too much for his stomach to handle.

Emiya huffed. "Well, this isn't exactly how I imagined this Singularity going, although I guess I should've known better." He looked down at Rika. "You alright there, Master? If you need to lie down, I'm sure Captain Drake wouldn't mind me projecting a hammock for you."

"Oh, sure, make fun of us squishy mortals," Rika grumbled. "Servants don't have to worry about getting seasick, do they? I wonder if a Command Spell can change that."

"I-I don't think that's a good idea, Master," Bradamante said with an awkward chuckle. "The Madam Director might not approve."

"She wouldn't," I agreed, "and you wouldn't like some of the things she might come up with as punishment."

"It was just a joke," Rika muttered. "Geez. Lighten up a little."

I guess I needed to work on my delivery a little if she didn't realize mine was, too, although not as much of one as she would have liked.

Marie's worst punishment tended to be termination — of your employment. It also tended to be her *first* punishment, because she took everything about Chaldea with deathly seriousness and treated it like the high stakes job it was. With Masters, however, she had a bit more leeway, because she had the latitude to do things like make us run more drills in the simulator or do more Rayshift compatibility tests. More than one candidate during my two years of training had washed out because that took too much out of them.

Arash shook his head. "Well, there's not much we can do about the seasickness thing. Sorry to say that it really is just something you're going to have to get used to, Rika."

"Ugh." She grunted, and then slid a sidelong look at her brother. "Well, I guess it could be worse. I could be hungover, too, couldn't I?"

Ritsuka opened his eyes long enough to lance her with a glare, unamused.

I let that one pass, just because she was right. She *had* been the more responsible one last night, and she was reaping the benefits of that now, even if her brother didn't appreciate it. It was actually kind of funny to see the metaphorical shoe on the other foot, especially after three Singularities where I wouldn't have guessed it would work out this way.

I guess fear of Marie's wrath really did work as a motivator. I'd have to let her know later on.

The *Golden Hind* pulled away from the nameless island Drake had been camped out on, and the wind picked up as we left the beach behind, carrying the ship out to sea even faster under a sunny, cloudless sky. The nostalgic smell of saltwater spray filled the air, as stale as it was familiar.

And of course, the further we got from the island, the more viable targets for my powers diminished, and it wasn't long at all before the last giant crab slipped away and there was nothing left — I was back to my normal, human senses. At least that told me something about how deep the waters were here.

Once we were out on the open ocean, however, things quickly got very samey. There wasn't much to look at when there was water in every direction and nothing else, and it struck me then exactly how much math and planning there must have been involved in navigation, especially back in Drake's day. When you didn't have any landmarks except for the stars, following a map was probably as much about knowing how far you had to go and how fast you were getting there as it was anything else.

A little bit of fiddling with my communicator opened up the map Da Vinci had prepared for us, the last, most up to date scan of the Singularity's layout. The tracking function showed a small, red dot moving slowly northeast, leaving behind a slowly fading trail of dash marks from a relatively small island that could only be Drake's "paradise."

Further on in front of us, however, there was another island, barely larger than the one we'd just left, with what looked like a mountainous ridge that formed a crescent shaped shell around its beach.

When I leaned out over the side of the ship, I saw no such thing on the horizon.

"Senpai?" Rika asked. "Is something wrong?"

I looked over to Arash instead of answering her and pointed up at the crow's nest. "Can you see anything about where we're headed?"

Arash held up a finger, and then he vanished. Rika squawked.

"I thought we had rules about that!"

"In Chaldea," Emiya drawled. "Out here, it's too useful to be too polite about it."

A moment later, I saw Arash reappear up in the crow's nest, startling the guy who was already up there, and he took a second to steady the man before he looked out ahead of us, scanning the horizon in every direction. Once he'd decided he'd seen as much as he was going to, he disappeared again and reappeared with our group. This time, everyone was expecting it, so no one was surprised.

"I couldn't see the actual island," he told us apologetically. "There's some kind of distortion up ahead, a mist or a fog that's too thick to see through."

Bombe, who had apparently been paying close enough attention to overhear us, didn't seem surprised. "Aye, that sounds about right," he said. "Things have been strange out here on these waters."

"Strange how?" I asked, turning towards him.

"One minute, we're sailing through a tropical paradise," he said. "The next, we be making our way through the chill of the North Atlantic. Before we can get our bearings, we're in Mediterranean waters, and a typhoon is trying to sweep us away. Things be wild out here, wilder than anything I've seen afore, I assure you."

