

Futile Fantasy Creations Presents...

FUTILE FANTASY FIVE

THE VOYAGE TO SANETZA

Apine Valley near the township of Tifaeris...

It didn't belong. Whatever it was or wherever it came from, it shouldn't have been there. It simply didn't belong. Generations of Tifaeris' population had played there. Their fathers and their father's fathers had all wiled away their youth in that very sanctuary. It was safe, a natural playground free from the vicious wild creatures that plagued the continent... but alas, not today.

At the bottom of the shallow canyon known as Apine Valley, a few miles east of the sun drenched haven of Tifaeris, three children faced their darkest nightmare. Having roamed to play in one of the few safe places in this otherwise crazed and violent world, they'd accidentally stumbled upon the beast. Three innocent ten year old boys had come face to face with a several tonne killer. In a display of self preservation, they'd had to run for their lives and jam themselves into a tight, sunlit alcove in the rocks, just out of reach of the beast's razor sharp claws.

Having failed to catch them, the Tyrannosaurus-like carnivore stared down menacingly into the alcove at them, seemingly taunting them, as if seeing no need to rush devouring such an easy meal. There was no way out for the young lads and a terrifying stand off had begun.

With the rocks around the boys hot enough to fry an egg on, they sweated and wilted in urgent need of water, knowing they'd die if they stayed there and die if they didn't. As the blazing sun reflected brightly off of the granite walls that flanked them, however, the terrified boys weren't about to give leaving there a second thought. Staring from the alcove with terror filled eyes at the sheer overwhelming size of the beast, they knew that running would be futile. The awesome muscle in the beast's hefty thighs was all the evidence they needed of that.

How such an innocent stroll down the same well-trodden path they'd crossed so many times could result in such a dire outcome, they didn't know, nor did they care. All they wanted right now was to survive. Sandwiched between burning rocky walls with a several tonne killer lusting for their blood only a few feet away, however, their chances of survival looked bleak. Naturally, the boys were desperate and terrified.

Trapped inside the sweaty alcove, it wasn't long before the eldest boy, Croxton, realised they had little option but to take action. If they stayed in the sweltering alcove they'd be killed by the heat, therefore the time to act had come. They had no choice. The time to fight like the men they were all destined to be was upon them.

With the merciless beast showing no sign of abandoning such easy prey, Croxton cast his fear to one side and gritted his teeth before blurting out an idea to his two frightened friends.

CROXTON: It can't chase all three of us if we run in different directions; we should

make a dash for it!

LESTER: Fuck off, I'm the slowest! It'd catch me in no time!!!

CROXTON: Yeah, but why would it chase *you*? You're also the smallest. Tree Boy over there would make a better meal!

(The boy he'd referred to as "Tree Boy" was indeed tall and well built for his age, but no less scared.)

TREE BOY: Forget that! If we stay a little longer, maybe someone will come and find us!

(Croxtton gave him a doubting glance.)

CROXTON: I doubt it. And even if they do, what are they going to do? That thing would just devour them too!

(With no other suggestion than Croxtton's immensely unpopular idea to run for it, the three of them stared, wide-eyed at the beast and their spirits sank even deeper than they had been. With absolutely no intention of entertaining Croxtton's plan for even a moment, Tree Boy looked up at the rocks in front of him.)

TREE BOY: Maybe we could climb up there!

(With little hope in their eyes, Croxtton and Lester both looked up with him.)

TREE BOY: Has to be worth a try, right?

(The sheer, red hot rock face in front of them offered nothing in the way of foot holds or climbing assistance but faced with very little alternative, Lester nodded.)

LESTER: I'll give it a go!

(As soon as he placed his hand on the rocks however, he yelped and pulled it back again. Grimacing as he held his burning fingers in his other hand, he gritted his teeth and looked to Tree Boy.)

LESTER: The rocks are fucking scorching!

(Tired of his friend's procrastinating, Croxtton looked out at the beast and growled under his breath.)

CROXTON: I'm gonna run for it!

(Alarmed by his words, Lester and Tree Boy remonstrated vehemently.)

LESTER: Don't!!!

TREE BOY: It'll catch you in seconds!

LESTER: You've got no chance!!!

(Just then, the sound of flapping wings in the sky above them made them swing their heads upwards. Dazzled by the glare of the burning sun, they shielded their eyes with their hands and squinted, when a large black bird landed on the ledge above. The bird then lowered its neck to glare down at them and their hearts sunk even further.)

LESTER: A vulture?

(In that moment they all fell silent as the reality hit them hard. Staying there would definitely be fatal. At least running for it offered them a slim chance. Having made this realisation, the previously reluctant duo of Lester and Tree Boy instantly changed their minds. Croxtton's way was right.)

TREE BOY: Okay, so we run then!

LESTER: Yeah!

(Croxtton nodded sternly then gestured to the beast.)

CROXTON: It's a big bastard; let's hope that means it's not that agile!

LESTER: I can't believe we're gonna do this!

(Quaking in his very boots, Tree Boy spoke up apprehensively.)

TREE BOY: Which way are we gonna go?

(Croxtton looked back to him determinedly.)

CROXTON: Whichever way we feel like! Spread out and just run like hell!

TREE BOY: Right, okay!

(He nodded to himself and wiped the sweat from his brow.)

TREE BOY: I can do this!

(Staring back at the beast, Croxton sneered.)

CROXTON: Good! You ready?

(His two companions replied with nervous whimpers.)

CROXTON: Right! Now!!!

(With that, he took off like a rocket into the valley and away from the temporary sanctuary of the alcove. Scared stiff, Lester and Tree Boy just watched him go and gaped in fear for his life. Unaware that his two friends hadn't found the courage to follow him, Croxton charged along the valley side, immediately springing the giant beast into action. Making the ground shake under its considerable weight, it bounded after him, drooling at the mouth.)

CROXTON: Shit!!!

(Seeing the beast charge after Croxton, Lester and Tree Boy felt a renewed sense of hope. With the beast bearing down on their friend, they too raced from the alcove and out onto the valley floor.)

LESTER: Now what?

TREE BOY: Now we run!

(With that, they charged off in the other direction, leaving the unfortunate Croxton to suffer the wrath of the beast alone. Running away in abject terror, Croxton had no idea that he'd been abandoned; his only concern was the giant, merciless killer behind him. With eyes on stalks he sprinted for all he was worth, desperately trying to maintain his balance as the soil beneath his feet vibrated with every crashing footstep from the ever gaining beast over his shoulder. His heart pounded and sweat poured from his forehead as he bounded forth in desperation to merely stay alive.

Unfortunately, his young human legs were no match for that of the giant carnivore behind him. Without even overexerting itself for a moment, it gained to the point where its shadow swooped down over Croxton. In a blind panic, fearing his time had come, Croxton could only scream out and hope for some kind of miracle.)

CROXTON: Mummy!!!

(As the beast's shadow drew along side him on the valley wall, Croxton burst into tears, knowing his end had arrived. Before the beast could swoop down and rip him apart however, he tripped and thudded face first to the ground.)

CROXTON: No!!!

(Having expected to feel the searing pain of the beast's massive teeth sinking into his prostrate body, he was amazed to see the beast's feet thud into the ground either side of him as it failed to stop in time to devour him. As soon as the beast passed over his head, he leapt back to his feet and charged back in the other direction, astonished by his lucky survival. Sliding to a stop, the previously overconfident beast reared up on its hind legs and released a foul roar. Having been thwarted by what it considered easy prey it was determined not to be fooled again. Snarling with extreme ferocity, it swung its tail around and bounded head down in pursuit of the fleeing Croxton again.

Quite some distance ahead of Croxton, his friends, Lester and Tree Boy had found a natural set of steps leading up from the valley to the rocky plateau above. Wasting no time whatsoever, they charged up them and raced back the way they'd come to see if Croxton was okay. Staring down into the valley, they raced forth in fear of what they might find.)

LESTER: You think he's alright?

TREE BOY: I don't know. He's pretty fast, but...

(He bit his lip. Noticing Tree Boy's unease, Lester hung his head and sighed.)

LESTER: Yeah...

(Fearing the worst, they raced on in silence. A million horrible thoughts passed through their minds and every step they took without finding their friend mutilated was a bonus. Moments later, however, a deafening roar from the valley made them both come to an abrupt halt. Following a terrified glance at one another they then raced to the valley edge. Sure enough, just down below them the furious beast was bearing down on Croxton once more.)

LESTER: Oh shit!!!

TREE BOY: We've gotta do something!!!

(They looked about themselves urgently.)

LESTER: Like what?

TREE BOY: I don't know!

(While his friends stood there and panicked, Croxton was losing ground at an ever increasing rate. Tired and withered by the burning heat in the valley, it was all he could do just to stay on his feet. Determined not to repeat its previous mistake, the snarling menace on his heels lowered its head in readiness to devour him as soon as its jaws were in range. Desperate to escape with his life, Croxton swung a glance over his shoulder as he charged forth, receiving the shock of his life. The beast's enormous mouth, filled with hundreds of dagger like teeth was right behind him.)

CROXTON: Argh!!!

(Instinctively he dived to his side and thrust himself against the hot rocks of the valley wall. Wise to the move, the beast slid to a halt and swung itself to face him, immediately trapping him where he stood.)

CROXTON: No!!!

(With no escape route for its prey, the beast growled and bared the fangs it intended to devour him with. Croxton could only gape and say nothing; knowing his time was up. Certain the beast's next move would be his doom, he whimpered fearfully, when much to his astonishment, the beast reared up then bellowed out in distress. Given the few inches he needed to escape, he raced out of the beast's way, staring back to see what had distracted it in such a sudden manner. Much to his delight, he saw Lester and Tree Boy on the embankment above, pelting the beast with rocks. Breathing a sigh of relief he raced back into the alcove where they'd previously hid and cried to himself with the joy of still being alive. Above him, the vultures looked down and cried excitedly to one another. Too relieved to be upset by them he looked up and sneered.)

CROXTON: You can piss off an' all!

(Back out in the valley, the beast was becoming wild with rage as rocks thudded and bounced off its head. Showering them onto it liberally, Lester and Tree Boy were having the time of their lives, safe in the knowledge that the foul creature couldn't get up there.)

LESTER: Aim for its eyes!

TREE BOY: I am!

(His eyes bulged with terror.)

TREE BOY: Look out!!!

(In an almost insane rage, the beast charged head first into the rocky valley wall beneath them, the vibration knocking them both off of their feet. As soon as they thudded to the ground, they both swiftly sat up and looked to one another urgently.)

LESTER: That thing's mad!!!

(With that, they both leapt to their feet in fear of its next move. As they looked towards the edge of the valley, however, the beast was nowhere to be seen.)

TREE BOY: Huh?

(Nervously, they crept to the very precipice. Half expecting the beast to leap into sight, they were amazed to see it lying on its side beneath them.)

LESTER: What the...

(Having become aware of the silence out there in the valley, Croxton popped his head out of the alcove. He too, couldn't believe what he was seeing. Feeling it had to be too good to be true, he looked up at his friends and slung enquiring hands to his side.)

CROXTON: What did you do?

(Still in a state of shock, Lester could only shrug back at him while Tree Boy scratched his head.)

TREE BOY: Stupid thing knocked itself out!

LESTER: Yeah...

(Gathering himself, Lester then paced along the top of the valley wall and yelled down to Croxton urgently.)

LESTER: We found a set of steps just down that way...

(He pointed further down the valley.)

LESTER: Get out before it recovers!

(In wholehearted agreement with his friend's sentiments, Croxton immediately raced from the alcove, taking extreme care to keep to the valley edge, as far away from the beast as possible. The only thing on his mind was to get out of the valley and never venture back in there ever again. As he raced past the beast with his eyes transfixed upon its muscular rump, Lester and Tree Boy watched on, hoping and praying he'd be quick enough to escape before the beast recovered. Alas, he was not. Much to their horror, with alarming agility, the beast's tail swung at him and thrust him hard into the rock wall. The beast then leapt to its feet and bellowed a tremendous roar into the sky above. As their dazed friend lay semi-conscious against the wall, Lester and Tree Boy could do nothing but look on in horror.)

LESTER: No!!!

TREE BOY: It faked it!!!

(Not about to fail again, the beast immediately dashed over to where Croxton lay and thrust down its head to devour him. Utterly helpless, Tree Boy and Lester could only scream out and look away when much to their alarm, the fizz of a powerful bolt of lightning filled the air, echoing all the way down the valley before culminating in a deafening boom. Terrified to their very core, Lester and Tree Boy immediately dived for cover. Thunder storms weren't exactly unusual in this part of the world but they'd never heard anything like *this* before. Devastated by their friend's death and terrified by the lightning, they both lifted their tear strewn heads and stared at one another.)

LESTER: What was that?

TREE BOY: I don't know!

(Just then, the soft sound of a friendly old man's voice piped up from behind them.)

OLD MAN: I can answer that, boys!

(Immediately they both swung themselves around. Before them stood a kindly looking, white-haired gentleman with a long beard that covered the front of his long, dark blue robe. Lester and Tree Boy could only stare up at him, traumatised by the whole thing.)

OLD MAN: Don't worry. Your friend is fine, look!

(He gestured towards the valley with a majestic, outstretched arm. Nervously, Lester and Tree Boy twisted to look down into the valley. Much to their relief they saw

Croxton climb to his feet and stare down at the black and shrivelled body of the beast. In a state of shock they both turned back to look up at the old man again, receiving a kind smile for their efforts.)

OLD MAN: You see?

TREE BOY: I... I don't understand!

(The old man sighed.)

OLD MAN: I'm sorry. This was all my fault. Grinola is my responsibility...

LESTER: Grinola? Um, sir?

OLD MAN: The beast that attacked you. He was kind and placid until yesterday. A loyal servant and protector of the righteous, he was. Damn witches must have corrupted him.

(He looked down at the two baffled faces before him.)

OLD MAN: I'll spare you the details! That was *my* beast; I'm a mage you see, so I used my lightning to save you. It was the least I could do!

(Tree Boy slowly climbed to his feet, nervous of the old man before him and what he considered his oddball ramblings.)

TREE BOY: I've got to be home soon, sir... sorry, I can't be late or my parents will kill me!

LESTER: Um...

(Lester also got to his feet, more trouble by the fact that this man had such awesome magic power than by his bizarre words.)

LESTER: Me too!

(Just then, Croxton came racing up from behind the old man looking quite perplexed.)

CROXTON: Hey, did you see that? What the hell was that? Did you see?

(He looked at the old man.)

CROXTON: Who are you?

(The old man chuckled out loud.)

OLD MAN: I'm sorry, young man. This is all my fault.

(The three nervous boys continued to stare his way.)

OLD MAN: That was just magic, no big deal, no need to worry about that. I'm more concerned that you'll be late; I don't want you to get in any trouble.

(Not needing a second invitation to leave, Lester nodded Croxton in the direction of Tifaeris and they all started to scamper off in a hurry, unnerved by the stranger. As they hurried away, the old man then called out to them.)

OLD MAN: Sorry again. You know, under the circumstances, maybe I should give you something for your troubles!

(Scared or not, they were children and the lure of a gift was too much to resist.

Suddenly, his awesome power and strange demeanour didn't seem so daunting and they all stopped to look at one another before about turning and slowly approaching him.)

OLD MAN: Good boys! Now...

(He fumbled in his pouch and pulled out three solid gold neck chains. Immediately the boy's jaws all dropped. In Tifaeris, gold chains were considered to be the mark of a man. They were given to heroes much in the same way that other settlements would hand out medals. Unable to believe quite what they were being offered, they all stared up at the old man then back at the chains in a series of never ending double takes. The old man smiled kindly, charmed by their modesty.)

OLD MAN: Go on, boys, you deserve them. Grinola attacked you and you survived to tell the tale, you earned them!

(Slowly, they all reached out with trembling hands and took a neck chain from the

gentleman's palm.)

OLD MAN: There you go!

(As they placed them upon their persons, the boys looked excitedly at one another.)

TREE BOY: Cool!

LESTER: Yeah, these are well good!

CROXTON: Thanks, old bloke!

(The old man laughed heartily.)

OLD MAN: Well boys, take care. Those chains will bring you good luck, take care of them.

(They boys nodded eagerly. A gold neck chain wasn't something you'd ever neglect after all.)

OLD MAN: I can see they'll be safe with you! Now I don't want to make you late...

(Fearing the old man might change his mind, the boys all looked up at him.)

LESTER: Yeah, thanks for these. Bye!

TREE BOY: Bye!

CROXTON: See ya!

(And with that they all scampered away hurriedly, excited at what they'd just acquired. As he watched them go, the old man smiled.)

OLD MAN: Perfect!

(With that, he faded into thin air.

As they rushed away, the boys chatted excitedly about what had happened. Being young and therefore yet to be brainwashed by their own cynicism, they quickly forgot all about the terror and despair they'd felt, preferring to remember their ordeal as nothing but a great adventure. The positivity of youth. What had happened had happened and they wouldn't over analyse it. In their minds it would always be something very simple; they were attacked and survived, so they were rewarded. The details would soon be forgotten. Feeling like big men all of a sudden, the boys strutted home with their chains glowing boldly from their chests.)

LESTER: That was so cool!

CROXTON: Scary though; what *was* that thing?

LESTER: Who cares? You kicked arse, man!

CROXTON: I know!

(He nodded to himself.)

CROXTON: We all kicked arse!

LESTER: I love fighting stuff!

CROXTON: Me too! I'm going to join the army when I grow up so I can fight stuff everyday!

LESTER: Hey, great idea! I'm joining the army too!

(Tree Boy sighed.)

TREE BOY: I'm not!

(His two friends chuckled sarcastically at him.)

LESTER: You never know, the army might call you up if they need wood!

CROXTON: Yeah, you can help build our barracks!

TREE BOY: Oh shut up!

(Having been trained by his father to take over his timber business from an early age, "Tree Boy" had a clear vision what his future held and unlike his two friends, it didn't involve fighting and adventure. Just trees.)

LESTER: Don't worry, Tree Boy, we'll write to you if we find the time!

(As Lester and Croxton chuckled, Tree Boy sneered, fed up with their constant

teasing about his future profession.)

TREE BOY: Shut it, will you? And stop calling me Tree Boy!!!

(As Lester strode ahead laughing, Croxton looked Tree Boy in the eye and scoffed.)

CROXTON: Calm down, we're only joking. And anyway, why should we call you by your real name? You can never seem to remember ours!

(And with that he walked ahead to catch up with Lester, turning to look over his shoulder as he did so.)

CROXTON: Can you, Flaxley?

City of Guevina – Twenty years later

(Blue skies, church bells ringing out, the blushing bride being showered with confetti while her victim, sometimes referred to as the groom, stands tall at her side. It had been the perfect royal wedding.

With all the bunting and streamers that snaked their way around Guevina, it was hard not to get caught up in the cheery mood of the place. This grandiose royal wedding was just what the people needed after their last attempt at a civic event had ended in the tragic death of their beloved king.

The unashamedly royalist citizens had taken their new queen straight to their hearts. For many, seeing their beloved Queen Mandika wed on this most magnificent of sunny days had restored their faith in the world. Finally, after a full 12 months of mourning, the city was putting king Falbury's death in the past where it belonged and moving on.

For many, the day was made even greater by the fact that their queen was marrying the great Sir Lefiat, the man whom they mistakenly thought was the toughest, fairest and bravest who ever lived.

Everybody who wasn't invited to the ceremony found themselves involved in the wedding in one way or another. The day had started with crowds amassing in the villages and parks for outdoor breakfasts in her majesty's honour before they all moved on to the many street parties being held around the city. By lunchtime, however, the whole city seemed to have converged on the official wedding parade route to get a glimpse of the queen and her new husband as they left for their honeymoon.

The lucky few who'd managed to score an invite to the wedding ceremony itself, had been treated to a ceremony they'd never forget. As they waited for the wedding to begin in the grounds of the royal palace, they were treated to a fifty trumpet fanfare before seeing one hundred doves released into the sky as a symbol of Guevina's role as a peaceful nation. Quite an awesome sight. Moments later, the queen had emerged from the palace and stunned the guests with her magnificent diamond encrusted wedding dress. As the ceremony began, the gathered assembly then watched on with joy as their queen scowled at her intended, telling him to take his tin helmet from under his top hat and put it away. They then watched with joy as the two young lovers said "I do" and left together to start a new life. Their beloved queen and much revered knight, together forever in holy matrimony.