"Bombe, stop your lollygagging!" Drake barked from the wheel. "Get your ass back to work!"

"Aye, Boss!" Bombe replied dutifully. "Just letting our guests here know some more about the crazy seas afoot!"

"They'll learn well enough when they see it first hand!"

Taking that as dismissal, Bombe scampered off and went back to what he was doing before he stopped to talk to us. Our group huddled back together again, and although he still wasn't in great shape, Ritsuka seemed to have improved a little since we first climbed aboard.

"So what does this mean?" he asked, still a little queasy.

"It means that we need to be ready for anything," I said. "Let's go see if Drake has any better idea what we'll be facing."

"Right behind you, Senpai!" said Rika.

We broke apart, and I led our motley crew up the main deck and towards the wheel, where Drake arched an eyebrow at us.

"Don't tell me a little mystery frightens you?" she teased.

A little bit of fiddling brought up the map again, and Drake whistled as she got a look at it. "Damn," she said. "I caught a glimpse last night when you were talking to that boss of yours, but I had no idea you had a map in that little doodad, too!"

I zoomed in and pointed out the little red dot. "This is us." Scrolling up, I focused in on the island we were headed towards. "This is where we're headed right now. Know anything about it?"

"Can't say that I do," Drake said. "We haven't been out on these seas all that long, and things were real screwy for a while there. Even if we *had* been to that island before, it might not be the same one anymore, get me?"

My lips pulled into a scowl. So it wasn't just the scanners having trouble, this place really *had* been shifting around and changing up until we got here, and there was no telling if it would stay the same the entire time either.

“So Miss Da Vinci was right,” Mash mumbled.

“You have no idea what to expect then?” I asked.

“Nothing solid,” said Drake. “I met a few of those invincible bastards — Servants you called ‘em, right? Managed to fight them off all by my lonesome, but if they’ve got a base around these islands, well, I ain’t found it, that’s for sure.”

“These Servants have names?”

Drake shrugged, which, yeah, that was probably about what I should have expected. We’d gotten used to the Servants we ran into broadcasting their identities to anyone and everyone who would listen, but tactically, in a situation like this one, it made sense for them to hide who they were. They weren’t Romulus recruiting soldiers and citizens for his new Rome, after all, or Jeanne Alter crowing her revenge from every rooftop she could find. Keeping their names secret was a much larger advantage to them in this case.

“Bombe said something about the seas changing wildly around here,” Arash said. “Something about shifting between tropical and arctic at the drop of a hat?”

“Aye,” said Drake, frowning. “Unpredictable, they are. They change almost randomly, and for no reason, to boot. Plays merry havoc on the weather, but not nearly as much as it should.”

“No typhoons or hurricanes?” Emiya asked. “Even someone like me knows that temperature differentials like that should cause all sorts of nasty stuff.”

“Should, but they don’t,” said Drake. “It’s like someone mashed together all the oceans in the world and told ‘em to play nice.”

“I mean, do we really want to make a big deal out of that?” asked Rika. “I, for one, really like the idea of not being bashed against the nearest rock by *kamikaze*.”

Drake and I both looked over at her. “What?”

What did Japanese suicide bombers have to do with this?

“In the late thirteenth century, the Mongols attempted to invade Japan,” Mash recited. “However, midway through the fighting, a powerful typhoon struck and destroyed a large portion of the invasion fleet, and the Mongol leaders retreated, leaving thousands of stranded soldiers to die. The Japanese, viewing the typhoon as divine intervention, named it *kamikaze*, or Divine Wind.”

“That’s the basic gist of it, yeah,” Ritsuka agreed.

“Ha!” Drake grinned. “Bunch of pansies! Scared of some wind and a little choppy water? What kind of sailor quits that easily?”

The kind that didn’t want to sink more resources and men into a fight that had already cost them too much of both to be worth it. Superstition about the wrath of gods had probably played at least some part in it.

“Leaving that aside,” I said, “have you noticed any other...strangeness about this ocean?”

“Nothing that exciting,” Drake answered. “Just gotta keep your wits about you. Fortunately, you’re sailing with Francis Drake! I ain’t met a storm yet that’s beat me!”

“Master.” Arash nudged me, and when I turned towards him, he jerked his head over towards the side, where, with a jolt, I saw a rolling mist creeping along the water.

Had we reached it already? No, we couldn’t have. We were moving fairly fast, but not *that* fast. That mist he’d seen earlier should still be a few miles off.

“Brrr!” Rika said, hugging herself. “Is it me, or did the temperature just drop, like, ten degrees? Centigrade, I mean, not that wacky Fahrenheit stuff America uses.”

It wasn’t just her, I felt it, too.

“See what I mean?” Drake asked pointedly. “Changes out of the blue.”

Up above, the sky darkened suddenly as clouds rolled in out of nowhere, thick and ominous. They gathered together swiftly, and in less than a minute, they’d blotted out the sun, casting the entire ship in a sort of dim twilight.

“Is...this part of those sudden changes?” Ritsuka asked worriedly.

Drake nodded. “Seen crazier since we got here, kiddo, trust me.”

The mist creeping along the water grew thicker and rose higher and higher, slowly climbing up the side of the ship. Up on the masts, the sails suddenly whipped about, flipping in every direction as the wind spun, and our speed dropped like a stone. Drake frowned.

“Oi, Bombe!” she shouted down. “Bring us down to half-sail! Something freaky’s going on!”

“Aye, Boss!” Bombe shouted back, and the crew adjusted the sail, pulling it up until it was only halfway open. The ship slowed even further until we were basically drifting along from our own momentum.

“Oh, geez,” Rika wheezed, “I’ve seen this movie before! The comedic relief always goes first!”

“You’re worrying too much, Master,” Emiya said. “This is real life, not a horror movie.”

Despite his words, however, he held his hands loose, fingers splayed, ready to summon his preferred weapons at any moment.

“What’s got you all in a tizzy?” Drake asked. “Just more of the usual shit. Give it a minute and it’ll pass.”

“Master,” Arash said sharply, looking about.

“Yeah.”

I wasn't the only one who found this suspicious. The only question was, who was coming, and what were they after?

Slowly, I reached down and took hold of the hilt of my dagger.

Beep-beep!

“S-rva-t de —” was all Romani managed to get out, and then the feed cut and his image disappeared as quickly as it had appeared.

“Okay, *now* I'm worried,” said Ritsuka.

The ship lurched, and we all stumbled as we tried to stay standing. Arash braced me, and Emiya braced Rika, but Ritsuka fell to his knees and Mash nearly joined him. Bradamante helped them both back to their feet.

“W-what was that?” Mash asked frantically.

“The Hell?” Drake tried to turn the wheel, but it refused to budge. “Something caught the rudder?”

Up above, the sails suddenly went slack as the wind settled, and down below, the mist crept onto the deck, wafting over our ankles gently, but so cold that it sapped the warmth from anything it touched. A shiver shuddered reflexively down my spine.

“Boss!” Bombe called.

“I know!” Drake shouted back. “Fuck! Keep an eye out! Something screwy is going on here!”

By now, the mist had become a fog so thick that anything further out than fifteen feet or so from the ship was all but invisible — the perfect time to ambush us and take us by surprise.

The only question was, who? I wasn't an expert on maritime heroes, but I knew enough of them to know that it wasn't likely any of them could control the weather like this. It was too close to a Divine Spirit's territory, something Poseidon or some other sea god could do, like an Authority. If that was the case, had he followed Drake here after she stole his Grail?

I wished we could rule that out.

Mash gasped and spun about, her shield materializing in her hands. “Enemy Servant det —”

The word died on her tongue before she could finish it, because out of the mist sailed a ship, a ghastly thing coated in barnacles and strips of some kind of stringy plants that glowed with an ethereal light, casting a faint, ghostly sheen over the hull's faded paint. The ragged sails remained full and filled, despite the lack of wind and the many rips and holes in them, and yet it crept along at a snail's pace.

It made no move to attack. None of the cannons were out, and the course it was maintaining would bring it past us, but not on a ramming run. Against all reason, it...didn't seem hostile.

“Holy shit,” Rika breathed. “No way.”

“Master,” said Arash, something like a question in his voice. He hadn’t yet summoned his bow, but he was ready to the instant I gave the word.

“Just...”

My instinct was to strike preemptively, before we were attacked first, but this wasn’t like with Jeanne Alter, who had actually tried to kill us in Orléans. Whatever or whoever this was, they hadn’t done a single thing to give us reason to think they were an enemy. They weren’t taking an offensive posture at all, but neither were they trying to be particularly friendly, and I just didn’t know what to make of that.

And as the ship came close, we could finally see the deck and the phantoms that worked atop it, faint impressions of human beings that only seemed halfway there. A low, droning sound echoed eerily off of them — a work song, I realized, a sea shanty.