Once the ceremony had ended, the queen and her new spouse climbed into the royal carriage in readiness to depart on their honeymoon. Knowing the streets would be lined with well wishers, her majesty couldn't wait for their carriage to start moving so she could take in their adulation. Her husband, on the other hand, couldn't wait to get his beautiful bride to the honeymoon suite to consummate their marriage. Unfortunately for him, however, the honeymoon suite was situated in Tifaeris, far away on the south continent, and he'd have a very long wait.

As the carriage started to roll forth from the castle, Queen Mandika sidled up to her new husband, Lefiat, excitedly. With a joyous crowd to wave to and a new husband to cherish, she was almost oblivious to the two other people in the carriage sitting opposite her. Her maid of honour, Kritz, and her bodyguard, Shaka. The groom, Lefiat, officially the royal knight, wasn't overjoyed at first that his bride had employed a new bodyguard for the trip; he felt insulted. After she explained that she employed him so they could be "together" in peace, however, he withdrew his complaint.

As the carriage finally emerged from the gates of the castle, the roar of the crowd was deafening. Mandika couldn't believe her ears. Excitedly, she cast her head out of the window and was quite taken aback by the size of the crowd. As she dropped back into her seat, she gushed excitedly to her three travelling companions.

MANDIKA: Oh my god, I'm so magnificent!!!

(Kritz giggled to herself, much to Mandika's annoyance.)

MANDIKA: What? I am!

KRITZ: Of course, you are. And it never ceases to amaze me how you manage to stop it going to your head!

(Mandika gave her a kind smile.)

MANDIKA: Thanks Kritz, you're okay too!

KRITZ: Yeah... cheers!

(As Mandika looked from the window and waved regally at her flag waving public, Lefiat looked to Kritz and shrugged.)

LEFIAT: Am I supposed to wave?

(Kritz frowned.)

KRITZ: How the hell should I know?

(Lefiat sighed.)

LEFIAT: We went over it a hundred times. Do this, don't do that, in the end I got all confused and just nodded!

KRITZ: Well, it's your wedding, Lefiat. I supposed it'd be okay if you waved out of the other side.

(He looked sheepishly from side to side before leaning his head towards her to speak out of Mandika's earshot.)

LEFIAT: Only, I don't want to get it wrong. She's told me off three times today, already!

(Also checking that Mandika wasn't paying attention, Kritz leant forward to reply.)

KRITZ: I see. But let's be honest, putting your top hat over your helmet, I mean come on, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: Oh yeah, make that four times!

KRITZ: I wouldn't worry about it, Lefiat. She had a go at me too!

LEFIAT: Really? Why?

(She sat back and gestured down at her black dress. Lefiat looked her up and down then raised a quizzical eyebrow.)

LEFIAT: 'Cause of your boobies?

KRITZ: No, you tit. The black dress!

LEFIAT: Eh? What's wrong with...

(Before he could finish his sentence however, Mandika cut in. Something he was more than used to.)

MANDIKA: I'll tell you what's wrong!

(She pouted at Kritz.)

MANDIKA: You turned up for my wedding as maid of honour, dressed for a funeral!

(Sensing tension, Lefiat threw caution to the wind and quickly waved out of the window in a desperate attempt to not be involved in the conversation.)

KRITZ: I already apologised, Mandika. I didn't know did I?

MANDIKA: No? Then why did you bring the wreath?

KRITZ: You didn't like the flowers either? Bonson told me they were your favourite!

MANDIKA: They're funeral flowers!!!

(In too good a mood to argue, Mandika sighed and gave her a smile.)

MANDIKA: Don't worry about it. You wait 'til I catch up with Bonson though!

KRITZ: You and me both!

(They shared a sigh, annoyed but not surprised by Bonson's handiwork.)

KRITZ: Honestly, Mandika, Flaxley told me not to wear white so I went with black, I weren't to know. The only wedding I've ever been involved with was mine and I wasn't worried about upstaging the bride, 'cause I was she!

(Mandika nodded.)

KRITZ: I really did make an effort, look!

(She hoisted up the bottom of her dress.)

KRITZ: I even wore underwear!

(Almost instinctively, both Shaka and Lefiat threw themselves across Mandika to stare at Kritz's crotch, Lefiat receiving a deft slap to his cheek from Mandika as he did so.)

MANDIKA: Hey!!!

(Fearing a severe tongue lashing from his bride, Lefiat threw himself back down and thrust himself to the opposite window to wave to the crowds again while Shaka apologised profusely. As Kritz put her dress back down, Mandika scowled into her eyes and growled.)

MANDIKA: For Pete's sake, Kritzeveltia!

(She looked to Shaka.)

MANDIKA: Not very professional, Shaka!

(He hung his head.)

SHAKA: Sorry, ma'am!

(Then, she glared at Lefiat as he continued to wave frantically at the crowds on his side of the carriage.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat!

LEFIAT: Um... not now, love. The crowds need me!

(Mandika seemed to growl under her breath and turned to face Kritz again.)

MANDIKA: I'm not going to let you or anyone else ruin today for me, okay?

KRITZ: I wasn't trying to!

MANDIKA: And when we get to Tifaeris, can you at least try to go a whole day without showing the world and his wife your beaver???

(Kritz was most taken aback.)

KRITZ: Hey!

MANDIKA: Well if you're going to be wearing those tiny little skirts of yours...

(Kritz had started to turn red.)

KRITZ: If you're going to persist with this, Mandika, I'll see to it that everyone out there takes a piece of you home as a souvenir!!!

(Mandika sat back gaping.)

MANDIKA: Are you threatening me? On my wedding day, no less???

(With a sigh, Kritz relented.)

KRITZ: No, sorry! It's just that I really tried and you don't seem to care!

(Mandika looked in her eyes and also conceded.)

MANDIKA: No, I'm sorry, I do care! Thanks, Kritz!

(They held hands for a moment and smiled to one another.)

MANDIKA: It's been a perfect day. I just wish Flaxley and Derek could have been here!

KRITZ: Yeah well... Flaxley's busy making sure you have a perfect honeymoon. He said... um... he wants to make sure everything is just right and he couldn't leave that in the hands of just anybody!

(Mandika laughed.)

MANDIKA: It's okay, Kritz. You don't have to cover for him; we both know why he didn't come. He hates this place.

KRITZ: Yeah. Fair enough.

(Mandika turned to wave to the frenzied crowd then turned back to her.)

MANDIKA: But why isn't Derek here?

KRITZ: He's moving house today. He's going to be our new neighbour!

MANDIKA: Cool!

(And with that, she returned to soaking up the crowd's admiration, revelling in every cheer. As she watched both Lefiat and Mandika revel in the approval of the people, Kritz sat back and crossed her legs to get comfortable for the long journey ahead.

Trying to regain his professionalism, Shaka just stared straight ahead, resigned to being in their company for a good many hours yet.)

(As the carriage headed forth through the bustling streets, being showered with confetti, a large crowd soon gathered behind to chase it. Guevina folk adored the monarchy and would happily trample one another just to get a glimpse of their queen.

Sitting atop the carriage as it headed forth between the crowds on each side of the road, the horseman and his co-driver couldn't believe the sheer vastness of the celebrating masses. Thankfully, royal guards were keeping the road in front clear or the carriage might have just ground to a halt and been swamped by overexcited well wishers.

Feeling extremely proud to have been chosen as coachman for such a historic day in Guevina's history, Anders Omki struggled not to get caught up in the euphoria and start waving to the crowd himself. Beaming happily, he turned to his co-driver and nodded excitedly.)

OMKI: This is fantastic, isn't it?

(Clearly disagreeing, his co-driver, the rarely excitable, frequently miserable, retired butler Bonson, folded his arms and forced a scowl upon his wrinkled brow.)

BONSON: Is it?

(Omki nodded; too excited to entertain the old man's angry rambling.)

OMKI: Yeah man. And we got to be part of it!

BONSON: Oh, whoop de bloody do!

OMKI: What?

BONSON: Listen, sunshine, I'm sure in a thousand years from now when people talk about the great royal wedding, they won't give two shits about who the bloody horseman was!

(Omki gave him a dismissive glance.)

OMKI: Whatever, it's not about that anyway!

(Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: That's true! It's about dragging me off on their bloody honeymoon!

OMKI: Huh?

BONSON: Why do they want *me* there? What am I supposed to do? Hold Lefiat's willy and make sure he puts it in the right hole or something?

(Omki was flabbergasted.)

OMKI: You can't talk about the queen like that???

BONSON: Oh, can't I now? I've been insulting the royal family since before you were born, chummy! I'm not going to stop now just because *you* don't like it!

OMKI: Shit, Bonson, what is your problem?

(Bonson flapped and glared at him.)

BONSON: I'll tell you what my problem is!!! It's *their* bloody honeymoon. Why the bloody hell do *I* have to come???

OMKI: Bonson, the law states that at least one senior member of the royal household has to accompany the monarch on his or her honeymoon. They were six others she could have picked but she chose you, you should be honoured.

BONSON: Honoured???

OMKI: Yes! Of all the elder folk in the castle you're the only one she can stand. The other six look down on her because of her youthful ways, but you...

(He shrugged.)

OMKI: Well, she can tolerate *you* for some reason.

(Bonson shrugged.)

BONSON: Well... we've been through a lot together...

(His brow then furrowed and he shook with rage.)

BONSON: But that's not the point! I absolutely despise that halfwit she married, so why take *me* on her honeymoon? I'm a bloody terrible choice. Fact is, she picked *me* because she wants to keep me where she can see me!

(He groaned angrily.)

BONSON: She doesn't trust me, that's what it is! She probably thought I was going to wait until she was gone then bugger off with the crown jewels. I only said it as a joke, for heaven's sake. Fucking royalty. They're the bane of my existence, I tell you.

OMKI: Yeah okay, calm down!

(Bonson just snarled and looked away.)

OMKI: Anyway, I heard the queen still pays you a salary, even though you're retired.

BONSON: So?

(Omki shrugged.)

OMKI: Well... you say they're the bane of your existence but really, without them, you'd be screwed!

(Bonson was outraged.)

BONSON: Oh, would I now???

OMKI: Yes! So stop bloody complaining! The simple fact is, the queen, she who pays your wages, told you to come so you're coming whether *you* like or it not! (Horried at having been talked down to and ordered about by someone half his age, Bonson flapped furiously and swung his legs over the side of the carriage.)

BONSON: Oh yeah??? I'll show you!!! I'm getting off!!! Nobody tells Bonson where he can and can't go! Bollocks to what Mandika says, I'm going home!!! (Omki stared at him in utter amazement as he leapt from the side of the carriage without a bye or leave.)

OMKI: Bonson???

(Fearing the old man may have hurt himself, Omki threw himself to see where Bonson had landed. Immediately he did an astonished double take. Much to Bonson's despair, his jacket had caught on a buckle of the horse's harness as he landed. As a result he was being pulled along backwards at the side of the horses. Omki could only laugh at the sight of Bonson frantically walking backwards, unable to snag himself away.)

OMKI: Priceless!

(As Omki sat up again to concentrate on going in the right direction, Bonson started to struggle. Desperate to remove his jacket, so he could free himself and go home, he twisted and contorted violently, receiving much adulation from the crowd who thought he was either a dancer or a very funny drunk.)

BONSON: What the hell? Useless... can't bloody... stupid jacket!!!

(As he pulled and twisted himself, getting ever more frustrated, he then felt his jacket loosen.)

BONSON: A-ha!!!

(Unfortunately for him, as Mandika waved to the crowds from the window of the carriage, she caught a glimpse of him in the corner of her eye.)

MANDIKA: What on earth is he doing???

(Kritz and Lefiat looked her way.)

LEFIAT: What?

MANDIKA: Bonson's drunk!

(The three of them all leant from the window and watched him with disdainful eyes as he shuffled, wriggled and writhed next to the horses.)

MANDIKA: He's a disgrace!

KRITZ: Fancy making an exhibition of himself like that!

LEFIAT: Yeah, even I wouldn't do that!

MANDIKA: He's ruining my wedding!

(She seethed.)

MANDIKA: I'm not having him make a mockery of my special day!!!

(Oblivious to the scornful looks he was receiving from the carriage, Bonson continued to battle against the buckle he was snagged on. He could feel his jacket loosening and knew that with just a little more struggling he'd soon be free. With the deafening crowd screaming and shouting, however, he didn't hear Mandika hammer on the carriage wall and order the coachman to stop the carriage. Pacing backwards and thrusting his shoulders about like a lunatic while the crowd cheered him on, he grimaced and yanked his whole bodyweight away from the buckle just as the carriage jammed to a stand still. With a tremendous rip, his jacket tore off and he flew forwards looking deliriously happy to have freed himself.)

BONSON: I'm free!!!

(Unfortunately for him, as his momentum thrust him forward, Mandika threw open the carriage door and spammed him square on the face with it, knocking him out cold.

With no sympathy whatsoever, the crowd cheered even louder, delighted that their queen had stopped before them. In their desperation to get near to her, they trampled all over the prostrate Bonson as if he wasn't even there. It took Shaka and a dozen guards over five minutes to clear them so they could retrieve him. During that time, Mandika had cowered in the carriage. Terrified by the chaos outside, she'd clung onto Lefiat and Kritz like her life depended on it, remembering how the tournament a year before had descended into a riot. Thankfully, but no thanks to Bonson, there was no repeat.

Having ruined her parade, Mandika showed Bonson no sympathy whatsoever. Once they'd established he wasn't dead, she ordered her guards to put him back on top of the carriage and keep going. With the brief melee over, they then continued through Guevina as if nothing had happened with the unconscious Bonson slumped next to Omki.

And so, under the midday sun, the parade continued on. The masses continued their unabated heralding of Mandika's magnificence, growing ever louder the further they went. Sadly for Mandika, however, all great things must come to an end and after a further hour of adulation, the carriage finally rolled out of the city gates to the sound of frenzied cheers. Looking behind her and waving frantically as Guevina became a dot on the horizon, she sighed to herself before taking a seat comfortably and looking to Kritz opposite. Having shared a warm smile with her, she leant her head on Lefiat and exhaled.)

MANDIKA: Wake me when we get to Tifaeris!

(At this current moment in time, Mandika may have been ready for Tifaeris but Tifaeris certainly wasn't ready for her.

Four years earlier, Sir Flaxley had quit his post as Mandika's knight and returned to Tifaeris with his beloved wife, Kritz, and they'd orchestrated a rebuilding programme, under which the town had swelled and was growing at an impressive rate. This normal routine of building and selling houses, however, had been put on hold as everyone prepared the city for the Queen of Guevina's honeymoon. The builders had all been recalled from where they were expanding out towards Trepe village to erect a honeymoon suite and a bigger town hall to host ballroom dancing during her stay. The planned amalgamation of the two towns was still a good few years from completion, so Flaxley, in charge of the honeymoon project, was happy to put the programme on hold for the time being and concentrate on giving Mandika the best honeymoon she could possibly ask for.

The best way to describe the state of Tifaeris at this time would be to say it was organised chaos. Builders were running to and from the picturesque beach collecting sand, huge cloths were laid out on thoroughfares in readiness for painting and building supplies were stacked up in several places along the main thoroughfare. In the middle of it all was Sir Flaxley. As he stood boldly in the town square, his polished armour gleaming from his muscular frame, he surveyed the state of the various incomplete preparations and nodded to himself with pride in a job well done.

While his wife, Kritz had been representing the Tifaeris and Trepe alliance at the

royal wedding, Flaxley had been determinedly overseeing and organising every aspect of Queen Mandika's visit. He'd ordered banners, helped design the ballroom and had given precise instructions to the honeymoon suite builders of exactly what he wanted. He'd even organised choirs, bands and fireworks for entertainment.

With the Queen's arrival still a good many hours away, Flaxley had no reason to doubt that everything would be ready on time. Having been working solidly through the previous night to make certain that would be the case, he had every reason to feel confident. Getting to this stage had been extremely hard work, chaotic at times, but at last things were beginning to take shape and finally he felt he could relax a little.

With this in mind, he returned home to the spacious wooden homestead he shared with Kritz and their two infant children, satisfied that he'd earned a rest. Content that the babysitter wouldn't object to him taking a break and collecting his children later, he went indoors and took a seat in an easy chair then rested his hands behind his head.

With the weight finally off his feet, he released a long overdue sigh of relief and smiled to himself. Tifaeris had been in a mess until he and Kritz had returned and he had every reason to feel pleased with himself. Homes were selling well above their worth as people from all over the world outbid each other to buy one and enjoy life in the sunlit paradise. Schools were full and all the bars, restaurants and inns were happy places. He had a lot to smile about. Feeling pleased that on top of it all he'd managed to arrange what would be a wonderful honeymoon for his friend and former charge, Mandika, he closed his eyes and allowed himself to gather forty winks. He hadn't been dozing for long, however, when he felt a presence in the room with him. Instinctively, he leapt from his chair and reached for his sword.)

FLAXLEY: Who goes...

(He then flinched in dismay. His sword was not on his person.)

FLAXLEY: Huh?

(To make things worse, when he looked up to see who'd awoken him from his slumber, his eyes were greeted with the sight of the much hated Daman Siria.)

FLAXLEY: You!!!

(Flaxley wasn't normally the type of person to allow his anger and hatred to show through; he normally left the violence and rage to his beautiful wife, but in Daman's case he was happy to make an exception. Not about to forgive the mystic wise man any time soon for his role in both his and his friend's past, he stared coldly and sneered.)

FLAXLEY: How dare you invite yourself into my home?

(Having manipulated and used Flaxley along with Kritz, Mandika, Bonson, Derek and Lefiat in his plan to retrieve three mystic keys, Daman knew he'd never be greeted with anything but the anger he was currently receiving. Knowing there was nothing he could do to change the way he was perceived, however, he decided to keep the formalities brief and got straight down to business.)

DAMAN: I apologise. Sorry, Sir Flaxley. I knocked but there was no reply!

FLAXLEY: Sorry? Sorry for entering or sorry for manipulating us into doing your bidding all our lives?

(Daman nodded.)

DAMAN: Touché. Both actually, but you don't seem very forgiving about the latter!

FLAXLEY: You made us puppets all our lives, what did you expect?

DAMAN: Well, that's fair enough!

(Flaxley's eyes then bulged in horror.)

FLAXLEY: No! No fucking way, Daman!

(Daman looked lost.)

DAMAN: What?

FLAXLEY: You show up now? Just when Bonson, Lefiat and Mandika are on their way?

DAMAN: I don't follow!

(Flaxley snarled.)

FLAXLEY: Do you really think I'm that stupid?

DAMAN: I don't know. Do *you* think you're that stupid?

(Baffled by the question, Flaxley ignored it and elaborated on his point.)

FLAXLEY: You manipulated us all our lives. Every time you wanted something you got the six of us together somehow and all hell broke loose. Now just when we're all getting together for Mandika's honeymoon, you show up again!

(Daman wagged a dismissive finger towards him.)

DAMAN: No, no. You have it all wrong. I told you after you'd retrieved the keys that your lives were your own and I meant it!

(Flaxley raised an eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: So this is a co-incidence, is it? You must think I was born yesterday!!!

DAMAN: Hmm... do *you* think you were born yesterday?

(Flaxley went to reply then furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: What?

DAMAN: Flaxley, listen to me! I have no control over you or any of your friends, I swear on everything I hold dear.

(Flaxley could only shake his head.)

FLAXLEY: I still don't trust you!

DAMAN: As is your prerogative!

FLAXLEY: So why are you here? If it involves a mission of any kind, I'm going to cut your balls off!

(He looked about himself and rubbed his chin with uncertainty.)

FLAXLEY: That's if you'd be good enough to wait while I look for my sword!

DAMAN: Flaxley, listen. I come because of an event in the past, a consequence that may prove disastrous.

(Feeling certain that a mission was about to be mentioned, Flaxley started to snarl.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck sake, Daman! I'm sick of being put in mortal danger and risking my life for you!

(He looked around the room again.)

FLAXLEY: Where the hell is that sword?

(Desperate to get Flaxley's full attention, Daman raised his voice.)

DAMAN: Flaxley, this is important!!!

(Flaxley glared at him, annoyed at his audacity.)

FLAXLEY: You come into my home and raise your voice at me??? I've got plenty of other swords, you know. You're on the verge of tasting one of them.

DAMAN: Well please listen, this is important!

FLAXLEY: I'm listening!

DAMAN: Very well!

(He took a deep breath and began as Flaxley continued to scour the room with his eyes.)

DAMAN: It's about your necklace. I fear somebody's after it!

(Flaxley grabbed his gold neck chain and glared at him.)

FLAXLEY: It's a gold chain not a necklace!

DAMAN: Whatever...

FLAXLEY: And why would somebody be after it?

DAMAN: Well... remember how you acquired that gold chain?

(Flaxley looked thoughtful and nodded as an ever more distrusting look crossed his face.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, why?

DAMAN: That old man who gave it to you...

FLAXLEY: You know about that?

(Having mused briefly and recalled how Daman always seemed to know everything about everything, Flaxley shrugged it off and continued his enquiry.)

FLAXLEY: What about him?

(Daman grimaced and scratched his face nervously as he replied.)

DAMAN: Well, he was a member of the council of the wise, like me. Just like me, actually... in fact... it was me.

(His words were met with a stony silence.)

DAMAN: Um... Flaxley?

(Not sure whether to laugh or kill him, Flaxley spoke coldly and directly into his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: You'd better get to the point then fuck off before I destroy you!

(Daman gritted his teeth.)

DAMAN: Ah, okay. Anyway, the necklaces...

FLAXLEY: Gold chains!!!

(Daman was becoming quite flustered by now, the sight of a fuming Flaxley not the easiest thing to face.)

DAMAN: Right, yes, gold chains, quite right!

FLAXLEY: Well?

DAMAN: Um... the chains are actually components from a mystical device. The three of them together are used to power a device called the "sceptre of the gods".

FLAXLEY: The what?

DAMAN: The sceptre of the gods! It's the device we used to create the keys of peace, liberty and justice. Well, we gave the chains to you three boys because you were all destined to go in separate directions all over the world. We didn't want anyone using the sceptre of the gods ever again you see, so I saw to it that the three chains would be split up and taken to three different corners of the world.

(He grimaced uneasily.)

DAMAN: And... well, I chose you and you friends because, like I say, you were destined to part and I was already involved in your life, Flaxley... manipulating it.

(Flaxley nodded understandingly.)

FLAXLEY: I'm going to kill you now; I'll just get a sword!

DAMAN: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Wait there!

(As Flaxley about turned to head for his armoury, Daman sighed to himself.)

DAMAN: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Sorry, old chap. I've made up my mind!

(In no uncertainty whatsoever that Flaxley was serious, Daman shook a sorrowful head.)

DAMAN: Sorry, Flaxley. I didn't want to have to do this but you leave me no choice!

(With that, he raised his hand at Flaxley and concentrated hard. Immediately, Flaxley froze to the spot.)

FLAXLEY: What the fuck?

DAMAN: Sorry, Flaxley, but it's important you listen! I'm using my powers to control you...

(Unable to move his body from the neck down in any way shape or form, Flaxley snarled back.)

FLAXLEY: I gathered that!

DAMAN: Sorry but I have to make you listen, and I'm not going to stand here while you swing swords at me!

(Flaxley growled.)

DAMAN: Now, turn around and look at me!

(Much to Flaxley's displeasure, his body did as it was told.)

FLAXLEY: Daman, I'm going to rip your legs off when I get out of this!!!

DAMAN: Do you want me to seal your mouth too?

(Immediately, he fell silent knowing there was nothing he could do but wish he was in biting range of the old man before him.)

DAMAN: Much better! Now, listen! I only came here to warn you that your necklace might be the target of an unscrupulous bunch of thieves. Take real good care of it and don't let it out of your sight!

(Having been given no option but to listen and concede to the mystic man, Flaxley gave a defeated sigh.)

FLAXLEY: Fine! Like I wasn't going to look after it anyway! And it's a gold chain!

(Daman nodded.)

DAMAN: Well whatever it's called, now that I've warned you, that concludes our business!

(Despite being held in a paralysed stasis, Flaxley scowled furiously.)

FLAXLEY: That's it? You came here to order me to do what I was going to do anyway???

DAMAN: Well no, the neck... gold chain wasn't under threat until now!

(Flaxley was uncertain.)

FLAXLEY: Well, can you at least tell me who's after it or why?

(Daman nodded thoughtfully.)

DAMAN: I suppose that wouldn't hurt. There's a gang from a northern city who seek to reunite the three chains. They aim to use them along with the sceptre of the gods to create their own key and control the world with it.

FLAXLEY: Right... so do they have this sceptre then?

DAMAN: Unfortunately, yes...

(Having made an alarming realisation, Flaxley's jaw dropped.)

FLAXLEY: Hey, wait a minute... you'd better warn Croxton and Lester!

(Daman hung his head.)

DAMAN: Sorry Flaxley, I warned Croxton yesterday but Lester... he didn't make it!

FLAXLEY: What do you mean?

(As Daman's words sunk in, he bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: Oh!

DAMAN: The thieves tried to lift his necklace from him but he caught them and fought back. In the end they stabbed him and took it. That was two days ago in Amethyst Village!

(Flaxley sighed and hung his head mournfully.)

FLAXLEY: Poor Lester!

(Daman nodded.)

FLAXLEY: He always said he wanted to go to Amethyst Village...

(He shook his sorrowful head then a furious look enveloped his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Wait! My friend was killed because of his gold chain and you weren't even going to tell me???

DAMAN: Well...

FLAXLEY: "That concludes our business", you said! If I hadn't asked...

DAMAN: Hmm... I see you're upset. I'll be on my way then!

FLAXLEY: If I wasn't under this spell, I'd rip your face off!

DAMAN: Yes, I know. That's why you *are* under that spell!

(Flaxley growled unable to even struggle.)

DAMAN: I'll see myself out! Just make sure you look after your necklace. Good day.

(And with that, Daman disappeared as he always did, leaving a furious Flaxley behind. As soon as he left, the spell evaporated and Flaxley tripped forward, grabbing the table to stop himself. With an anguished grimace he looked to the skies.)

FLAXLEY: I swear, Daman...

(He then sighed and hung his head.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry, Lester! You were a top bloke.

(As he stood there shaking his sorrowful head, he then noticed his sword propped up just inside the door. With a menacing glint in his eyes, he paced over to it and nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: One day, Louise, you and I are going to have that Daman Siria's blood!

(He then looked uncertain.)

FLAXLEY: Unless *he* turns into a ten tonne beast and snaps you in two like Stifer did.

(A sorrowful pout then washed over his face as he lifted his sword before his face lovingly.)

FLAXLEY: I thought I'd lost you, Louise, but that blacksmith is a miracle worker. That was a dark, dark day but now you're back, reinforced and ready to fight at my side once more. I love you, Louise. More than anything. Though don't tell Kritz that.

(He then shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Who am I kidding? She knows.

(With that, he nodded sternly then headed for the door.)

FLAXLEY: Come on, old girl, we've got a civic event to arrange!

(Checking his gold chain as he did so, he then swung open the door and stepped outside into the stunning Tifaeris sunshine.)

(Despite his run in with Daman, Flaxley felt great. Every inch of the Queen's visit to Tifaeris had been planned down to the finest detail and he was extremely proud of himself. He'd left absolutely nothing to chance and made sure every eventuality was covered. Or so he thought. Unfortunately for him, his plans may have been perfect but those delegated to carry them out were not.

As darkness set in, the honeymoon suite he'd designed, chosen a site for and even selected the wood for was proving awkward to build. Confident there was plenty of time left to sort out the problems, however, he refused to panic and joined them in its construction, working solidly through the night. The plan was to build the suite on the embankment leading down to the beach. The main door was to be at the top, leading to the main thoroughfare. That part hadn't been a problem. The rest of the

suite, however, was supposed to be built on stilts, giving the newlyweds a glorious view from the window of the beach between two trees. Having tried what seemed like a million different ways to support the floor with various types of stilts, nothing seemed to be working. Twice the stilts had collapsed completely and the floorboards had slid down the bank to the beach. Hampered by the darkness and the onset of tired limbs, it had started to seem like an endless and somewhat futile task but they carried on regardless, becoming more and more determined to succeed every time something went wrong. Come daybreak, however, the suite was still no nearer completion. The heat that the sun brought with it was hardly welcomed by the exhausted men and yet, they soldiered on. Every man involved in the project refusing to accept failure.

Proud of his men's attitude to their work, Flaxley felt confident they'd eventually find a way and everything would work out in the end. It would be just reward for their efforts after all. With every faith in his men, shortly after eight in the morning, he offered them some words of encouragement then rushed off to assist in the building of the new town hall instead. He was determined to oversee every single project.

As a result of everyone in Tifaeris pulling together with determination to make the queen's visit a monumental success, the township bustled and buzzed with excitement all morning and well into the early afternoon. Slowly but surely it all seemed to be coming together.

Convinced that Mandika would be thrilled by what she saw, at two o'clock in the afternoon, an exhausted Flaxley raced from the town hall, intent on seeing how the honeymoon suite was coming along, when he heard the sound he'd been dreading. The lookout he'd posted on a rooftop blew hard on a bugle to sound the alarm. Mandika's carriage was in sight. Upon hearing the lookout, Flaxley stared ahead of himself like a startled rabbit for a few moments then stood up straight to gather himself. Having taken a few seconds to calm himself, he then nodded determinedly and turned to face the Tifaeris gates with a knowing glint in his eye. And then, with no more ado, he charged towards the gates, yelling at the top of his voice.)

FLAXLEY: It's time!!! People, it's time!

(Upon his words, a band scrambled from a nearby hut and a rush to unfurl all the banners began. In a mad scramble, everybody immediately took up their positions, Flaxley rushing to wait outside his home, just inside the main town gates where the carriage was scheduled to stop. Standing to attention, knowing her majesty was imminent, Flaxley allowed himself a chuckle. After everything he and Mandika had been through together, it all seemed a bit pompous to stand on ceremony, but in the end he respected her position as queen and knew she'd appreciate the effort. Wearing a wide smile, he watched the band rush towards the gates in readiness to strike up a fanfare, then grimaced as they rushed out of the gates just as the carriage came into view.)

FLAXLEY: What the hell are you doing???

(He then slapped his forehead as the band spotted the carriage and quickly rushed to strike up a panicked, out of tune welcoming cacophony of random trumpet sounds.)

FLAXLEY: Well that was professional!

(He shook his head, hoping against hope that the musical debacle would be the only downside to an otherwise perfect event.)

FLAXLEY: Hopefully she didn't notice them.

(As the carriage passed between the pillars of the gates, the small crowd that Flaxley

had gathered and instructed to greet it, cheered and clapped for all they were worth. Knowing that any kind of adulation would be greeted favourably by Mandika, Flaxley smiled, content with proceedings so far.

As the coach pulled to a standstill in front of him, Shaka was first to alight, followed by her majesty. Daintily holding onto Shaka's hand and being careful not to soil the bottom of her dress, she jumped from the step and onto Tifaeris' soil for the first time as Queen Mandika. Delighted to see her, Flaxley stepped to her wearing the widest of smiles as the crowd whooped with delight.)

FLAXLEY: Queen Mandika!

(As he went to hug her, however, Shaka stepped in his path taking his role as bodyguard a little too seriously. Not about to entertain such an indignity, Flaxley grabbed both his forearms and tossed him to one side.)

FLAXLEY: Pillock!

(With that, he held out his arms and allowed Mandika to give him a hug. Overjoyed to see her dear friend and former knight, she threw her arms around him and placed her head on his chest plate.)

MANDIKA: Great to see you, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Absolutely great to see you too, ma'am!

(She looked up at him.)

MANDIKA: Ma'am? You haven't called me that in ages!

FLAXLEY: Well, seeing as it's a special occasion!

(As Shaka climbed to his feet looking miffed, Kritz and Lefiat climbed from the carriage taking in the sights around the town as they did so.)

LEFIAT: Wow! Banners and stuff!

(Setting Mandika aside, Flaxley shook Lefiat's hand.)

FLAXLEY: So you've made an honest woman of her at last, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: Eh? What do you mean by that?

FLAXLEY: It's just a phrase!

(With a quick roll of his eyes, Flaxley then proceeded to hug Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Welcome back, my love. I missed you!

KRITZ: Aw!

(She squeezed him tight, having also missed the company of the one she loved.)

KRITZ: I missed you too, darling. How are the kids?

(At once, Flaxley's hair almost stood on end but he managed to remain calm and retain an honest face.)

FLAXLEY: Um... great! Yeah, not a problem. I took great care of them!

(Kritz beamed.)

KRITZ: I knew you wouldn't let me down!

(At this point, the band Flaxley had organised almost apologetically raced into place and belatedly played the welcome theme they'd failed to play previously. As they did so, Lefiat and Mandika allowed their eyes to scan the crowds and read the banners that were strewn across all the nearby buildings.)

LEFIAT: Wow, you really made an effort for us! Thanks!

(Flaxley nodded, feeling extremely proud of his handiwork.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, yes we did!

(Mandika however was a little less enthusiastic. With a baffled frown she pointed at a banner on a house opposite.)

MANDIKA: That one says, "Welcome, Queen Guevina of Lefiat!!!"

FLAXLEY: What?

(They all looked to the offending banner.)

FLAXLEY: What the hell?

(Mandika pouted then pointed to another.)

MANDIKA: And who the hell is Luffy-lops?

(Lefiat spat his forehead.)

LEFIAT: I'm Luffy-lops!

FLAXLEY: Hmm... little Phisele made that one! She's only nine years old, you can't blame her for that.

LEFIAT: But why does she always call me Luffy-lops???

FLAXLEY: Hmm... never mind that...

(Anxious to point out what had gone right rather than what had gone wrong, Flaxley pointed to the main banner above them.)

FLAXLEY: That one's okay isn't it?

(They all looked up.)

MANDIKA: Um... they put two N's in my name and left the letter U out of the word "queen".

(Noticing the errors, Flaxley glared at his drinking buddy "Thin", a portly villager with a tendency to do half a job. As Thin shrugged back at him, Flaxley waved his fist and sneered.)

MANDIKA: Still, you tried I suppose. Shame about the band though!

(Kritz spat her forehead then shook her head at Flaxley.)

KRITZ: Nice work, darling!

(While Flaxley and Kritz remonstrated with each other through a series of gestures and whispers, Mandika took a deep breath of the refreshing sea air and hugged Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: Well my love, we're here! Our honeymoon can begin!

(Just then, the people in the crowd around her started to shuffle about and glare angrily to their sides. Moments later, the three foot tall green alien from the planet Tryme 17, Derek, Mandika's friend and ally emerged from between two revellers apologising for having poked them with the horns that protruded from each side of his head. Mandika's eyes immediately lit up as he strolled towards her with a wide smile etched on his face.)

MANDIKA: Oh my, it's...

(Once again, Shaka leapt into action, determined to do his duty and keep the public from interfering with his charge. Looking mean and menacing, he thrust his hand at Derek.)

SHAKA: Halt!

(Angered by the interruption, Derek grabbed his hand and swung him out of the way. As he landed in a heap, Shaka leapt up and snarled.)

SHAKA: Hey!!!

(Mandika grinned at him.)

MANDIKA: Relax! It's Derek!

(Much to Derek's horror, Mandika then proceeded to pick him up and hug him like a little boy.)

DEREK: What are you doing???

(Mandika chuckled.)

MANDIKA: If I crouch I'll get my dress dirty!

DEREK: Even so, this is humiliating!

(She put him down and smiled to him.)

MANDIKA: Great to see you, Derek!

(Flaxley didn't agree.)

FLAXLEY: It would have been greater to see you earlier, Derek! What were you doing?

(Derek shrugged.)

DEREK: I was moving into my new home. You know that!

(He grinned.)

DEREK: Plus, I knew you'd ask me to help if I came out earlier!

FLAXLEY: I knew it!

(He then raised a baffled eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: Hey, where's Bonson?

(At once, Mandika's brow furrowed and she gestured to the top of the carriage with angry eyes. Grimacing, Flaxley looked up and sure enough, there he was, fast asleep next to the coachman.)

FLAXLEY: Tired from the trip or is that a drunken slumber?

MANDIKA: A drunken slumber! At least he *looked* drunk when I knocked him unconscious yesterday!

(She then rubbed her hands together excitedly.)

MANDIKA: Anyway, forget *him*. What now, Flaxley? What have you got planned for me?

(Flaxley beamed, eager to show her all the wonderful things he'd arranged.)

FLAXLEY: Well, Mandika... ma'am...

(His words were then interrupted by a little girl racing from the crowd towards him.)

PHISELE: Flaxley, Flaxley!!!

(Flaxley did a double take in her direction then gulped in terror.)

FLAXLEY: Uh-oh!

(Much to his relief, Shaka, determined not to be thwarted a third time, stepped in front of Phisele and raised his voice in no uncertain tone.)

SHAKA: Step away from her majesty!!!

(Now, Shaka was a proud man and as a trained bodyguard he knew he was to remain cool at all times. However, this would be the final insult. As Phisele, trained in martial arts by Kritz, threw him on his back and stepped over him to get to Flaxley, he'd finally stood all he could stand.)

SHAKA: Fuck sake!!!

(Leaping to his feet wearing a face of thunder, he ripped his hat from his head and threw it to the ground before leaping on it three times and yelling at the top of his voice.)

SHAKA: Stupid... fucking... why???

(And with that, he barged past Mandika and headed for the gates.)

MANDIKA: Hey!

SHAKA: Fuck you, ma'am! I resign!!!

(They all watched wide-mouthed as he stormed out of the gates to walk back to Guevina.)

KRITZ: Wow. He's kinda like a young version of Bonson!

(Unfortunately for Flaxley, Shaka's failure to stop the little girl had consequences.)

PHISELE: Flaxley!!! My mum says you have to pick up your children. She says it's been two days and you owe her 100 lig!

(Fearing the worst, Flaxley grimaced at a twitching Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Um... oh dear!

(He glared at Phisele.)

FLAXLEY: Snitching twerp!

PHISELE: I aint scared of you!

(She then kicked him.)

PHISELE: Ow!!!

(Having kicked his metal shin guard, Phisele welled up, looking like she was about to cry. Flaxley immediately placed his hand to his head and cringed. Kritz adored Phisele and he knew he'd get the blame. Luckily for him, however, Phisele stopped screwing her face up as she noticed Lefiat and Mandika chatting together. With adoring eyes she blushed then exhaled in Lefiat's direction.)

PHISELE: Hi, Luffy-lops!

(Her cuteness stole Kritz's heart and a wide smile instantly appeared on her face.

Having spotted this, Flaxley decided this would be a great time to make his exit.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent! Um... Kritz, you talk to Phisele while I show Mandika and Lefiat to their suite!

KRITZ: Okay!

(She knelt and picked Phisele up.)

KRITZ: But don't think I've forgotten!

FLAXLEY: Damn!

(With a sigh, he reached out a hand towards Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: Come, my queen! Let me show you to your quarters!

(Mandika beamed.)

MANDIKA: Brilliant! Let's go!

LEFIAT: What about me?

FLAXLEY: Sorry Lefiat, just the queen! I mean both of you, obviously!!!

LEFIAT: Oh okay!

(As he tried to lead her away, however, his path was blocked by the crowd of citizens he'd invited.)

FLAXLEY: Right...

(With that, he looked up and yelled out to the vast assembly of citizens before him.)

FLAXLEY: Job done! Go home, now! Party in the main square later!

(Immediately, they all dispersed. Mandika couldn't believe her eyes. The crowds in Guevina were very often out of control, but here in Tifaeris they'd turned up at Flaxley's whim and left the same way. Even *she* didn't carry that sort of sway.

With the path clear, Flaxley then led them both along the main thoroughfare towards the honeymoon suite. Having been very much uncertain whether it was finished or not, he was mightily relieved to see it finally complete and standing proudly at the top of the embankment. With pride etched on his face, he stepped up to the door and gestured Mandika towards it.)

FLAXLEY: This ma'am, is the front door!

(With that, he swung it open and peered inside. Much to his further relief, it had been finely decorated throughout, just as he'd specified.)

FLAXLEY: Perfect. After you!

(Excitedly, Mandika grinned and hunched her shoulders at him before strolling inside.)

MANDIKA: Ooh! Nice!

(Lefiat followed.)

LEFIAT: Oh wow, nice carpet!

(Flaxley followed them in.)

FLAXLEY: And how's that for a view?

(Mandika clutched her hands to her chest.)

MANDIKA: Wow, that's amazing! Thank you so much for this, Flaxley! This more than makes up for the band, the banners and the fake welcoming committee!

(Not sure whether there was *any* sincerity in her gratitude, Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Well, it was the least I could do!

LEFIAT: Yeah, that's normally what I do!

FLAXLEY: Hmm... okay. Well, enjoy! There's a lovely view but seeing as you're newlyweds you might not even bother looking at it, eh?