“Haul on the bowline,” they chorused, flat and dead, “the bully ship’s a-rolling. Haul on the bowline, bowline hauling.”

The ghostly crew shuffled about, going through the motions of the jobs they’d had in life, and they were completely oblivious to us. For all they cared, *we* were the ghosts, no more substantial than air and no more worthy of attention. I wasn’t sure they would have noticed if one of our Servants killed one of them.

“Fuck me running,” Drake breathed.

But it was the captain who stood apart from the rest, a tall, gangly, much more solid figure in ratty, tattered pirate garb, complete with tricorn hat, manning the wheel. His skin was pale and washed out, as though it had been completely drained of blood, and strips of blackened seaweed hung from his gaunt face in place of a beard or hair, framing milky white eyes that seemed to stare not at us, but through us.

He didn’t speak. He said nothing as his ship came within spitting distance of the *Golden Hind* and slowly sailed past. He just watched, turning that dead, piercing stare on each and every one of us one at a time, like he was looking for something and didn’t care as long as we didn’t have it.

BANG was the sound of someone firing a shot, but the round flew wide, passing through ship and crew alike as though they weren’t even there. The silent captain remained unfazed and unbothered, and then, at last, he turned away, and his ghostly ship sailed off back into the fog. Between one heartbeat and the next, it was gone, disappeared, as though it had never been there in the first place.

“E-enemy Servant...disappeared, Master,” Mash said into the silence.

“A real, live ghost ship!” said Bradamante. “I never thought I’d actually see one!”

“That one of your ‘invincible guys?’” I asked Drake.

“No,” Drake replied. “Think I would’ve remembered a spooky fucker like that.”

“He didn’t attack,” Arash remarked.

“Then what did he want?” Emiya asked.

Maybe, just like back in Fuyuki, “Reconnaissance.”

Arash hummed thoughtfully. “Scoping out the competition?”

It would explain a lot of what just happened. He might not have been so confident he could take us all out when we had three Servants on our side, plus Drake, who was nearly as good as one. There was no telling what those phantoms on his ship could do, but there was no way they matched up to the quality we had on our side. He almost certainly figured that out.

“Maybe he was like Cúchulainn,” Ritsuka suggested shakily. “He wanted to see who we were and what we’re doing before deciding if we were enemies or not.”

“H-he didn’t have to be so creepy about it!” Rika exclaimed.

“He didn’t say a word,” Bradamante added. “That’s poor form for negotiations!”

“Maybe he couldn’t,” Mash suggested. “We’ve already encountered Berserkers who communicate in strange ways, Master, Miss Taylor. Maybe he has a skill that prevents him from speaking in coherent sentences.”

It would be inconvenient, if it was true. After all, if he *was* an ally, or even just unaligned with whoever the enemy was, then how were we supposed to negotiate his help or even work together at all? If he had a skill like Mad Enhancement, then it was entirely possible he wouldn’t be able to understand *us* either, which shut down just about any hope of meaningful communication at all.

Just as important was another question.

“Do you have any idea who that was, Captain Drake?”

“Can’t say that I do,” Drake said. “Like I said, I would’ve remembered a spooky fucker like that. Never heard of a legend about that sort of guy either.”

“I-I need my jar of dirt!” Rika blurted out.

“Rika,” her brother began wearily. She shook her head wildly.

“No, Onii-chan,” she said, stressing the next part, “I need my *jar of dirt*.”

For a second, he stared at her, brow furrowed, and then the confusion morphed into realization.

“You think...that was Davy Jones?”

“Davy Jones?” Drake echoed, bemused.

“Yeah!” Rika nodded. “I mean, I was expecting him to be more...” She put her hand under her chin, palm down, and waggled her fingers. “Tentacle-y, you know? Maybe a little Bill Nighy in there. But who else could it be?”

“I...can’t think of anyone,” Ritsuka admitted.

Emiya sighed. “Master. That movie franchise wasn’t historically accurate at all.”

“So it’s a character from a movie?” Arash asked.

“I’m sure the legend predates the movie by more than a few years,” I said, “but I’m not sure you can say a real Davy Jones ever existed.”

Emiya arched an eyebrow at me, and although he didn’t say anything, I got his point. Yeah. Heroic Spirits. Solid proof any individual one existed wasn’t always available. Just because he was treated as a sailor’s superstition in the modern day didn’t mean there was never a being called “Davy Jones” who did such things as ferry those lost at sea to the afterlife.