(Mandika blushed and raised her shoulders.)

MANDIKA: Shush!

LEFIAT: Yeah shush, what view? I can't see anything except the sea!

(Flaxley gave him a disbelieving look.)

FLAXLEY: That *is* the view!

LEFIAT: Oh right! Yeah; now I see it, nice!

(Never quite able to comprehend the extent of Lefiat's stupidity, Flaxley scratched his head.)

FLAXLEY: Right! Well, if you need me, I'll be at my place listening to Kritz shouting at me!

(And with that, he headed for the door.)

MANDIKA: Bye, Flaxley! And thanks again!

(He smiled and shut the door behind him before walking straight into a stranger.)

FLAXLEY: Oops!

STRANGER: Ugh?

FLAXLEY: Totally my fault. Sorry old chap!

STRANGER: Ugh!

(As the ignorant stranger walked away, Flaxley scowled at his rudeness.)

FLAXLEY: Some people!

(Brushing the incident aside he then grinned to himself with satisfaction that despite the debacle with the band, the banners and the obviously pre-arranged crowd, he'd made Mandika happy. He then rushed home get the verbal abuse he was promised by Kritz over and done with.

The beauty of arranging a honeymoon is that apart from the odd activity here or there, mostly you just have to give the newlyweds a bed and leave them to it. This had left Flaxley a lot of time to be told off by his wife, make love to her and then set up the festivities for evening.)

Township of Tifaeris, Nightfall

(As darkness fell on Tifaeris on this most special of days, the festivities in the town square that had been on-going throughout the day doubled in intensity. A vast array of different coloured lanterns were lit all around the square creating a multi-coloured effect on the cobbles, while minstrels struck up happy songs for the townsfolk to dance to around a small bonfire in the centre. Tables were set out around the edges and various meats and ales were made readily available, not to mention spirits.

Flaxley's vision for the celebration in the queen's honour was to afford her no special treatment whatsoever. Instead, she'd be treated like an ordinary citizen of Tifaeris. He was extremely proud of the town and its people and he felt the highest tribute they could pay her would be to accept her as one of their own. She'd get no special seats,

no cordoned off area and no special treatment. She's simply be accepted by the townsfolk and welcomed with open arms. This well meant gesture however, had one tiny flaw. Mandika hated common folk. She was terrified of them.

As soon as the festivities had begun, Flaxley had gone to collect Lefiat and Mandika and led them into the square. Mandika didn't know whether to cry or erupt into a fit of rage. This was her honeymoon, her special night and Flaxley expected her to consort with peasants, the sort of people she considered to be nothing more than diseased criminals. Lefiat, on the other hand, had been taken by the rhythm from the mandolins and lutes and had started to enjoy himself, much to her disgust. Naturally, the formally sleeping Bonson had smelled the ale and had immediately woken and made his way to the square, still unsure how he'd ended up back on the carriage that he'd thought he'd escaped from.

As they watched the large numbers of townsfolk enjoy themselves with feasting, drinking and dancing in the square, Flaxley and Kritz felt extremely proud. The Tifaeris before them was a world away from the township that had not so long ago, stood on the verge of obliteration. As a teenager, Flaxley had returned from delivering wood to a nearby township to find his home destroyed and all his friends and family slaughtered by the Trepe tribe. All Kritz knew about that day was that one of the Trepe warriors had taken her back to their village and raised her there as her own. Flaxley, on the other hand, recalled every moment of it right down to the smell of burnt bodies and the sight of a baby impaled on a spear. Tifaeris was now a far cry from the town he'd come back to that day. The fifty or so desperate survivors were now among a throng of thousands of partying villagers. The mortal enemy that the Trepe had always been were no longer a threat but instead an ally. And Tifaeris owed it all to Flaxley and Kritz. Flaxley had gone away and become a knight while Kritz was raised as a Trepe warrior. Ten years later their love had brought them home and in a few short years Tifaeris had become the beautiful and happy place it was today. To them, this night was as much about celebrating Queen Mandika as it was about celebrating Tifaeris.

As Mandika stood at the edge of the throng, looking terrified that the people around her might pass on their diseases or mug her, everybody else in Tifaeris was having a tremendous time. Nobody was even remotely worried about Mandika's apprehension. There was such a jubilant atmosphere, they all felt sure that even *she* would lighten up and enjoy the evening in the end. As far as the townsfolk were concerned, it was simply down to her to embrace the festivities.

As she watched the partying townsfolk whilst standing aside a picnic table at the edge of the square, Kritz looked to her husband and smiled.)

KRITZ: And you're sure Phisele's mum is okay about babysitting again tonight?

FLAXLEY: Absolutely. I already told you, she said she'd be honoured.

KRITZ: I just thought she might like to come and enjoy herself!

FLAXLEY: She *is* enjoying herself. She *likes* babysitting!

(Kritz nodded and cast her eyes out at the festive, smiling crowds.)

KRITZ: You did a great job, this is fantastic!

FLAXLEY: Well, I told you I was great!

(She chuckled.)

KRITZ: The *greatest* you said!

FLAXLEY: Well, you have to be great to be the greatest, don't you?

KRITZ: Yeah, fair enough!

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: We've done well, Kritz! Only a few years ago we came back here to find less than a hundred people existing in broken huts and surviving on what little food they could catch! Now look at it!

KRITZ: Yup! The houses are amazing; we've got schools, bars... and everyone's happy, Flaxley! *We* did that!

FLAXLEY: We did! I guess that means we're both great!

KRITZ: Well I know *I* am. I don't have to keep telling everyone either; it's a given!

(They laughed and held each other close. Flicking back her hair, Kritz then looked across the square to where Bonson and Derek were at a table laughing.)

KRITZ: Wow, this place is so great, even Bonson's enjoying himself!

(Sure enough, seated upon a picnic table at the opposite side of the square, Bonson was laughing most heartily while Derek frowned at him coldly.)

BONSON: Oh my, that's hilarious!

DEREK: I'm glad you find my pain so amusing!

BONSON: Ha! Sorry, old chap! No, I'm not!

(He laughed louder.)

DEREK: That's the last time I confide in you!

BONSON: Well, with respect, you ought to know better than to come to me with tales of alien brewers droop!

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: Yes well, I just assumed you'd be the expert!

(Bonson was not amused.)

BONSON: Hey!!!

DEREK: What?

BONSON: How dare you doubt my erectile abilities!!!

(Derek looked baffled.)

DEREK: I didn't!

BONSON: You assumed I was an expert on the subject!

DEREK: On beer!!!

(Bonson looked enlightened.)

BONSON: Oh, I hear you!

DEREK: Good grief!

BONSON: Hey, you hate beer anyway, don't you?

(Derek screwed up his face.)

DEREK: You're not wrong...

(They then spoke simultaneously.)

BOTH: It tastes like rotted seaweed...

BONSON: Yes, so you keep saying! Bloody poof!

DEREK: It was this Tequila drink I'd had. Very strong. I got home and couldn't perform though!

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: The little green man didn't show up for work, eh?

(Thankfully, Derek could read minds and knew what he meant.)

DEREK: Yeah! I even used magic to sober myself up and still nothing.

BONSON: Well, that's just bad luck, not the drink's fault!

DEREK: Well that's good, 'cause I brought a bottle with me!

(With a devilish glint in his eye, Bonson grinned from ear to ear.)

BONSON: Excellent.

(And so, while Flaxley and Kritz enjoyed the evening together taking in a few dances, Bonson and Derek plied themselves with Tequila. The four of them having a great time. Mandika however, was flatly refusing to enjoy herself. Despite Lefiat's best efforts, she stubbornly rejected his every attempt to make her join in the festivities.)

LEFIAT: But, Mandika...

MANDIKA: It's your majesty to you!!!

LEFIAT: Eh?

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: Here we go again!

MANDIKA: Hey! What do you mean by that?

(As always, Lefiat had no idea how to defend himself from her vile tongue.)

LEFIAT: It's not *my* fault! Blame Flaxley!

MANDIKA: I do!!! It's my wedding party and he expects me to celebrate with peasants! It's like he's never even met me!!!

(Surrounded by the very people she was insulting, Lefiat looked from side to side.)

LEFIAT: Careful!

MANDIKA: Why? They know they're peasants!

LEFIAT: Look, let's just have a dance or something!

(She looked mortified.)

MANDIKA: And get entangled with this riff raff??? Are you insane?

(She then ruffled her neck bitterly.)

MANDIKA: Besides, you can't dance to minstrels! I need an orchestra and a ballroom with no peasants in it!!!

LEFIAT: Oh won't you at least try?

MANDIKA: No!!! This is an outrage. How can *I* be expected to consort with common folk like some pox-ridden farmhand??? I deserve better!!!

(Sulking like a schoolgirl, she then folded her arms and pouted.)

MANDIKA: And for suggesting I should, there'll be no sex for you later, so don't even ask!

LEFIAT: I wasn't going to, we've been bonking all afternoon and my back hurts!

(Realising far too late, as he so often did, that he shouldn't always say what he's thinking, Lefiat cowered and backed away from her angered expression.)

LEFIAT: But I will if you want to... um...

(He gave her a cheesy grin.)

LEFIAT: I love you!

(Relenting her anger for a moment, she shook her head.)

MANDIKA: Good!

LEFIAT: So will you dance with me?

MANDIKA: No!!!

(Just then, a little girl's voice popped up from beside Lefiat.)

PHISELE: I'll dance with you, Luffy-lops!

(Lefiat looked most bemused.)

LEFIAT: Eh? But... you?

(He then shrugged indifferently.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, okay. I suppose it wouldn't do any harm!

(Unfortunately for him, Mandika begged to differ.)

MANDIKA: What???

LEFIAT: Um...

PHISELE: Come on, dance with me!!!

(Lefiat froze to the spot with fear at the sight of Mandika looking ready to explode.)

LEFIAT: Um... maybe not then!

PHISELE: Oh, come on! Please!!!

(Lefiat could only gape and say nothing.)

MANDIKA: Go away, little girl!!!

(Phisele looked to her and scowled.)

PHISELE: Who's she?

LEFIAT: Um... she's my wife!

(Desperate to get back in Mandika's good books, he gave her a cheesy grin.)

LEFIAT: And her word is final.

(Phisele pouted.)

PHISELE: No dance then?

MANDIKA: No! Now clear off!

LEFIAT: Sorry.

(Looking bitterly disappointed, Phisele's bottom lip drooped then she burst into tears and ran away.)

LEFIAT: You made her cry.

(Caring very little for Phisele's tears, Mandika shook her head bitterly.)

MANDIKA: You're a disgrace!

LEFIAT: Eh?

MANDIKA: Flirting like that!!!

(Starting to get somewhat peeved with Mandika's attitude, Lefiat grumbled under his breath.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, that's what I was doing!

(Getting more and more agitated by the minute, Mandika retorted furiously.)

MANDIKA: Don't mumble at me!!!

(Fed up with being to blame for everything since the day he met her, Lefiat finally snapped then responded in kind.)

LEFIAT: Don't yell at *me*! That's done it. No sex for you, tonight! I don't care how much you beg!

(Every ounce of courage then seeped out of his body and withered away as Mandika's eye started to twitch and her nostrils started to flare.)

LEFIAT: Oh no!

(He then cowered and started to back away, fearing an explosion of her royal rage.)

LEFIAT: Um... remember I love you... um... calm down...

(Just when Lefiat thought things couldn't get any worse, a drunk then proceeded to stumble past Mandika, burp in her face then walk away giggling. For Mandika, it was the last straw. Having been insulted by an awful band and poorly spelt banners, she was now being treated like a humble peasant. And this was supposed to be the perfect honeymoon. With steam practically whistling from her ears she snarled and paced past Lefiat wearing a look of pure hatred on her face. Growling with rage, she stamped across the town square to Flaxley and slapped him as hard as she could across the face before storming off towards the honeymoon suite.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, don't mention it! Glad you could come!

(Having got half way there, she stopped then stamped back furiously.)

MANDIKA: And here's another thing, I hate you!

(She folded her arms and pouted.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm, okay!

(Kritz smiled and whispered in Flaxley's ear.)

KRITZ: I think she wants a hug, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Really?

(He looked to Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: Do you want a hug, Mandika?

(In that moment, Mandika's angry face dissolved into that of a woman on the verge of tears.)

MANDIKA: Yes, please!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Good call, my love. Knock yourself out!

(With that, he paced across the square towards Lefiat, leaving Kritz to give Mandika a consoling hug.)

KRITZ: Men!!!

(She rolled her eyes then watched as Flaxley pace past Lefiat and started a conversation with a gentleman she'd never seen before. Realising it must have something to do with entertainment, she smiled, pleased to see her ever loving husband doing his best to cheer Mandika up even though she didn't deserve it.)

KRITZ: Chin up, Mandika. We should get some more entertainment in a minute!

(Mandika sighed.)

MANDIKA: More? What do you mean more?

(Kritz rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: Grateful bugger, aint ya?

(Once again Mandika could only shrug. Determined to make her enjoy herself, Lefiat slowly paced over to them wearing a smile.)

LEFIAT: You okay, Mandika?

(She lifted her head towards him and forced a smile.)

MANDIKA: I suppose.

(Just then, Phisele appeared from out of the dancing crowd and pointed at Lefiat.)

PHISELE: That's him!

(Clearly following her, two more little girls emerged from the crowd.)

GIRL: That's your boyfriend? Ew!!!

(And with that, they darted off again leaving Mandika fuming and Lefiat utterly offended.)

LEFIAT: Ew? Hey, I'm not that bad!

(He then noticed Mandika's scowl.)

LEFIAT: Not that I care what they think!

MANDIKA: I hate that kid!

(Lefiat could only shrug, not daring to say anything for fear of recrimination.)

MANDIKA: And I hate this honeymoon!

(Just then, there was a loud explosion down by the top of the beach road that echoed across the sky. The ground shook with the force. In abject horror, everyone at the party froze to the spot thinking the same terrifying thought. Could Tifaeris be under attack again? Fearing the worst, they all stared towards the beach when, a few moments later, Flaxley strolled sheepishly into view with soot all over his face and a human arm in his hand. Seeing the anguished faces of the townsfolk staring his way, he grimaced and walked on.)

FLAXLEY: As you were!!! Nothing to worry about!!! Slight mishap with the fireworks! We'll be having the jugglers and acrobats later, but needless to say, the fireworks have been cancelled!

(Thoroughly relieved by the false alarm, the partying citizens continued about their business. For Mandika, this was just another disaster to add to her list of complaints.)

MANDIKA: But, I love fireworks!

(As Flaxley reached her, he held up the arm in his hand and sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah, so did he! Poor Desmond.

MANDIKA: Ew!!! Flaxley! That's gross! I don't wanna see that!!!

(Slipping into another rage, she grabbed Lefiat's hand and dragged him away, complaining as she went.)

MANDIKA: Come on, Lefiat! This is an outrage. We'll spend the night then tomorrow we're going to find a hotel somewhere else. Somewhere far, far away!

(As they watched her go, Flaxley and Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: She's very highly strung you know!

FLAXLEY: Yeah! I had noticed that!

(They smiled.)

FLAXLEY: I'll chuck this arm in the fire, might as well cremate it seeing as this is all that's left of him.

(As Flaxley approached the bonfire in the centre of the square, Kritz watched him go and tilted her neck to check out his backside. Smiling with approval she then looked to the flames and sighed joyfully. Moments later, hypnotised by the orange glow her mind wandered back to the day of her wedding. The sides of her mouth curled upwards as she recalled Flaxley staring into her eyes and reciting his vows on the beach in the glow of the glorious sunlight. Just then, the thrall of the bright flames took her mind to somewhere entirely different. It took her to a place it had never taken her to before. A place she didn't want to revisit. All too vividly she recalled the burning heat of a fire on her face and crying for her mother. Shocked by the flashback, she shuddered as her mind threw her images of killing and carnage occurring in Tifaeris' main thoroughfare as she cowered beneath a table, staring wide-eyed through an open front door. As clear as crystal she then heard her mother scream out in distress before falling silent. Almost in a trance, she stared at the flames, unable to stop the mental torture her mind was inflicting on her. Moments later, as Flaxley returned to her from the fire, he noticed her tortured expression and swiftly raced over to assist. Grabbing her upper arms, he looked into her troubled eyes and raised a concerned voice.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz!

(As the memory of a Trepe warrior, kneeling before her and reaching an outstretched hand in her direction invaded her mind, Flaxley's voice suddenly cut over it all and she snapped out of the trance.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz? Darling?

(Traumatised by it all, she staggered and grabbed the table to support herself.)

KRITZ: Whoa!

FLAXLEY: You okay, my love?

(Still in a state of shock, she looked about herself and plonked herself down on the nearest seat. Determined to help, Flaxley slipped himself beside her and placed an arm around her. Kritz immediately allowed her head to flop onto his shoulder.)

FLAXLEY: Darling?

(Taking a deep breath, she went to speak but instead, burst into tears. As her distressed head bobbed up and down, Flaxley pulled her close and she threw her arms around him.)

FLAXLEY: It's okay, Kritz!

(In the last year or so, Flaxley had noticed a slight change in Kritz. Motherhood had feminised her. She could still be volatile and aggressive, but from time to time she'd allowed her husband to see she was scared or insecure about things, aspects of her personality he'd never known for the first few years of their relationship. One thing

he'd *never* seen before, however, was her so upset that she couldn't even talk for crying. He'd seen her cry a few times during the early stages of pregnancy when her hormones were raging, but she'd never been so upset that she was shaking and unable to speak. Watching her tremble worried Flaxley greatly and he was only too relieved when she wiped her eyes a minute or so later and lifted her head to talk into his waiting eyes.)

KRITZ: I'm sorry! You must think me a right wimp!

(Flaxley shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: You're anything but a wimp, darling.

(Reassured by his presence, she forced a smile before speaking up in warm, sincere tone.)

KRITZ: It was like this before wasn't it? Tifaeris when we were kids.

(Flaxley looked around at the partying villagers and general joyous state of affairs in the square.)

FLAXLEY: Well... yeah, kind of...

KRITZ: I mean, it was built up and people were living here happily until the Trepe burnt the place down!

(Flaxley nodded, unsure where she was going with her words.)

KRITZ: Then I became a Trepe.

(She sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Hey, it's not like you had a choice!

KRITZ: I know. Oh, god I know that, my love. It's just that...a few years ago I left the Trepe and came back here with *you*... to live in Tifaeris again.

FLAXLEY: Yeah... um... what are you getting at, my love?

KRITZ: Flaxley, a few years ago the Trepe came to burn it down again and we stopped them. Not only did we stop them but we brought peace to their tribe and now they're our ally. It could all so easily have happened again but we stopped it!

(Flaxley was baffled by now. She wasn't saying anything new.)

FLAXLEY: We did... yeah...

KRITZ: I was just a kid when they came the first time.

(She looked nervously up into his eyes.)

KRITZ: I saw it, Flaxley. I finally remembered.

(As Kritz looked to her feet, Flaxley squeezed her close to himself and grimaced uncomfortably.)

FLAXLEY: You saw what, darling?

(She looked up at him with a pout on her saddened lips.)

KRITZ: I've never remembered much really, about my life as a kid here, but this memory was so vivid. I've always remembered being raised by the Trepe but very little else before that. Just that I had a sister and the odd little thing.

(Shuddering to think what she might have remembered, Flaxley gulped.)

FLAXLEY: You recalled something else?

(She nodded then spoke up in a subdued voice.)

KRITZ: I remembered the killing that night when the Trepe attacked.

(Looking somewhat relieved, Flaxley listened intently, unsure quite what he could say to lift her spirits.)

KRITZ: I heard my mother scream her last scream and I remember *her*!

FLAXLEY: You're mother?

KRITZ: No. The Trepe that took me in. Was she the one who killed my mum?

(She paused and looked down at her feet again.)

KRITZ: I don't know what happened to my dad or my sister. I just know they killed

them. They killed everything.

(With a desperate look in her eye she lifted her head imploringly to Flaxley.)

KRITZ: It was so vivid. I felt the pain I felt at the time. And I remembered how much it hurt when I lost them. Then you brought me back to reality!

(Seeing she was distressed by the sudden recall, Flaxley pulled her close and gently pushed her head to his tunic.)

FLAXLEY: Do you want to go home, my love? It must have been horrible.

(Fearing she'd be miserable all evening, Flaxley was most surprised to see her lift her head and smile to him warmly with an excited glint in her eye.)

KRITZ: You know, darling. It was *just* a memory. It was real and it shocked me. It hurt. But mum, dad and Kassy are gone and we couldn't have built a more fitting memorial!

FLAXLEY: Huh?

(She jumped to her feet and gestured out into the town.)

KRITZ: Look at it! Tifaeris is alive and thriving thanks to us. They may have taken our loved ones but they couldn't take our spirits and break us. Now we've made a family of our own. Life goes on for all of us and Tifaeris is twice as big as it ever was before. We won, Flaxley!

(Loving her positive perspective on things immensely, Flaxley also jumped to his feet, wondering exactly what he did right to deserve to have *her* as his girl.)

FLAXLEY: Kritzeveltia, I fucking love you! You know that?

KRITZ: I fucking do! Now come on, let's dance!!!

(Needing no second invitation to do so, Flaxley grabbed her in his arms and immediately waltzed her across the square. Having eyes only for each other, the two of them encircled the bonfire, dancing up quite a storm together. With hearts full of love, they didn't care who was looking or indeed what they thought. It was a good thing too. Having had their way through unquantifiable amounts of Tequila, Bonson and Derek found the sight of an overexcited Flaxley and Kritz dancing, too delicious to pass up. Laughing heartily, they mocked them profusely.)

BONSON: I haven't seen dancing that bad since Lefiat accidentally stepped in that fire!

DEREK: That's dancing is it?

BONSON: Well, if Tifaeris can call that muck they serve up "ale", then I suppose they can call that dancing!

DEREK: Maybe Flaxley pissed himself and they're running round the fire to dry him off before anyone notices!

(Bonson found Derek's comment most amusing and laughed so hard he fell off of his seat, creating hilarity in Derek.)

DEREK: You pillock!

(As Derek laughed unreservedly, Bonson leapt to his feet.)

BONSON: I'm fine! Nothing happened!

(As Flaxley and Kritz waltzed their way, Bonson scoffed and yelled out as he took his seat.)

BONSON: Flaxley!!! You dance like a tit!!!

(Like a pair of badly behaved schoolchildren, they both fell about laughing. By now they were so drunk that every minor occurrence and everything they said seemed hilarious to them. Failing to share their mirth, however, Flaxley snarled back angrily. Having not quite heard him, Kritz scowled into her husband's eyes.)

KRITZ: Did he just call me a tart?

(Saying nothing for a few moments as they continued to Waltz, Flaxley kept a dead

pan face before replying emotionlessly.)

FLAXLEY: Yes! Yes, he did!

(As Kritz immediately broke from the Waltz and charged at Bonson, Flaxley smiled to himself, glad to see she was back to herself after her traumatic flashback. Calling Kritz a tart was a guaranteed way to get a black eye and he didn't mind seeing Bonson taken down a peg or two, even if he was innocent of the charge. Unfortunately for Kritz, however, the shock of her charging towards him mixed with an excessive amount of alcohol, made Bonson pass out before she even got a chance to pummel him. Quite bemused, Derek stood over him as a furious Kritz arrived on the scene.)

DEREK: Bonson?

KRITZ: Oh, what a sissy!

DEREK: Sissy?

KRITZ: It's not like I was going to pound on him *that* much!

(Derek looked up at her.)

DEREK: Yes you were!

(Having always hated Derek's mind reading ability, she scowled back at him coldly.)

KRITZ: No more than he deserved!

(As Flaxley sauntered up behind them, Kritz looked over her shoulder and smiled to him.)

KRITZ: He passed out!

FLAXLEY: Bloody sissy!

(Derek rolled his eyes.)

DEREK: Look, he seems comfortable enough down there. Tequila anyone?

(He grimaced as he held the bottle towards them.)

DEREK: At least I think it's tequila. We only had two glasses and we were giggling like idiots. Strong shit.

KRITZ: I'll give it a miss, thanks.

(Flaxley looked to him with uncertainty for a moment then took the bottle from his outstretched hand.)

FLAXLEY: Derek, this isn't tequila. This is extra strong sword cleaner!

(Derek looked most perplexed.)

DEREK: But the salesman said...

FLAXLEY: Trust me.

(He pointed to the label.)

FLAXLEY: "Blade Glow" is the brand of sword cleaner they mass produce in Port Shehi.

(Derek scratched his head uneasily.)

DEREK: That would explain why a heavy drinker like Bonson got drunk so quick.

FLAXLEY: Drunk? By rights you should both be dead! One hundred and twenty percent proof!!!

(Derek gave him a doubting glance.)

DEREK: By definition Flaxley, you can't have more than one hundred percent.

FLAXLEY: With alcohol you can.

DEREK: No, by definition...

FLAXLEY: Look, I'm not going to argue with you. This stuff is deadly to drink and you should pour it away.

KRITZ: Or give it to Flaxley. Save us buying some. It's 10 lig a bottle.

DEREK: Ten??? I paid 30! He told me it was a high class spirit!

FLAXLEY: Then that salesman must have seen you coming from a mile away.

(He rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: And you've drunk almost the entire bottle!
DEREK: Yes, well... keeping up with Bonson isn't easy.
(Flaxley chuckled to himself then looked to Kritz.)
FLAXLEY: Let's go back and dance, my love.
(He then passed the bottle to Derek.)
FLAXLEY: Have some ale instead, Derek.
DEREK: Fine. Even if does taste like...
KRITZ: Rotted sea weed?
DEREK: Exactly.
(With that, Kritz took Flaxley's arm and led him back into the square to dance.)

(Sadly, after many hours of festivity and fun, as midnight came and went the party came to a natural end. The entertainment was done and dusted and the minstrels had packed up and gone home, as had most of the revellers.

All that remained was a group of hardy drinkers and several floozies, making sure none of the alcohol went to waste and that every inch of fun was squeezed from the evening. And of course, Flaxley, Kritz and their miniscule green guest.

Deciding it was time to call it a night, one that they considered a complete success despite Mandika refusing to attend, Flaxley nodded to Kritz before looking to Derek seated on top of one of the tables.)

FLAXLEY: Well, I think we've done enough. Thanks for coming, Derek.

(With glazed eyes, Derek looked up at him.)

DEREK: You're going?

KRITZ: Yeah! Tell Zanne I'll drop by and say hello tomorrow!

DEREK: Zanne?

KRITZ: Um... yeah, your wife!

(Derek gave her a scornful glance.)

DEREK: I know who she is, she was supposed to come and join me!

KRITZ: Hmm, well whatever. Night, Derek!

(Not about to sit around on his own, Derek leapt down from the table and landed with a drunken stagger.)

DEREK: Whoa, no wait. I'll come with you!

(Flaxley grinned.)

FLAXLEY: Righto, and good luck explaining your drunken state to Zanne!

DEREK: A-ha, Flaxley!

(He stood akimbo and beamed proudly.)

DEREK: You forget. I have powers!

(It was true to say that Derek truly was a master of magic. There was a saying among certain mage groups, however, that stated "never use magic whilst under the influence of alcohol". Giving a terrific example as to why, Derek proudly thrust his fingers at his chest and cast inferno magic on himself.)

DEREK: Yeow!!!

(Luckily for him, he'd taught Kritz how to use H2O magic some years earlier.

Immediately she sprung into action and soaked him from head to foot, dousing the fireball that had engulfed him. As he stood there soaked to the skin, enshrouded in a white mist of his own making, Flaxley looked him up and down and mused out loud.)

FLAXLEY: Maybe you should let Zanne sober you up when you get home!

(And with that they headed for home. Derek lagged behind feeling horribly embarrassed while Flaxley and Kritz dragged Bonson back to the house. The end of a successful night. Mandika may not have liked it, but Flaxley knew he'd done everything he could and wasn't about to worry about things he had no control over. Specifically, Mandika's snobbery and ingratitude.)

(As always, the end of the evening for Flaxley and Kritz meant one thing. Climbing into bed and ravishing each other's naked flesh. Suffice to say, headboards in their house didn't last very long.

Having deposited Bonson in the spare room, they raced into their bedroom and clothes went everywhere. They then leapt onto the bed and proceeded to run their hands all over each other's naked bodies.)

KRITZ: I've been looking forward to this all night!

FLAXLEY: Me too!

(With that, he turned Kritz onto her back and slipped himself on top of her. He then spoke lovingly into her eyes in a soft, romantic tone.)

FLAXLEY: Tonight, darling, I'm going to make sweet love to you like only I can.

KRITZ: No thanks! Love can wait! I want a damn good seeing to tonight.

(Flaxley looked impressed.)

FLAXLEY: Feeling naughty, are we?

KRITZ: I went beyond feeling naughty as soon as you slipped your underpants off.

(She exhaled.)

KRITZ: Tonight, I want you to *savage* me like only you can! The little ones are still with Phisele's mum so there'll be no crying babies to stop us half way through and I want to take full advantage of that fact.

FLAXLEY: I see! In that case, one serious seeing to coming up.

(He grinned.)

FLAXLEY: Let's just hope we don't wake Bonson up.

KRITZ: He just drank over a pint of metal cleaner, he's not gonna be waking up any time soon, I can assure you.

(They chuckled together for a moment then Kritz's looked lovingly into Flaxley's eyes.)

KRITZ: Darling, before we get this sexy show on the road, I just want to say thank you.

FLAXLEY: That's a bit presumptuous, isn't it? I could lose my wood, shoot too soon, anything could happen!

KRITZ: No, not for the sex! For... well... this last year has been amazing, my love. Compromising over the kids was the best thing we ever did. Now I have my freedom and... I just love it that you and the kids have become *so* close.

FLAXLEY: No need to thank me for *that*, darling. I *enjoy* spending time with them.

KRITZ: Yeah, but... I just wanted to say, I've never been happier. Everything's worked out wonderfully.

FLAXLEY: Well... yes it has. And because they've seen *me* do it, other blokes have taken to looking after their kids now and again too. Yes, they laughed at me at first, but a few black eyes later, they soon knocked that on the head.

KRITZ: Damn right too.

FLAXLEY: Anyway, what brought all this on?

(Kritz shrugged.)

KRITZ: Well, it's been an amazing day and I wanted to round it off by saying it.

FLAXLEY: Fair enough.

(A knowing glint then appeared in Kritz's eyes.)

KRITZ: And after the filthy things we're about to do to one another, we probably won't be able to look one another in the eye for a few days, so I figured I'd get it out of the way now.

(Flaxley couldn't help but beam from ear to ear.)

FLAXLEY: Is that so?

KRITZ: Believe it. Now...

(Gazing lustfully into his eyes, she then nodded excitedly.)

KRITZ: Give it to me hard!

FLAXLEY: One hard one coming right up, my love!

(As he slipped himself inside her, Kritz went cross eyed and hunched her shoulders, a grimace of ecstasy washing over her face.)

KRITZ: Ooh...

(Wearing a satisfied smirk, Flaxley nodded to himself and started to thrust powerfully, sending her into cross-eyed shivers of joy.)

KRITZ: Holy orgasms of the trembling goddesses, Flaxley, that's amazing!!!

(As her eyes came into focus again, she groaned with ecstasy before looking a little uncertain.)

KRITZ: Darling?

FLAXLEY: Yes?

(In instalments, she managed to lift her hand to his chest as he continued to thrust into her.)

KRITZ: You took your chain off!

(Without breaking his pace for even a moment, Flaxley rushed his hand to his neck.)

FLAXLEY: What?

(Immediately, his eyes bulged and he leapt off of her.)

FLAXLEY: Shit!!!

(Kritz was mortified.)

KRITZ: No!!! Put it back in!!!

(Noticing there was already nothing to put back in, Kritz instantly knew something was horribly wrong.)

KRITZ: Oh my god, where did it go?

(She shook her head.)

KRITZ: I mean, oh my god, what's wrong?

(Looking tortured, Flaxley rushed his clothes on as he replied with an anxious tone in his voice.)

FLAXLEY: That gold chain has a meaning. Damn it, Kritz, I knew this would happen! We have to find it!

KRITZ: What? Slow down! I don't understand!

(As he continued to dress, he continued to make little sense.)

FLAXLEY: That chain is a component of some sort! I saw Daman and he told me someone was after it... that bloody bloke I walked into!

KRITZ: Eh? Daman? Bloke? Talk to me, calm down!

FLAXLEY: Some bastard I walked into earlier. Only I didn't. He walked in to me. Bastard must have swiped it then!

(Realising her flustered husband wasn't going to be making any sense any time soon, Kritz took drastic action and yelled.)

KRITZ: Flaxley!!!

(Given quite a start, Flaxley reeled back.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck sake, woman! Are you trying to wake the dead or something?

(Calmly, she looked into his eyes and gestured for him to sit on the bed.)

FLAXLEY: We can doink later; I need to find that chain!

KRITZ: No, I mean come and talk to me. Then we can do whatever needs to be done, okay?

(Realising she was right, he sat himself on the bed then immediately started to explain himself. As she listened attentively, Kritz's mouth fell open. The last thing she expected to hear was that Daman Siria had been back on the scene. As Flaxley went on to give his animated account of how he acquired the gold chain and how it worked as a component to power a mystical sceptre, Kritz rolled her eyes. Unsurprised to hear that the sceptre was related to the three troublesome keys they'd risked their lives over on more than one occasion, she was in no doubt what would happen next. Flaxley would do everything in his power to get his chain back before another key was created and their lives could be thrown into chaos again. In that moment, she vowed to herself to give him her wholehearted support on the matter.

As he finished his in depth explanation, Flaxley wasted no time in rushing around the bed to reunite himself with his shoes. Slightly stunned by his revelation, Kritz groaned and shook her head.)

KRITZ: Fucking Daman Siria! There's no way it's a co-incidence. The same six people he chose to manipulate over those keys, gather in the same town for the first time in ages and shock, horror, he appears with a key related warning!

FLAXLEY: Tell me about it!

KRITZ: I wanna kill that guy!

(Flaxley looked shifty.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm... easier said than done, my love!

(Understanding his body language, Kritz smiled.)

KRITZ: Well, at least you tried!

(With that, she leapt out of bed.)

KRITZ: So, we need to find your gold chain then! Let's go!

(Flaxley shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: My chain is with whoever took it. It could be anywhere by now!

KRITZ: So what are we gonna do then?

FLAXLEY: Well, I think our only hope is to find Croxton. If they need all three chains then they'll probably be after his next!

KRITZ: What if they got his already?

FLAXLEY: Daman said they only got Lester's yesterday, so maybe they haven't got to Croxton yet, they've only just got mine!

KRITZ: Okay, fair enough! So where does this Croxton guy live?

FLAXLEY: I don't know! I wish I'd asked Daman now. All I know is that he warned him to be careful, but he said the same to me and looked what happened. I just hope he doesn't suffer the same fate as Lester.

KRITZ: So... what then? If we don't know where the thieves went and we don't know where Croxton is, we're kinda stuck.

(Flaxley looked thoughtful.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, but we *do* know someone who *does* know where Croxton is. Daman!

KRITZ: Yeah, but where's Daman?

(Flaxley looked to her then shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Well... it works for Bonson sometimes...

(With that, he proceeded to yell at the top of his voice.)

FLAXLEY: Daman!!! Daman!!! Get your arse down here you mystic piece of crap!!!

(Silence then ensued as Kritz and Flaxley glanced about the room, hoping desperately that Daman would appear before them.)

FLAXLEY: You try, Kritz. He's bound to hear *you*. Hell, I think Derek's parent's on Tryme 17 can hear *you* when you yell.

KRITZ: Charming!

(With that, she rolled her eyes then bellowed at the top of her lungs.)

KRITZ: Daman!!! Daman, you shithead!!! Get the fuck down here, Daman!!!

(As Flaxley syringed his ears with his fingers, Kritz bit her lip and glanced about the room.

KRITZ: He's not coming, is he?

FLAXLEY: Give him a second to clear out his ears.

KRITZ: Oh, whatever. You *asked* me to shout remember?

(Flaxley glanced at her anxiously for a moment then bit his lip.)

FLAXLEY: Wait, he's only ever come to us when Bonson's called him.

KRITZ: That's true.

FLAXLEY: We should wake him.

(Kritz scoffed.)

KRITZ: Yeah, right. He might wake up, but trust me; you'll get no sense out of him until mid-morning at the earliest.

FLAXLEY: What are we going to do then?

(Kritz looked to him uneasily.)

KRITZ: I don't know, but we can't just wait around until morning for Bonson to sober up. Your friend could get killed and god knows what'll happen to *us* if they create another key while we're sitting here twiddling our thumbs.

(She growled.)

KRITZ: If they do make another key, we're the ones that tosser Daman will send after it, you mark my words. We have to stop that from happening no matter what. But, how?

FLAXLEY: Exactly.

(He then sighed in despair.)

FLAXLEY: Right well, the way I see it is, Croxton is our only lead. We don't know who the thieves were or where they went so we can't even begin to go after *them*.

(He nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: We have to go after Croxton. To find him before they do. I just hope *they* don't know where he is either.

KRITZ: Yeah, but if you've got no idea where he might be...

FLAXLEY: I kind of have... vaguely. Well, put it this way, last I heard, he joined the Leathrock army!

KRITZ: Leathrock, huh?

FLAXLEY: Yeah, it's about 6 hours away by carriage!

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: I know, I went there on official Tifaeris and Trepe alliance business a couple of months ago!

FLAXLEY: Anyway, as far as I can see, all we can do is head there and find out if he's *still* in the army. If not, we'll just have to track his movements and like I say, hope those thieves can't find him either.

KRITZ: Okay. And we should take Bonson with us. He'll be lucid again in the morning, so we can get him to call Daman from Leathrock. Hopefully, Daman will answer *him* and lead us straight to Croxton. Of course, he might just ignore Bonson too then we're stuck with the grumpy old pervert.

FLAXLEY: That's a gamble I'm willing to take. So that's settled then. We head to Leathrock!

KRITZ: Okay, let's go!

(With that, she paced towards the bedroom door purposefully.)

FLAXLEY: Wait!

(She stopped and looked to him with a baffled expression on her face.)

KRITZ: Wait for what?

FLAXLEY: You're naked!

(Feeling quite the fool, she tried to act cool and slowly paced towards her clothes.)

KRITZ: I *know* I'm naked, what do you think I am, an idiot or something?

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, dear!

(She was outraged.)

KRITZ: You do???

FLAXLEY: What? No! I was just humouring you!

(She scowled.)

KRITZ: Whatever. Let's hurry, my love. And don't worry about the kids, Phisele's mum is very understanding when it comes to matters of national importance and it's not like she doesn't need the money! I'll just pop over and ask her to keep hold of the kids a little while longer while you prepare the carriage.

FLAXLEY: Righto!

KRITZ: Oh, and maybe you should get Derek to come with us.

FLAXLEY: I will! I'll get him now. You...

KRITZ: Yeah I know, get dressed!

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: I'll pack some supplies for the trip too!

FLAXLEY: That's my girl!

(With that, he raced out of the bedroom.)

(In a blinding hurry, Flaxley rushed from his home and charged across the darkened thoroughfare towards Derek's place, a mere three doors down on the other side of the road. Upon reaching Derek's door he then hammered on it with extreme urgency.)

FLAXLEY: Derek!!!

(Moments later, the door crept open and Derek's little green head popped out from the darkness midway down the doorway. He'd been sobered up by Zanne's magic, but nonetheless he was extremely sleepy.)

DEREK: Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Derek...

DEREK: I can't come out; Zanne has grounded me for making a drunken fool of myself in front of our new neighbours! Besides, it's the middle of the night!

(Flaxley frowned.)

FLAXLEY: It's much later than that, Derek, but never mind that, this is important!

DEREK: What is?

FLAXLEY: Look, read my mind, it'll be quicker!

(As he stood there thinking about receiving the chain as a child and the recent visit of

Daman Siria, Derek stood there reading his thoughts and nodding along with a look of concentration etched on his face.)

DEREK: Hmm... okay...

FLAXLEY: And then...

(He started to think some more about the situation when Derek turned his head away and grimaced.)

DEREK: Flaxley!!!

FLAXLEY: Sorry, don't know how *that* popped into my head!

(Derek shook his head then continued to scan his friend's every thought. Determined not to leave anything out, Flaxley even covered the conversation with Kritz about heading to Leathrock. As soon as he was satisfied he'd covered everything, he stood tall and looked down to his tiny alien friend.)

FLAXLEY: Well?

(Derek nodded.)

DEREK: Leathrock, eh?

FLAXLEY: Yes! We must find Croxton before the thieves do!

DEREK: Well...

(He mused briefly then nodded.)

DEREK: Okay, I'm in. I got so drunk tonight, Zanne's implemented a week long sex ban, so I might as well go with you.