“Are there no other possibilities?” Bradamante asked.

Unfortunately, I couldn’t think of any. There were plenty of pirates and sailors in general famous for dying in a storm or from their ship sinking, but that didn’t really explain the ghastly, ghostly appearance of our mystery man, nor the seaweed hair and beard. If you wanted to try and stretch it, maybe Jonah from the Biblical story about the whale, but he had no business being dressed in those sorts of clothes. Too close to modern.

The sails up above suddenly snapped to full as a brisk wind swept down across the deck, and the ship lurched into motion. Ahead of us, the mist began to clear, slinking away across the water, and the clouds blocking the sun dispersed, evaporating into nothingness.

“Look!” said Mash. “Things are returning to normal!”

And she was right. The *Golden Hind* exited the cloud of mist to the bright, sunny day atop a calm, placid sea that it had been before we entered it. Strangely enough, although the mist had rolled over the ship while we were still many miles out from the island we’d been aiming towards, somehow, we were now within metaphorical spitting distance.

Beep-beep!

Romani’s image appeared in a flicker of static. “Thank goodness, you’re all okay! When we lost contact with you so suddenly, I was afraid something seriously bad had happened!”

Marie pushed him aside so that she could glare at us through the camera. “What happened?” she demanded. “We detected a Servant, but there wasn’t any increase in magical energy expenditure. Where did it go?”

“He...left,” I said simply, for lack of anything better.

Marie recoiled, confused. “He left?”

“Serious horror movie stuff, Boss Lady!” Rika chimed in. “That spooky jerk just rode up and stared at us without even saying hi!”

Marie blinked, still confused. “What?”

“We encountered an unknown Servant, Director,” Mash reported dutifully. “No direct contact was made. It seems he was here only to observe us.”

“What do you mean, observe?” Marie asked. “What kind of Servant even was he?”

“Some kind of pirate,” I answered. “He didn’t match any obvious descriptions of famous pirates —”

“It was Davy Jones!” Rika interrupted.

“— but his appearance is distinctive enough that it shouldn’t be too hard to figure out who he is.”

“Come on, Senpai!” Rika complained. “It was Davy Jones! It has to be!”

“Don’t be ludicrous,” Marie snapped impatiently. “Davy Jones is just an urban legend, an old maritime superstition. The basis for his actual existence is too flimsy to produce a Heroic Spirit!”

Rika shook her head vigorously. “You didn’t see him, Boss Lady! He had seaweed for hair and everything!”

“I’ll give you a better description later,” I promised Marie. “As far as what he wanted, he didn’t speak, he just looked at us. It’s possible that he can’t talk for one reason or another, but he may have been performing reconnaissance.”

On principle, I had to agree with Rika, that it was entirely possible our mystery man was Davy Jones. In practice, though, I agreed more with Marie. It wasn’t necessarily as impossible as she was saying, but the only reason I was even giving it that much weight was because of just how unusual he looked.

If a Servant’s appearance could be dictated by the manner of their death, then Arash would have been summoned on death’s door, his body torn to shreds from his famous shot.

On the other hand, there *were* skills that could change a Servant’s appearance. If he was a Berserker, Mad Enhancement would neatly explain away both his appearance and his apparent inability to speak.

“Reconnaissance?” Marie asked. “A scouting party?”

“Or he was a stray who was coming to see who we were and check if we were a threat,” I said. “He didn’t give us any indication either way.”

“Class?” she asked.

I shook my head a little, frowning. “I didn’t get a good look. Given the ship he was on, though? Rider or Berserker, probably.”

Marie made a disgruntled noise in the back of her throat. “That doesn’t exactly narrow it down, does it? Just about every sailor to ever make it to the Throne is going to be either a Rider or a Berserker.”

“I suppose there aren’t many pirates famous for being master swordsmen, are there?” Mash said thoughtfully.

“Hell no!” Drake said. “Give me cannons and a good flintlock any day of the week!”

“Somehow, that suits you perfectly, Captain Drake,” Bradamante commented.

“Course it does! I’m the one who said it, aren’t I?”

“Leaving that aside,” said Marie, eyeing Drake dubiously, “we’ll begin cross referencing the description of the Servant you encountered with our records here at Chaldea. If there is a Heroic Spirit matching that appearance anywhere in recorded history, we’ll be able to match him up with a true name.”

“Get a jar of dirt, too!” Rika said.