(Flaxley raised an eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: You've been married for a long time, haven't you?

(Derek sighed.)

DEREK: Even murderers get a shorter sentence!

FLAXLEY: Hmm...

DEREK: I'll just get my stuff ready, Flaxley! Wait there!

(With that, Derek's head disappeared from sight.

Two minutes later, a period of time that felt like an eternity to the waiting Flaxley, Derek re-emerged in his doorway. Giving Flaxley a knowing nod, he slipped himself outside then turned and yelled back into the darkness.)

DEREK: I love you too! Bye!

(With that, he slammed the door behind him.)

DEREK: Let's go!

FLAXLEY: Damn right.

(As they started to head the short distance to his house, Flaxley gave Derek an uneasy glance.)

FLAXLEY: So, you and Zanne...

DEREK: We're fine, Flaxley. I adore her, you know that! I'm just like you or anyone else when I've had an argument with the wife; I let off steam with silly jokes about marriage being a prison sentence, that's all.

FLAXLEY: Fair enough.

(Just then, an enlightened expression crossed Flaxley's brow.)

FLAXLEY: Derek?

DEREK: Yes?

FLAXLEY: Any chance you can use your magic to sober Bonson up when we get back? Daman might come if *he* calls him, you see.

(Derek sighed emptily.)

DEREK: Sorry, Flaxley. I'm out of sobriety magic. I filled the space on my mystic armlet with inferno instead, that's how I managed to accidentally set fire to myself

earlier.

FLAXLEY: Well, what about Zanne? She *must* have some. I mean look at you, you're stone cold sober.

DEREK: Sorry, old chap. Zanne used the last of hers on me. She then gave me a lecture about wasting magic herbs. The herbs to make sobriety magic are rare, you see and now she has to hunt down some more. She was pretty livid, actually.

FLAXLEY: Damn! Then I guess sobering Bonson up tonight won't be happening. Damn it, I was hoping...

(His words were then interrupted by a marauding Mandika. Covered in mud from head to toe, she stormed along the thoroughfare at him, bellowing at the top of her voice as an equally muddy Lefiat trudged behind her.)

MANDIKA: Flaxley!!! Flaxley!!!

FLAXLEY: Mandika, people are trying to sleep!

(In no mood to entertain anything Flaxley said, Mandika paced up to him and slapped him with a venom across the face.)

FLAXLEY: Will you stop doing that? What's wrong?

MANDIKA: I'll tell you what's wrong!

(With that, she stamped on his foot.)

FLAXLEY: Okay then!

MANDIKA: It's not funny, Derek!!!

(Flaxley looked behind him to where Derek was creased up with laughter.)

FLAXLEY: What? What's going on?

MANDIKA: I'll tell you what's going on...

(As Flaxley moved his foot back, she commenced ranting furiously.)

MANDIKA: That honeymoon suite!!!

FLAXLEY: What about it? You said you liked it!

MANDIKA: Oh I did. It was lovely! Nice floors, nice windows, lovely bed...

FLAXLEY: So what's the problem?

MANDIKA: They're all in a pile at the bottom of the slope, that's what???

(Flaxley scratched his head.)

FLAXLEY: I don't follow!

MANDIKA: We were...

(She blushed.)

MANDIKA: Never mind what we were doing...

(She then raised her voice again.)

MANDIKA: The room suddenly creaked, the window fell out and all the walls caved in. Next thing we knew, we were speeding down the embankment on a runaway bed!!!

FLAXLEY: Oh!

MANDIKA: Oh, he says! Look at the state of us!!!

(She hung her head and fought back a tear.)

MANDIKA: Some honeymoon!

(She snarled.)

MANDIKA: The bed hit a tree trunk at the bottom and threw us off!

FLAXLEY: Oh... you okay?

(She gave him a hateful stare and replied in a deeply sarcastic tone.)

MANDIKA: Oh, yeah, we're great! Thankfully a huge pile of mud, shit and seaweed broke our fall!!!

(Looking livid she jumped up and down.)

MANDIKA: It's not funny, Derek!!!

DEREK: I'm sorry, Mandika, but the way I see it in my head...

(He fell about laughing again.)

MANDIKA: You bastards! I hate you lot!

(Standing behind her looking lost and forlorn, Lefiat looked to Flaxley.)

LEFIAT: Can I use your toilet, Flaxley?

MANDIKA: Just use it, Lefiat! Seeing as he forgot to build one in our suite, you must be dying by now!

(Flaxley spammed his forehead. Of all the things to forget to supply them with, he couldn't believe that was it.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, go ahead Lefiat, but don't touch anything!

LEFIAT: Thanks!

(With that, he raced a short way up the street then darted into Flaxley's house.)

FLAXLEY: Let's go, Derek. Why don't you come back to our place and get cleaned up, Mandika?

(As a smashing sound rose from Flaxley's home accompanied by the sound of an apologetic Lefiat, he gestured for her to go inside with him.)

MANDIKA: No! I'm not talking to you!

FLAXLEY: Well, you please yourself. We've got work to do!

(As Derek and Flaxley headed off, Mandika gaped. The last thing she expected was for them to walk away and leave her there. Feeling quite peeved, she hung her head then followed them towards Flaxley's house.)

MANDIKA: Wait for me!

FLAXLEY: We can't! We're going to Leathrock!

MANDIKA: Really? What? Now?

FLAXLEY: Yes, now!

MANDIKA: Are you going by carriage?

FLAXLEY: Well we're not going to walk!

(Mandika nodded defiantly.)

MANDIKA: Then I'm coming with you!

(Immediately, Derek and Flaxley turned to face her.)

FLAXLEY: No you're not!

MANDIKA: Yes I am! You've done everything you can to destroy my honeymoon, so the least you can do is take me to Leathrock so I can enjoy the rest of it *there*. Far, far away from Tifaeris!

(Wearing a hateful scowl, Flaxley looked her in the eyes and retorted angrily.)

FLAXLEY: Fine, you do that, you ungrateful old sea hag!

(Mandika was gobsmacked.)

MANDIKA: You expect me to be grateful??? Look at me!!!

(Seeing her caked in mud and filth from head to toe, Flaxley tried but failed not to grin.)

MANDIKA: It's not funny!!! I was naked at the time!!!

(Seeing both Flaxley and Derek fighting back laughs, she spewed furiously.)

MANDIKA: Oh yeah? Like that is it? This dress was the only thing I could find!!!

All our stuff went everywhere!!! God only knows where my suitcases ended up!

And if you think that's *funny*, maybe you'll change your mind when I send you the bill to replace everything!!!

(Flaxley's face dropped.)

FLAXLEY: What?

(Fearing Flaxley would engage Mandika in the argument she was clearly squaring up for, Derek hastily intervened.)

DEREK: Um... Flaxley? We've got things to do!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, yes we have! Okay, Mandika you can come. The sooner you're out of Tifaeris the better. This town's too good for you anyway!

(With that, he raced indoors to help Kritz pick up the shattered pieces of the vase that Lefiat had smashed as he went in.)

(As soon as he'd finished assisting Kritz, Flaxley slipped into knight mode.

Whenever there was a major task at hand, he'd ascend to a new level of professionalism and dedication. This had been the driving force behind all the successes of both he and his allies. Taking control, he saw to it that the coach was prepared and that adequate supplies were ready for the journey. Taking extreme care to ensure Lefiat waited outside where he couldn't break anything else, he even managed to convince a very disagreeable Mandika that it made more sense to take his coach rather than hers, just so they could get back again. One task he did choose to leave to Kritz however, was asking Phisele's mother to keep looking after the children until they returned. As for Bonson, the grumpy former butler was a nuisance even at the best of times and Flaxley figured he'd leave him to sleep for now then fetch him at the last minute. Thanks to Flaxley's guidance and supervision, it was only a matter of minutes before everyone was packed and ready to leave for Leathrock.

Having brought his carriage around to the front of his house, Flaxley then headed back inside to gather their supplies while Lefiat and Derek climbed inside it. Mandika, however, preferred to continue sitting and sulking in Flaxley's living room. Covered from head to toe in dirt, wearing a dress she'd plucked out of a muddy puddle, there was no way she wanted to risk being seen in public. As far as she was concerned, this was how peasants dressed and being mistaken for one would be an insult beyond an insult.

Eager to get going so that he wouldn't have to look at Mandika's sour pout any longer, Flaxley paced from his house again moments later with everyone's supplies nestled in his arms. Wearing an urgent expression, he headed to the rear compartment of the carriage then stooped to drop the supplies down onto the ground, so he could open the compartment. As he did so, he heard the front door to the house next to Derek's creak open. Glancing over as he started loading the supplies into the large compartment at the rear of the vehicle, he spotted Kritz emerging from Phisele's mum's house. Delighted to see her, he offered her a wide smile and watched on lovingly as she paced towards him.)

FLAXLEY: Everything sorted, my love?

KRITZ: Yup!

(She sighed sorrowfully.)

KRITZ: I hate leaving them, but this is too important to ignore. Don't worry, I gave them both a kiss from you.

FLAXLEY: Phisele and her mum?

KRITZ: No, you tit! Our twins!

FLAXLEY: Right. Obviously! Forgive me, darling, I'm bloody tired.

KRITZ: So I can see.

(Just then, Phisele came rushing out of her house.)

PHISELE: Kritz!!!

(Kritz turned and knelt as Phisele charged over to her.)

KRITZ: Yes, love?

PHISELE: Will you be gone long?

KRITZ: Well...

(As she looked up and spotted the back of Lefiat's head through the carriage's rear window, Phisele's bottom lip drooped.)

PHISELE: Is Luffy-lops going too?

KRITZ: Yeah, we only have so many vases!

PHISELE: Oh...

(A wry smile then washed over Phisele's face and she kissed Kritz on the cheek before racing indoors.)

KRITZ: Aw, love that girl!

(With that, she headed for the carriage then proceeded to climb up on top of it.

Moments later, satisfied that everything was ready, Flaxley swung open the carriage door then walked inside his house to tell Mandika to "get her lazy backside into the carriage or they'd leave without her". Indignantly, she stormed from his house, and climbed into the carriage to sit next to Lefiat, scowling at Flaxley all the way. It was safe to say that the good feeling between them both had evaporated. She couldn't wait to leave Tifaeris and he didn't care. With Mandika, Lefiat and Derek inside the carriage and Kritz waiting up top, the only task that remained for Flaxley now was to drag the sleeping Bonson out of bed and deposit him in the carriage. Or so he thought. Just as he was about to head back in and get him, however, he was most amazed to see the bleary-eyed Bonson emerge from his front door and stagger towards the carriage.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson?

BONSON: Going back to Guevina already? Excellent. I'll be able to get decent ale, not alien piss masquerading as tequila!

(As Bonson entered the carriage, Flaxley chuckled to himself then secured the door to his home and raced to join Kritz on top of the carriage. Having clambered into the driving seat, he took the reins then glanced at Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Well that was handy. Bonson dragged *himself* to the carriage.

(Kritz grinned.)

KRITZ: Cool. Saved *you* the effort.

FLAXLEY: Indeed. You ready, my love?

KRITZ: Let's go. And don't worry, if you get tired, I'll drive some of the way.

FLAXLEY: Are you sure? You've only had one driving lesson.

KRITZ: Yeah, but one is more than enough. And it was only last week, so it's not like I've forgotten anything yet.

FLAXLEY: Well, true. Okay, if I get tired, the carriage is all yours.

(And with that, the carriage got moving. Two seconds later, however, there was a weird thudding sound from the back of it and he immediately called it to a halt again.)

FLAXLEY: Did you hear that?

KRITZ: What? I didn't hear anything.

FLAXLEY: Hmm...

(Kritz could only look on bewildered as he leapt down from his seat, headed around to the back of the carriage, fiddled with the rear compartment then hurriedly returned to her side.)

KRITZ: What was that all about?

FLAXLEY: I hadn't shut the rear compartment properly! Doesn't matter. To

Leathrock!

(And with that, he set the carriage in motion once more. As it moved towards the town gates, the passengers were far from jovial. Mandika was furious about her ideal honeymoon descending into farce, not to mention the fact that she and her husband were covered in mud and Lefiat was miserable because of her tendency to take her frustrations out on *him*. As for the pie-eyed, Bonson, he was annoyed because his seat seemed abnormally uncomfortable.)

To make matters worse, as the carriage rolled past the side of Tifaeris' new town hall, Mandika spotted the two foot tall, solid gold eagle that had gone missing from Guevina last time Kritz was there. With a gape she stared at the sight of her most valuable national treasure sitting on top of the building, staring back at her, gleaming in the moonlight.)

MANDIKA: The Guevina eagle!!! Kritz!!!

(Realising that Kritz was undoubtedly on Flaxley's side and would therefore more than likely ignore her, she pouted bitterly.)

MANDIKA: She stole our national symbol! You wait until I get a hold of her!!!

BONSON: What are you going to do? Teeth-butt her fist?

LEFIAT: Be nice, Bonson!

BONSON: I'd love to but this seat is uncomfortable and it's making me nauseas!

(Mandika glared at him coldly.)

MANDIKA: That's because you're sitting on Derek!

BONSON: What?

(He looked down between his legs and saw two little green feet kicking like crazy beneath him.)

BONSON: Hmm, those don't belong there!

(With that, he leapt up and sat in between Mandika and Lefiat.)

BONSON: Sorry, Derek!

(Looking traumatised, Derek stared directly into his eyes.)

DEREK: It was horrible...

BONSON: Yes, sorry, about that, but better out than in, as they say.

DEREK: Let's never mention it again! I mean ever.

(Cramped to the edge of the carriage by Bonson, Lefiat frowned and leapt across to sit next to Derek.)

LEFIAT: For Pete's sake, Bonson!

BONSON: What? What did *I* do?

(Fed up with the cold glares he was receiving, he shrugged and closed his eyes.)

BONSON: Fine, be like that then. Wake me when we get to Guevina!

(As the carriage rolled on through the meadows en route to the large township of Leathrock, Mandika's mood remained wholly sour. As a result, Lefiat remained silent just in case his attempts to cheer her up landed him in trouble as they so often tended to do. Derek also opted for a silent trip by virtue of the fact he was a little tired. A little tired green man, no less. On top of the carriage there wasn't much conversation either. Flaxley was in knight mode and focussed his thoughts solely on recovering his gold chain while Kritz worried that once they made it to Leathrock the authorities might want to talk to her about a certain missing statue.)

The one thing that wasn't lost on Flaxley despite his attempts to focus on his neck chain was that Daman Siria had appeared and within 48 hours the same six he'd chosen to manipulate were once again travelling in a carriage together. Knowing he

wouldn't be happy until Mandika and Lefiat had left the party to start the rest of their honeymoon, he hurried the horses along. The sooner the six of them were split up, the sooner his mind would be at rest. As the carriage soldiered forth through the night, the same thoughts occurred to Mandika. Unfortunately for her, however, the sleepy and somewhat intoxicated old man beside her, Bonson, soon gave her something else to think about when he dozed off on her shoulder, drooling on her top. Making no effort to shift him, she opted to cry and add it to the list of things she'd chastise Flaxley and Kritz for later. A joyous trip, it was not.

Township of Leathrock

As the carriage emerged through the early dawn mist and rolled onto the polished cobbles of Leathrock's main outer city thoroughfare, Kritz was the only one in her party still awake. With her beloved husband sleeping soundly on her shoulder, having not had a moment's sleep for the previous two nights, she felt quite relieved to have made it to her destination. Although she'd assured him she knew what she was doing, the truth was that she wasn't overly confident in her sense of direction. She could see he desperately needed sleep, however, and had decided to allow herself that one little white lie. Thankfully, everything had worked out perfectly.

Allowing Flaxley to get as much shut eye as he needed, Kritz led the carriage through the township and eventually brought it to a halt just outside the large presidential palace that dominated the skyline. Feeling quite proud of her achievement she looked across at the palace and the busy port beside it with a wide smile on her face.

Knowing he'd be pleased, she gently tapped Flaxley's thigh and wiggled her shoulder to jog his head and wake him. As he slowly stirred and opened his eyes, he squinted to protect his eyes from the low morning sun before slowly erecting himself.)

KRITZ: Morning darling!

(He looked about himself.)

FLAXLEY: Wow, morning!

(She beamed.)

KRITZ: We're here!

FLAXLEY: So, I see!

(She gave him a shy glance.)

KRITZ: Are you proud of me?

FLAXLEY: Hmm... nice job. One small problem though!

(Her face dropped.)

FLAXLEY: This is Port Anyu!

(Hardly believing she could make such a mistake, her mouth fell open.)

KRITZ: What? But I was sure...

(Much to her displeasure, Flaxley started to chuckle.)

KRITZ: Oh... hey, that's mean!

(She pushed him then started to chuckle herself.)

KRITZ: Yeah okay, you got me!

FLAXLEY: Seriously though, darling, you did brilliantly, I really needed that sleep! And you've taken us right to the palace too. They're bound to have the military records in there, or at least they'll know who we can ask. Nice work.

KRITZ: Thank you!

FLAXLEY: Now, let's wake Derek and Bonson then release Mandika and Lefiat into the wild!

KRITZ: Speaking of Bonson, I was thinking last night... how are we gonna get rid of him after he's called for Daman?

(Flaxley mused to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Not a problem, I'll tell him we passed an inn or something. We won't see his heels for dust! Simple. We'll be shot of all three in no time.

(Having climbed down from the carriage, Flaxley swung open the door and saw his four passengers wide awake, staring back at him.)

FLAXLEY: Right. Good, you're up! Morning Derek, we're here! Mandika... and you, Lefiat, you can bugger off now. I'm going in the palace!

(Mandika frowned.)

MANDIKA: *We're* going in the palace, actually!

BONSON: Palace? What palace? Guevina has a castle, Mandika.

MANDIKA: What's that got to do with anything?

(Bonson gave her a sideways glance then peered from the window.)

BONSON: Wait a minute... this isn't Guevina!

(Flaxley rolled his eyes then stepped back from the carriage door.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson, we're in Leathrock.

BONSON: What the bloody hell for?

FLAXLEY: Look, never mind the details, I need you to do something for me.

(Bonson gave him a distrusting glance.)

BONSON: Fine, I'll figure out the details for myself then. Now, what do you want?

FLAXLEY: Well... come out here a second will you?

BONSON: Fine, if you insist.

(Bonson rolled his eyes then slid from the carriage holding his painful head.)

BONSON: Good grief, what the hell did I drink last night?

FLAXLEY: You really don't want to know.

BONSON: I bloody do. I haven't had a hangover in thirty years, Flaxley. I can drink like a hippo with no ill effects, but half a bottle of that stuff... never again.

FLAXLEY: Look, never mind that. I need you to call for Daman Siria.

(In that moment Bonson froze and glared at him coldly.)

BONSON: Excuse me? Did I hear you right?

FLAXLEY: Yes, you did.

BONSON: What do you want with that two-faced, back-stabbing, low down...

FLAXLEY: I just need his advice, that's all.

BONSON: Right...

FLAXLEY: So, will you call for him?

(Bonson grimaced.)

BONSON: I'd rather not, my head's killing me. *You* do it.

FLAXLEY: I tried last night, he didn't come. He didn't answer Kritz either. He's only ever come when *you've* called him.

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: Probably because he knows I'll have something intelligent to say. On the subject of which, remind me not to nod.

FLAXLEY: Bonson?

BONSON: What?

FLAXLEY: Can you call him?

(Bonson looked a tad miffed.)

BONSON: What? Now?

FLAXLEY: Yes!

(Bonson groaned then looked into the air and squinted.)

BONSON: Fine.

(With that, he clenched his fist and yelled skyward.)

BONSON: Daman!!! Get the fuck down here, you...

(With that, he folded in half and held his head.)

BONSON: Ouch!!!

(He then looked skyward again.)

BONSON: Now, Daman!!!

(As Bonson cringed and clamped his hands to the top of his head, Flaxley glanced about himself for signs of Daman Siria. Alas, there were none.)

FLAXLEY: Damn it. He's not here. Guess we'll have to do things the hard way.

(He forced a smile then nodded to Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: Thanks for trying, Bonson.

(Clambering back into the carriage, Bonson groaned in pain.)

BONSON: Whatever, just let me sit down for a bit.

(As Bonson sat down, Flaxley stepped back to the carriage door to talk to Derek then performed a double take. Much to his horror, Lefiat and Mandika were still in the carriage.)

FLAXLEY: I thought you were going to the palace!

MANDIKA: I will once I'm ready!

(Content he could only deal with one headache at a time, Flaxley rolled his eyes then looked to Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson, we passed an inn a minute ago! Why don't you bugger off and have an ale?

(Much to Flaxley's horror, Bonson grimaced.)

BONSON: Good god no, I couldn't! And while we're on the subject of bugging off, *you* bugger off!

(Flaxley couldn't believe it. For the first time in all the years he'd worked with him at Guevina castle and in all the years since then, Bonson didn't feel like an ale.)

FLAXLEY: Excuse me? Did you just say no?

BONSON: Damn right, I did. I'm not drinking a bloody thing with *this* hangover. And besides, at this early hour there'd be no other bugger in there; I'd be drinking on my own. I'm not *that* much of an alcoholic, Flaxley.

(As everyone gave him a sideways glance, Bonson growled bitterly.)

BONSON: What? I enjoy a drink admittedly, but that's because I enjoy pubs and socialising. It's not like I'm a helpless dipsomaniac who sneaks off the armoury to drink the sword cleaning fluid!

(At once, Flaxley and Derek glanced away innocently.)

FLAXLEY: Right yes, well... never mind that... you sit and sober up...

(He then snarled at Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: While I deal with these two.

MANDIKA: You'll do nothing of the sort. I'll go when I'm ready...

(With that, Mandika glanced from the window and beamed. To her, the presidential palace seemed like an ideal place to be right now. She'd visited the president before on an official royal visit with her father. Knowing him on such a personal level, she hoped he'd offer her the usual courtesies afforded to a royal. A stark contrast to those made in Tifaeris. This, she thought, would be the perfect place to continue her honeymoon. Before she could set off, however, she had a few problems that needed

attending to. Knowing just how to make sure her needs were met, she looked away from the window then back into Flaxley's scowling eyes, wearing a smarmy expression.)

MANDIKA: And I won't be ready until you've performed a few little tasks on my behalf, Sir Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Forget it! Kritz and I are going in the palace! You can do what you like. (Mandika laughed out loud.)

MANDIKA: Oh right, like the president is going to grant an audience to just anybody! If you want to get in there you need standing. Basically, you need *me*! (At once, Flaxley froze in horror. Mandika was right. He'd probably not be granted an audience by the president without her. Realising this, his heart sank. Being leader of Tifaeris still didn't carry much authority in global politics. Unless they built a palace or a castle, it'd always be seen as wooden settlement of no real importance. Therefore, as Mandika had stated, the chances of the president granting them an audience without her were virtually nil. Knowing no other way to find out about their army, or indeed who to ask, Flaxley shuddered. He knew he needed Mandika's help and he also knew how hard he'd have to work to get it.

Having had no option other than to accept Mandika's demands, Flaxley then watched on with heavy heart as she sent Kritz to go and find a dressmaker with very specific instruction for what to purchase. She wasn't about to see the president while covered in mud and as far as she was concerned, it was all Flaxley and Kritz's fault that all her own clothes had gone missing. While Kritz was away searching for a seamstress, Derek was sent to fetch water then Flaxley and Lefiat had to guard the carriage so she could wash in peace. Once Kritz returned with her new dress a short while later, they then had to wait an eternity until she was satisfied that her hair looked nice. Knowing full well that Flaxley was getting angry and impatient, Mandika deliberately took her time. In her mind she was teaching him a valuable lesson.

Half-tempted to tell Kritz she didn't like the dress and send her get another, after keeping them waiting for almost two hours, she finally decided enough was enough. Partly because she felt Flaxley had learnt his lesson and partly because Kritz would have beaten the living daylights out of her without giving a hoot about the consequences. And so, satisfied, she'd held them to ransom long enough, she finally alighted the carriage and headed for the gates of the palace, swaying her hips in a cocky manner as she did so. With a look of pure thunder on their faces, the others followed on, Kritz fighting off the temptation to grab Mandika and throw her in the sea.)

(Having informed the palace guard of her royal standing, Mandika was immediately allowed through the palace gates. The rest of the party weren't allowed to join her, however, until Flaxley said "please" and apologised for ruining her honeymoon. Focussed on the mission, he apologised immediately. Once she'd made him say it like he meant it, they were then finally led to the president's meeting room. It was a large marble square with a domed roof, magnificent white pillars and wall to wall windows on one side, display a breath-taking ocean view.

As they all availed themselves of a seat while they waited for the president to join them, the mood in the room couldn't have been darker. Silence prevailed. Flaxley,

Kritz and Derek were furious at Mandika for messing them around, Mandika was furious at Flaxley and Kritz for ruining her honeymoon, Bonson had a hangover and Lefiat was afraid to speak for fear of reprisals.

Thankfully, it was only a matter of minutes before the president marched in wearing a white suit that matched the décor of the room. With medals adorning his chest, he stepped up to Mandika confidently with outstretched arms and greeted her like a long lost friend.)

PRESIDENT: Queen Mandika!!! So lovely to see you!!!

(Mandika beamed and climbed from her seat to hug him.)

MANDIKA: President...

(She looked stumped, much to Flaxley's amusement.)

FLAXLEY: It's President Jahl!

(The president gave him a sideways glance.)

PRESIDENT: I'm President Micalov; President Jahl was assassinated six years ago!

(Bonson shook his head.)

BONSON: My, my, and you're normally so good with names, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Shut it, you!

MANDIKA: I'm sorry, President Micalov, it's been a long few days, I'm tired!

(The president nodded.)

PRESIDENT: It's okay, we only met briefly after all! So, what can I do for you, my queen?

MANDIKA: I'm on my honeymoon!

PRESIDENT: Oh that's nice!

MANDIKA: Well it should have been...

(She glared at Flaxley.)

MANDIKA: This clown here ruined it for me!!!

FLAXLEY: I did no such thing!

MANDIKA: He's the leader of Tifaeris and he couldn't even organise fireworks without blowing up the guy doing them!

FLAXLEY: Hey, he blew *himself* up!

MANDIKA: My honeymoon suite fell apart and everything. I ended up sliding down a steep hill on a runaway bed, clinging to it for dear life!

(As Derek started to laugh, she pouted to the President.)

MANDIKA: So, I wondered if I could stay with you!

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Have you noticed how she never refers to it as *our* honeymoon?

(Everybody answered at the same time in unimpressed voices.)

ALL: Yes, we have!

BONSON: Poor old Lefiat's circumstantial! This is *her* honeymoon; he's just here to make up numbers!

MANDIKA: Shut up, Bonson!

(Far too busy to stand around watching while they argued, the president swiftly spoke up, smiling at Mandika as he did so.)

PRESIDENT: The answer is yes, of course you can stay, your majesty!

(Mandika beamed.)

PRESIDENT: Would you like your husband to stay too or don't you mind either way?

(Shocked by his sarcasm, Mandika was most taken aback.)

MANDIKA: Hey, that's... not... hey!

(No lover of arrogant royals, the president rolled his eyes then stepped towards

Flaxley, leaving a speechless Mandika in his wake.)

PRESIDENT: So, leader of Tifaeris are you?

FLAXLEY: Indeed!

(He gestured to Kritz as he shook the president's hand.)

FLAXLEY: This is my beautiful wife, leader of the Tifaeris and Trepe Alliance!

(The president looked thoughtful as Kritz smiled his way.)

PRESIDENT: Did you visit my government officials a few months ago?

(Kritz looked incredibly nervous.)

KRITZ: Um... no! I never even saw a statue; I'd certainly never steal one!

PRESIDENT: Statue? What?

(Fearing she might be deaf or mentally disturbed, he quickly looked to Flaxley again.)

PRESIDENT: So, Tifaeris eh? I've heard a lot about that place! Fastest growing township in the world they tell me!

FLAXLEY: Probably, yes!

PRESIDENT: And you even tamed the vile Trepe, I hear!

KRITZ: Yes, we did!

PRESIDENT: Well... this is wonderful. I was thinking of popping down there so I could meet you actually. It's always great to form new alliances with other nations and townships!

(As the president's words filtered into his mind, Flaxley looked thoughtful.)

FLAXLEY: You wanted to meet me? So... are you saying... you'd have granted me an audience even *without* Mandika here?

PRESIDENT: Well, of course! It'd be pretty poor form to turn away a fellow world leader.

(Having been made to jump through hoops by Mandika under the mistaken impression that he needed her to gain access to the palace, Flaxley glared across at her furiously, only to see her give him a smarmy look and poke her tongue out.)

FLAXLEY: Why you little...

KRITZ: You mean I ran all that way and wasted 100 lig on a dress for nothing???

(Mandika looked mortified.)

MANDIKA: I'm wearing a 100 lig dress??? Gross! I wouldn't even let a peasant saddle my horse wearing something *that* cheap!!! Disgusting. I feel all itchy now!

FLAXLEY: Right...

(Desperate not to make a bigger scene than they already had, Flaxley then stood tall and looked to the president, deciding it was time to get down to business.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway... enough of this nonsense...

(He nodded firmly.)

FLAXLEY: President MacAfee? I need your help!

PRESIDENT: It's Micalov! And what can I do for you, old chap?

FLAXLEY: I need to trace an old friend of mine. The last thing anybody knows about him is that he joined the Leathrock army, you see?

PRESIDENT: Name?

FLAXLEY: Yes, how rude of me, I'm Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris!

PRESIDENT: His name, not yours!

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Oh! His name's Croxton. He's about 6 foot tall, he had...

(Looking slightly surprised to hear the name, the president held his palm towards him.)

PRESIDENT: Wait, I know who you mean! He hailed from Tifaeris too, right? He left a year or so before the Trepe razed it to the ground I believe he said!

FLAXLEY: So you know him?

PRESIDENT: Indeed I do!

(Looking somewhat stunned, the president then took a seat and gestured for those unseated to do likewise. Once everyone was seated, he then spoke up in a subdued voice.)

PRESIDENT: Croxton was a great soldier, the best actually. This nation isn't known for it's military, however, it's our admiralty we're renowned for, so like all the best soldiers we transferred him to the navy. He worked his way up to commodore in under a year. An outstanding achievement.

(He then forced a smile.)

PRESIDENT: I was hoping when his naval days were over he'd come and work for me here at the palace actually. It's rare to get such a brilliant mind, you see.

(Flaxley looked most surprised.)

FLAXLEY: He made commodore in under a year? Isn't that second in command?

(The president nodded.)

PRESIDENT: In *our* navy it is, yes. Anyway, two years ago he was part of a crew I sent out on a scouting mission. They were to head west and scour an uncharted stretch of sea a few hundred miles away. Unfortunately, they never returned.

FLAXLEY: They sunk?

(The president nodded solemnly.)

PRESIDENT: Sadly, yes.

(He then glanced to the ceiling thoughtfully.)

PRESIDENT: Though, there are a few who refuse to believe that.

(Everyone looked to one another, curious as to what he possibly meant.)

FLAXLEY: What do you mean?

PRESIDENT: Well, it's nothing really. I don't want to get your hopes up. It's just that there's rumours, you see? Rumours spread by retired sailors, and you know what old sailors are like! Old people sure love a tall tale!

(They all looked at Bonson wearing scornful grimaces.)

BONSON: What? I'm as honest as Lefiat is ugly!

LEFIAT: Hey! You're not *that* honest!

(Realising he just well and truly caned himself, Lefiat hung his head and allowed the president to continue.)

PRESIDENT: Anyway, some of the old sailors tell a tale of land out that way. They all reckon they've spotted it on a clear day. Well, some folk believe my crew sailed out there, found these new lands and settled there.

(As Flaxley raised a thoughtful eyebrow, the president scoffed.)

PRESIDENT: Old sailors, you've got to love them. They've all seen this mysterious land and yet none of them have landed on it. It's obviously just your typical maritime myth. Sailors are notorious for their stories.

FLAXLEY: Yes, but what if those old sailors are telling the truth?

(The president shrugged.)

PRESIDENT: Then there's land out there. I doubt that explains what happened to my ship and its crew though! Personally I think it's just a myth they've created. I've come to accept that Croxton and the rest of that wonderful crew perished in the ocean.

(Realising he had news that might startle the president a little, Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: The thing is, Mr President, I have it on extremely good authority that Croxton is still alive!

(As the president gave Flaxley a disbelieving glance, Lefiat chuckled.)

LEFIAT: Mr President!

PRESIDENT: What?

LEFIAT: Everyone laughed at me when I called the king “Mr King”. Now Flaxley’s doing it!

FLAXLEY: Lefiat, “Mr President” is the correct term!

(The president nodded at him sincerely. Realising he’d made a fool of himself once again, Lefiat clicked his fingers and grimaced angrily.)

LEFIAT: Damn!

BONSON: You tit!

FLAXLEY: Anyway, as I was saying, Croxton’s still alive and we need to try to find him! Even if that means going out to sea and looking for ourselves!

(The president couldn’t quite get his head around the revelation and scratched his head repeatedly.)

PRESIDENT: You think he’s still alive? What makes you say such a thing?

FLAXLEY: I was informed so only a few days ago by an irrefutable source, a mystic wise man, named Daman Siria!

(Having not realised Daman Siria was involved, Bonson, Mandika and Lefiat gasped.)

LEFIAT: Daman Siria?

BONSON: Oh for fuck sake!!!

MANDIKA: What does he have to do with this?

BONSON: Don’t you see? Six of us together, Daman Siria... it’s not difficult to figure out! Something crap is going to happen!

FLAXLEY: Guys, I’ll explain later but right now, I need to know exactly where the ship went so we can head in the same direction! You know as well as I do that if Daman Siria is involved, we have act now!

BONSON: We?

MANDIKA: Fuck that!

KRITZ: Calm down you lot, you don’t have to come if you don’t want to!

BONSON: Yes we do. Somehow we always end up coming. We’re bloody cursed I tell you!

(Sick of listening to the complaints, Flaxley implored the president desperately.)

FLAXLEY: Mr President? Can you help me?

(The President nodded. He felt unsure about whether to believe what he was hearing about Croxton but he didn’t see any harm in helping his guests.)

PRESIDENT: I’ll tell you all I know but if you go after him you could well be wasting your time!

FLAXLEY: I trust my source, Mr President!

PRESIDENT: Okay, well... they went due west. Literally. That was their orders!

FLAXLEY: And what about the ship?

BONSON: That went east. Why do you think they all drowned?

(As Bonson chuckled to himself, the president continued, choosing to ignore his misplaced merriment.)

PRESIDENT: That ship was the pride of my fleet, the “Magniferry”...

MANDIKA: Hey that’s ancient Kazooian for Splendid Craft!

PRESIDENT: Indeed. They set sail due west from dock 18 on the Magniferry under the command of Admiral Kassamandra Misakoto Ballevientios with a crew of 60 or so...

(The president paused and a worried look crossed his brow.)

PRESIDENT: Are you okay?

(Kritz had turned extremely pale and Flaxley was staring at him agape.)

BONSON: Ballevientios? Hmm... now where have I heard...

(Mandika nudged him and pointed him to where Kritz was sitting. Her lips were trembling and she was slowly shaking her head in stunned disbelief.)

BONSON: Oh!

PRESIDENT: Um, are you alright there?

FLAXLEY: Kassamandra Ballevantios?

PRESIDENT: Yes! Um... why?

FLAXLEY: It can't be!

PRESIDENT: You knew her? Oh, she was from Tifaeris too, that's right!

(Kritz then put her hand to her mouth and bent double to stop herself hyperventilating.)

PRESIDENT: She doesn't look too well. I'll open some windows so she can get some air. Can someone get her some water?

(Derek immediately pulled a water bottle from his pouch and passed it to Flaxley as the president went to the windows.)

DEREK: Here, Flaxley! Give her this!

(As Mandika and Lefiat worriedly leant towards her, Flaxley frowned.)

FLAXLEY: Give her some air will you! Thanks for the water, Derek!

(Kritz was shaking so much, Flaxley had to hold the water bottle to her lips so she could take a sip.)

KRITZ: Thanks!

(As the president came back over, Kritz forced a weak smile.)

KRITZ: Thank you, President!

PRESIDENT: You're welcome!

(With desperation in her eyes, Kritz looked imploringly to Flaxley.)

KRITZ: Kassy? Kassy, Flaxley!

(Flaxley nodded, stunned to his very core by the president's revelation.)

KRITZ: You think...

FLAXLEY: Well I severely doubt there's another Kassamandra Misakoto Ballevantios out there!

(Utterly overwhelmed, she forced her knees together and threw both hands over her face before proceeding to cry her heart out. Flaxley tried to console her but knew how little a hug would help under the circumstances and felt entirely useless. As he looked between her hands to what he could see of her tearful face, the president looked enlightened.)

PRESIDENT: Wow, you actually look alike! Then... surely... are you Kritzeveltia?

(She looked up slowly.)

KRITZ: What?

PRESIDENT: Kassamandra mentioned once that she had a little sister, but she said she died in the Trepe devastation of Tifaeris!

(She looked to Flaxley with distressed eyes.)

KRITZ: Oh my god, Flaxley!!! My sister!

(Flaxley just nodded to her, knowing exactly what her eyes were telling him.)

FLAXLEY: Mr President, we thought Kassy had died in that Trepe attack too. Now we're going to find her! And I mean *now*!

(Kritz wiped her eyes and nodded.)

KRITZ: Thank you!

FLAXLEY: Well, if there was any doubt before there certainly isn't now. We're going to get a ship and find both her and Croxton!

(He looked to Lefiat, Derek, Mandika and Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: Derek, are you coming?

DEREK: Flaxley, I'm right with you!
FLAXLEY: Excellent! Let's go!
LEFIAT: What about us?
(Mandika glared at him furiously.)
MANDIKA: What about us, Lefiat?
BONSON: Yes Lefiat, what about us?
(Lefiat shrugged.)
LEFIAT: Well, I may be useless but... I want to help. As a knight I want to do what's right. It's my duty to do everything I can.
BONSON: And how does that involve us?
MANDIKA: Yeah!
(Flaxley climbed to his feet and looked to Lefiat with a proud glint in his eye.)
FLAXLEY: Lefiat, you may be useless...
(He paused for dramatic effect and gave him an approving smile.)
FLAXLEY: So maybe it's best if you stay here!
(With that, he reached his hand down and helped pull a still somewhat distressed Kritz to her feet.)
LEFIAT: Hey that's mean, Flaxley!
MANDIKA: Mean but accurate, I'd say. And besides, you *can't* go! You're on my honeymoon!
(Lefiat pouted.)
LEFIAT: Yeah... okay.
(As Mandika glared despairingly at Lefiat, Flaxley nodded to the president gratefully.)
FLAXLEY: Thank you for your hospitality, President... Mr President!
PRESIDENT: Micalov!
FLAXLEY: Indeed!
(With that, he picked Kritz up and carried her towards the door.)
FLAXLEY: Let's go, Derek!
(As the three of them rapidly disappeared out the door, Mandika, Lefiat and Bonson watched them go.)
LEFIAT: Damn. Kritz looks really ill!
MANDIKA: Yeah...
(She then shrugged and turned to face the president.)
MANDIKA: So... um... my room?
LEFIAT: *Our* room!!!
(Mandika was not impressed by his tone.)
MANDIKA: Talk to me like that again and it will be *my* room, you can piss off back to Guevina on your own! On foot!!!
(A soul destroying reality then hit Bonson like a thunderbolt.)
BONSON: I should fucking cocoa, chummy!
MANDIKA: What?
(He looked Lefiat and Mandika up and down in some considerable distress.)
BONSON: There's no way in hell I'm staying here with you two!!!
(Faced with the prospect of remaining behind with Lefiat and Mandika, he'd suddenly developed a burning desire to accompany Flaxley and Kritz on their mission. Sailing into uncharted waters with untold danger ahead seemed relatively pleasurable in comparison and he took off like a rocket out of the door. He didn't stop running until he'd caught them up.)

(Having made the decision to head out to sea in search of Croxton, Flaxley immediately went into knight mode again. His focus doubled and his resolve to get the job done escalated. Unfortunately, however, he had no idea how to even start such a mission. There were several ocean related obstacles standing between themselves and their goal which he wasn't sure how to hurdle. And so, he opted to seek the advice of his companions to help him come up with a plan.

Determined to begin the planning process, he led Bonson, Derek and Kritz back to the carriage with a stern look on his brow. Upon arriving at the carriage, he opened the door and helped Kritz inside, knowing she'd just had a tremendous shock and would benefit from the brief rest. As she sat, Bonson climbed in the carriage after her followed by Derek. Eager to formulate a plan as soon as possible, Flaxley stood in the doorway and projected his voice inside.)