Emiya sighed. “Master,” he said, “that was invented for those movies. Even if it *is* Davy Jones, nothing in them will be relevant to his actual strengths and weaknesses.”

Rika looked at him askance. “Isn’t that how Heroic Spirits work? They’re, um, what was the word Hot Pops used...”

“Ameliorated,” Ritsuka supplied helpfully.

“That’s it!” She snapped her fingers. “Aren’t Heroic Spirits ameliorated by common beliefs held by a bunch of people?”

“That’s...” A complicated expression crossed Emiya’s face. “That wasn’t exactly what he meant when he explained that to you, Master.”

“It’s *because* they’re modern movies that it doesn’t work like that,” Marie said, sounding like it was taking every last ounce of her patience to explain. “And anyway, it doesn’t matter, because Davy Jones *doesn’t exist!*”

Rika looked ready to defend her belief with her dying breath, so I cut in to keep things from devolving any further.

“Are there any readings we need to concern ourselves about on the island ahead of us?”

Marie took a deep breath, then let it out slowly, forcing herself to calm back down. Once she’d regained her even keel, she told us, “There are some anomalous readings on the island itself, but nothing of the scale of Captain Drake’s Holy Grail, and there’s no detectable Saint Graph. Whatever it is that’s on the island, it’s not a Servant.”

“It’s probably some low grade Phantasms,” Romani supplied from off screen. “Something on a similar level to that giant hermit crab from earlier.”

Ah. I should have expected them to have seen that. I’d been so caught up in the fact that I could even do it that I hadn’t considered what implications it would have back at Chaldea.

“Nothing for us to worry about, then,” Arash said with a smile, coming to my rescue.

Marie huffed. “For four Servants and a...whatever it is that’s going on with Captain Drake? Of course not.”

“CAP’N!” Bombe’s voice suddenly called.

“Aye, I see it!” Drake shouted back. “Keep us at half sail, Bombe! Let’s ease into this one nice and slow! No need to risk running aground after we’ve gotten this far!”

“Aye, Cap’n!”

“It sounds like you’re about to find out what it is that’s making that island home,” Marie said.

“We’ll contact Chaldea as soon as we’ve finished investigating it,” I said. Marie nodded, but before she could cut the connection, I went on, “One last thing, Director.”

“Yes?”

“Captain Drake’s Holy Grail is an unlimited source of food and drink,” I said, and she didn’t quite follow where I was going with that yet. “If Da Vinci can find the room, it might be worth it to send some of it back to Chaldea every time we stop for the day.”

Marie’s eyes went wide.

“That could solve every single one of our supply problems overnight!” Romani exclaimed excitedly.

“I-I’ll bring it up with Da Vinci!” Marie said. “Taylor, you...!”

I could tell she wanted to say it. She was absolutely bursting to proclaim for everyone to hear, ‘this is why you’re Team A’s Ace Master!’ and it was only her pride and her sensibilities that were keeping her from actually saying it.

“We’ll be in touch again soon.”

Marie nodded. “R-right!”

The connection cut, and I let my arm fall back to my side.

“Pretty smart,” Arash said. “Good thinking, Taylor.”

“Maybe this will mean I can put more variety into my cooking,” Emiya said wryly. “I wouldn’t say no to the chance to branch out, so to speak.”

“More Emiya goodness?” said Rika. “Yes, please!”

Ritsuka sighed ruefully. “He really is spoiling us.”

“Maybe we can even expand Servant meal days into twice a week instead of just once!” Bradamante added eagerly. “Or even thrice a week! O-oh, Master, that would be delightful!”

She looked like she was vibrating with excitement just thinking about it. There was even a little bit of drool in the corner of her mouth.

Good grief.

A shout among the crew down below preceded the sails being fully drawn, and then there was a heavy splash, as of something large and weighty landing in the water.

“Anchor’s set, Cap’n!” Bombe reported. “All set to go ashore!”

Drake turned to us with a grin. “Alright, *esteemed guests*, ready to go and see what all of the fuss is about on this island?”

Ritsuka looked over at the longboats, grimacing, his face going a little pale. His throat bobbed as he swallowed whatever it was he thought about saying.

The longboats weren’t comfortable, so I couldn’t entirely blame him, but it wasn’t like we could *swim* to shore.

“Let’s,” I said.

“Yeah,” Rika agreed reluctantly. “Just...Senpai, this time? If there’s giant crabs? Don’t make us eat them. Please.”

I didn’t have the heart to tell her that there very much was.