FLAXLEY: Okay chaps, we need a plan. Now...

(Much to his annoyance, Bonson raised a protesting finger and cut him off before he could even get started.)

BONSON: Hold your horses, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

BONSON: What's going on here?

FLAXLEY: What do you mean?

BONSON: Well, you've just found out that your old friend, some bloke called Croxton and Kritz's sister are lost at sea; fine, got that bit. You want to go and find them, excellent; I'm with you so far.

(He shrugged in bewilderment.)

BONSON: What I want to know is, why were you looking for this Croxton bloke in the first place? And what's more, what does that two-faced ne'er do well, Daman have to do with anything?

(He rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Honestly, you say you like having me around for my wisdom then you keep me in the dark. How are you going to benefit from my advice when you've only let me in on half the story?

(Kritz looked stumped.)

KRITZ: Wait, what? Who said we like having you around for your wisdom?

BONSON: Flaxley did, you cheeky cow.

FLAXLEY: Really? When?

BONSON: On the glacier that time!

FLAXLEY: I see. Maybe I was patronising you to make you feel better or something.

(Bonson was furious.)

BONSON: Why, you...

KRITZ: Oh, don't be like that, Bonson.

(Bonson snarled at her.)

BONSON: How do you expect me to be? Your husband just insulted my very reason for living.

KRITZ: Ale?

BONSON: Wisdom!!!

(He shook his fist at her.)

BONSON: Fucking ale, indeed! Anyone would think I was a shameless piss-head the way you lot go on!

(Flaxley furrowed his brow at him.)

FLAXLEY: Don't shake your fist at my wife, Bonson.

BONSON: Why not?

FLAXLEY: Because she'll smash your face in.

(Bonson grimaced.)

BONSON: Right, good point.

(With that, he lowered his fist then scowled at Flaxley.)

BONSON: Anyway, care to fill me in on the details?

FLAXLEY: Why? Are you planning on coming with us?

BONSON: Of course, I am.

DEREK: Really? It could be dangerous, you know?

BONSON: Yes, but what choice do I have? I can stay here with Lefiat and Mandika, walk home by myself or go with you. I choose the latter. Staying with those two would drive me insane and walking home by myself would be suicidal. I'm going with you lot.

FLAXLEY: Fine... let me fill you in then.

BONSON: If you wouldn't mind.

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Right, well, my gold chain was stolen...

BONSON: You mean your necklace?

FLAXLEY: No! My gold chain.

BONSON: Well, no harm done. Jewellery is for women and homosexuals anyway.

(Flaxley gritted his teeth.)

FLAXLEY: Do you want to hear this or don't you?

BONSON: There's no need to get uptight Flaxley, I was only saying.

FLAXLEY: Look, point is, that gold chain...

BONSON: Necklace!

FLAXLEY: Gold chain!!! It was actually a component that powers the device which creates mystical keys. Keys like the key of peace.

(At once, Bonson's jaw dropped.)

BONSON: Oh, my.

FLAXLEY: Anyway, to cut a long story short, Daman confessed that I got the chain from him back when I was a kid. He gave my two friends and I one each as we were destined to split up to different corners of the world, you see? Now it seems someone is trying to gather the three chains. They've got mine and one other, but as far as we know they don't have the one that belongs to my old friend, Croxton. So we have to find him before they do.

(Looking thoughtful as he pieced together Flaxley's words with what he heard in Leathrock palace, Bonson bit his lip.)

BONSON: Right. Good thing this Croxton chap is missing then really.

(He sighed.)

BONSON: If whoever is gathering the necklaces together makes a key, you know who that bastard Daman will exploit to get it back, don't you?

KRITZ: That's exactly what I said.

FLAXLEY: Anyway, now you know.

BONSON: Indeed. Then we'd better think of a plan for getting after it.

FLAXLEY: That's precisely what we're gonna do, Bonson.

(He nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Right, okay. Listen up, chaps. Facts; problems; solutions. Facts! We know Croxton is alive and we know he went out to sea two years ago and never returned. Problem! We don't have a boat to go and look for him! Solution! We go

to the docks and hire a ship and her crew!

BONSON: Problem! That's bloody expensive!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Solution! We steal a ship!

BONSON: Problem! None of us know how to sail!

FLAXLEY: Correction! Kritz and I sailed back to Tifaeris from Desha Village that time; we know what we're doing!

BONSON: Fact! Nobody likes a smart arse, Flaxley!

(Flaxley scowled.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson, we don't have time for your snide comments, we've got to steal a ship and get going!

KRITZ: We'll need supplies!

DEREK: Or we can steal a ship that's just been loaded with them!

KRITZ: We could, but I'd rather we had the right supplies than any old rubbish!

FLAXLEY: Okay, so... fact! We need supplies! Fact! We need a ship! Fact! We need them as soon as possible!

BONSON: Those come under problems rather than facts don't they?

(Flaxley snarled.)

FLAXLEY: Fact! If you're going to sit there and be awkward, I'll throw you in the sea!

(Most aggrieved by Flaxley's attitude, Bonson scowled and folded his arms.)

BONSON: Insult! You're a tit and I don't like you!

(Not wanting to wait a moment longer, Kritz climbed to her feet and headed to the carriage door.)

KRITZ: Look, we know what we need! Bonson, come with me to get some supplies.

(Flaxley nodded as he stepped aside to let her alight the carriage.)

FLAXLEY: You heard the lady, Bonson!

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Suddenly all I'm fit for is shopping!

FLAXLEY: You were a butler! You spent your life waitressing and cleaning, I'm sure a little shopping is well within your capabilities!

BONSON: Waitressing??? How dare you? For a start, that isn't even a word...

DEREK: Don't get your feather duster in a flap, Bonson. We've got work to do!

BONSON: Why you...

(Before he could even begin his rant, however, Kritz pointed to the palace, her stunned tone deflecting the attention from the old grouch almost instantly.)

KRITZ: Hey, what the hell? Look at that?

(As Flaxley swung his neck to see where she was pointing, he was most taken aback at the sight of two men in black clothing and balaclavas scaling a wall to gain access to the palace roof. As he watched on with interest, another balaclava clad man raced across the forecourt.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm... an exercise maybe?

(Flaxley, Kritz, Derek and Bonson watched on with interest for a few moments when one of the strangely dressed men appeared in the palace's main entrance and slammed the doors shut.)

FLAXLEY: That's no exercise! That's an attack!

(Kritz looked to him in horror.)

KRITZ: Mandika's in there!!!

DEREK: So's Lefiat!

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: They would be, wouldn't they? Always got to drag *us* into it!
(Flaxley looked his way with a menacing glint in his eye.)
FLAXLEY: Stay here if you want, Bonson, I'm going to rescue her!
DEREK: And Lefiat!
KRITZ: I'm coming too!
DEREK: Me too!
BONSON: I'll bring up the rear!
(Flaxley went to move out but upon hearing Bonson volunteer to come, he stumbled forward and narrowly avoided falling over.)
FLAXLEY: What did you say?
BONSON: You heard me! I've got inferno magic, I'll be fine!
FLAXLEY: Wow!
BONSON: I'll be sure not to cast on it myself too... unlike someone I could mention!
(Derek looked peeved.)
DEREK: Who told you?
BONSON: Nobody. I came to just time in time last night and saw everything. Unfortunately, I was too inebriated to laugh at you and passed out again almost straight away.
FLAXLEY: Never mind that! Let's go!
(Despite falling out with her over the whole honeymoon debacle, Mandika's safety meant a great deal to Flaxley. He may have been duty bound to protect her but it was a duty he was happy to be burdened with. He'd known her since she was a child and though he'd never admit it, he was actually extremely fond of her. Channelling that emotion to strengthen his focus, he led Kritz, Bonson and Derek towards the palace gates, determined to do what was right before he set off in search of Croxton. The ability to prioritise being an important asset to any knight worth his sort.)

As they reached the palace gates, Flaxley scoured the building with his eyes then swiftly glanced to his three companions.)
FLAXLEY: Right! Phase one! Run from here to the building, keep low! Go!
(And with that, he charged for the wall next to the main entrance, followed by his eager allies. Well aware that stealth could be a major factor if the rescue was to be successful, they kept their heads down and their mouths shut. Moments later, they reached the wall unscathed then thrust their backs hard up against it.)
FLAXLEY: Right! Excellent work! Now we need to find a way in without alerting the bandits! Remember, our priority is Mandika. Once she's safe, only *then* can we think about rescuing the president!
(Derek rolled his eyes.)
DEREK: And Lefiat!
BONSON: Yeah, him too... if we've got time!
FLAXLEY: Precisely.
(As Bonson beamed with delight at the thought of them failing to save Lefiat, Flaxley nodded firmly.)
FLAXLEY: Okay... so now how do we get in?
(As he stood there musing to himself about ways to gain entry, Kritz rolled her eyes.)
KRITZ: The window, Flaxley!
(With that, she raced along the wall to the nearest window and peered through the glass. Seeing an empty room, she smiled and nodded to her husband.)
KRITZ: You do it; I've got nothing to protect my arms!
(Having raced up behind her, Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Righto! Shield your eyes!

(Immediately, Bonson, Derek and Kritz turned away as Flaxley smashed the window in with his gauntlet. As shattered glass fragments rained to the floor inside the room, Kritz turned back to face inside it.)

KRITZ: Let's go!!!

(With amazing agility, she leapt into the room in a single bound then waited for Flaxley to climb through and help Bonson to clamber in. Once Bonson was safely in the room, Derek scrambled inside and joined them in racing up to the interior door.)

FLAXLEY: Right, so far so good! Now, if I trust my sense of direction we have to go out of here...

BONSON: Flaxley, if you trust your sense of direction then so do we! You lead, we'll follow!

DEREK: I'm happy to go with that!

FLAXLEY: Right! Okay. Let's go!

(Unfortunately, their faith in his sense of direction proved rather unfounded. As Bonson rightly pointed out as they sneaked and crept along corridors and passageways in search of the presidential suite, when they'd been in there earlier, at no point did they go up a flight of stairs. Having already been up two flights and only come back down one, he knew they were horribly lost. Knowing Flaxley would never admit to it, however, he followed on, keeping his complaints to a minimum.

Negotiating their way along corridors, ever alert for the sounds of danger, they kept their backs to the wall and crawled when they felt it was necessary. Kritz was especially adept at these neo-ninja skills being slim, nubile and extremely agile. Bonson, however, ached all over.

After what seemed like an eternity, Bonson especially was only too relieved when they heard the sound of the president's voice. His cry of pain that followed, however, was more than a little disturbing. Having followed the sound, they eventually found themselves sneaking out onto a balcony that overlooked the presidential suite. As they crept towards the edge, keeping a sharp eye out for danger, Flaxley looked consummately baffled and whispered over his shoulder.)

FLAXLEY: We're on the wrong floor!

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: I told you it was on the ground floor, why you had to go up *any* stairs is beyond me!

KRITZ: Shush! Guys, keep it down!

(Adhering to Kritz's sensible advice, they sneaked to the edge and peered down into the suite below. Below them, the president was sitting on one of the sofas, holding his hand to his face while Lefiat and Mandika trembled by the window. Before them paced an angry looking, skinny man dressed all in black. Curiously, he seemed to be the only bandit in the room. Knowing he had to do something, Flaxley watched and listened carefully as he considered his next move. It seemed that the leader of the bandits loved the sound of his own voice. As he paced up and down in front of the president, he announced his every word with pride and authority.)

HEINER: You see, Mr President, your nation is nothing. Nothing but a sprawl of people and the shit they call their lives. What do they or their belongings mean? I mean really? They're nothing and I'll smite them in a heartbeat if you don't tell me what I want to know.

(The president snarled.)

PRESIDENT: Listen...

HEINER: Call me Heiner!

PRESIDENT: Listen, Heiner, I already told you, I don't know!

(Heiner scoffed.)

HEINER: Yes. Yes you did. Well, let me rephrase the question in a way that might help you remember. We're going to get what we're after one way or another and when we do... put it this way, help me now and when the time comes I may even spare Leathrock. If you stand in my way, however, this town will be the *first* to feel the wrath of the key of death!!!

(Up on the balcony, Flaxley looked to Bonson uneasily.)

FLAXLEY: Key of death?

(As Bonson grimaced back at him, sharing his foreboding, Heiner continued.)

HEINER: Now! Where's Commodore Croxton?

(The president snarled.)

PRESIDENT: You can phrase it how you like!!! I'm not suddenly going to know something just because you threaten me!!! I told you, I don't fucking know!

HEINER: So this Commodore sails off into the sunset and disappears along with your nations pride and joy, the nations flagship, and you didn't even bother to look for it???

PRESIDENT: What was I going to do? Swim out there?

HEINER: You have other ships!

PRESIDENT: Heiner, sometimes you lose ships. It's a hazard of the navy.

(Up on the balcony, Flaxley whispered to his comrades.)

FLAXLEY: Key of death, Croxton, these are the bastards who stole my chain!

KRITZ: Looks that way.

FLAXLEY: It has to be them; they want Croxton's neck chain so they can use the sceptre of the gods to make this key of death.

BONSON: Well obviously!

DEREK: Question is, Flaxley! What are we going to do? We're powerless up here!

(Flaxley mused for a moment then nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Give me a sec, chaps! Kritz, I need your bra!

BONSON: Eh?

(His face lit up.)

KRITZ: I'm not wearing one!

BONSON: Let me see!

FLAXLEY: Bonson, stop that! I need some cloth then! Give me your jacket, Bonson!

BONSON: What? But...

DEREK: Go on, Bonson!

BONSON: Oh... fine!

(As Bonson removed his jacket, Heiner started to lose his temper.)

HEINER: I need to find Croxton, President! So help me or I'll kill you!

PRESIDENT: I told you, I can't help you!

HEINER: You mean won't!

PRESIDENT: I mean can't!!!

HEINER: Either way...

(He drew his sword.)

HEINER: You don't get to live!

(Just then, before Heiner could even begin to carry out his deadly threat, Sir Flaxley dropped to the ground a few feet away from him having slid down a supporting

chandelier chain using Bonson's jacket. As Mandika and Lefiat both gave out womanly swoons and clutched their hands to their hearts, he yanked his sword from its sheath.)

FLAXLEY: Not so fast!

(Thrown by his sudden appearance, Heiner stepped back nervously.)

HEINER: What's going on?

FLAXLEY: The game's up! Give me back my chain, Henry!

HEINER: It's Heiner!

FLAXLEY: Don't be so sure!

HEINER: What?

FLAXLEY: Never mind that! I, Sir Flaxley, will be your end! Prepare to...

(With that, Bonson's jacket fell from the chandelier and landed squarely over his head. Hoping nobody had noticed, he hurriedly cast it aside to continue only to find Heiner making a bolt for the door.)

FLAXLEY: Damn it!

(As Heiner reached for the door, Flaxley turned and shrugged at the president.)

FLAXLEY: How lame is *this* bloke? He's running away!

(Unfortunately for him, however, Heiner had merely been going to get his men. Seconds later, over a hundred or so bandits in black clothing, raged into the room screaming for blood.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent!

(Far from sharing Flaxley's joy for battle, the president leapt to his feet and sprinted away to cower by the window. Lefiat drew his sword to protect his queen, the only thing in the world he was actually good at and Bonson, Derek and Kritz all leapt to their feet to fire their magic into the fracas from the balcony. There was chaos. As much as Flaxley enjoyed this kind of chaos however, retrieving his gold chain was most definitely the only thing on his mind. Feeling quite certain that the leader, Heiner was likeliest to be holding his chain, his intention was to take him down one on one. With three quarters of the charging foes bearing down on him and him alone, however, he had no choice but to focus on them instead. Therefore, with a venomous sneer, he set about thinning the herd.)

FLAXLEY: Big mistake, losers!!!

(Sure enough, as soon as he leapt into action, people started to die. If there ever was an example of a man and his sword in perfect harmony, Flaxley was it. Watching on from the balcony, as he helped Derek and Kritz rain magic down onto the bandits, Bonson shook a disdainful head.)

BONSON: Idiots! Anyone with any sense would have attacked Lefiat first!

DEREK: No, Bonson, with a numerical advantage like that, you always take down the big guy!

BONSON: Not when that big guy's Flaxley you don't!

(Bonson was right. Thanks to the three mages above him, the bandits hadn't even managed to get close to Flaxley without being scythed down with supreme ease. With jets of water, balls of fire and streaks of lightning crashing around their feet, to hold them at bay, not one bandit had even managed a single strike at Flaxley's blade. Had they not been there to help, then Flaxley may well have been swamped by their sheer numbers but as things stood, the bandits were fighting a losing battle. Well aware of their losing position, Flaxley stepped up his attacks, eager to get Heiner on his own. As if his sword was just an extension of his person, he sliced a bandit's head clean off of its shoulders before thudding his fist into another's nose. It was almost like hacking through a forest with a machete.

Far from sharing Flaxley's ability, Lefiat didn't look to confident at this point. Luckily for him, however, Mandika had used her glacier magic, a long standing gift from Derek to surround the nearby floor with ice. As a result, none of the bandits had even got close to them. Several had slid so hard on the ice, they'd whizzed past them and crashed straight through the window. With only a steep cliff outside the window, it was safe to say they wouldn't be coming back any time soon.

As he watched the slaughter from the doorway, Heiner snarled. His men were being hindered by the attacks from above while Flaxley was making mincemeat of them on the ground. Those who tried to attack Lefiat were so far wasting their time. Quick to realise they were very much fighting a losing battle, he stood tall and called out over the din.)

HEINER: Retreat!!!

(In that moment, the men who'd seem so desperate to fight a few moments ago, did all kinds of back-flips, somersaults and spins, whatever was needed to get themselves away as soon as possible. Such was the speed of their exodus, Flaxley was left gaping with his sword held aloft, not quite ready to stop the cull. In a matter of seconds, they'd gone. Looking peeved, Flaxley lowered his sword and stood at ease.)

FLAXLEY: Bloody poofs! Did you see that?

(Grinning down from the Balcony, Bonson replied heartily.)

BONSON: We did see! We kicked arse!

(Breathing a sigh of relief, Lefiat lowered his sword.)

LEFIAT: Good thing they were rubbish really!

FLAXLEY: They weren't rubbish! Bonson, Kritz, Derek, we owe you our lives! If you hadn't been so brilliantly positioned up there, I think that might have been curtains for us!

(Bonson nodded down to him.)

BONSON: Good thing we decided to use those stairs and go up a floor really!

(Kritz chuckled.)

KRITZ: You've changed your tune!

BONSON: Well pardon me for being precise! It was still a mistake on his part, but thankfully a lucky one!

FLAXLEY: Never mind that. Is everyone okay?

(As he climbed from where he was cowering, the president spoke up.)

PRESIDENT: I'm fine!

MANDIKA: Yeah, we're all okay!

FLAXLEY: Excellent, now I need to find out where that Heiner went and get my chain back!

(Just then, the president reached out his palm towards him.)

PRESIDENT: Wait, I have a better idea!

(Flaxley paused and raised a curious eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: You do?

PRESIDENT: They're looking for the same guy you are! Croxton!

FLAXLEY: I know!

PRESIDENT: Well, it's important that you find him before they do.

(Just then, there was a loud thud behind them as Lefiat stepped away from the window, having already forgotten about the ice in front of him.)

LEFIAT: I'm okay!

(Rolling her eyes, Mandika performed a controlled skid across it and stepped up

behind the president.)

MANDIKA: You were saying?

PRESIDENT: Hmm... yes I was! It's important to Leathrock that *you* find Croxton, so I want to help!

FLAXLEY: Good! How?

PRESIDENT: Well, if you think he's out there on the ocean still alive somewhere, I'll lend you my fastest ship and her crew. She's already stacked with supplies, so you can go whenever you're ready!

(Upon hearing the suggestion, with the agility of a jaguar, Kritz leapt down from the balcony, landing in a crouched position.)

FLAXLEY: Careful, darling!

KRITZ: I'm fine! We accept, Mr President!

(She looked to Flaxley.)

KRITZ: Let's go and find Croxton, wherever he is, Kassy is probably there too! Or at least he'll know what happened to her!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Don't worry, Kritz. I'm way ahead of you!

(Kritz gave him a condescending glance.)

KRITZ: Ahem... darling? We talked about this!

FLAXLEY: Quite. My bad. I'm right there *with* you!

(He nodded to the president.)

FLAXLEY: We accept!

PRESIDENT: Okay...

(Ignoring another thud behind him, he continued.)

LEFIAT: Ow!!!

PRESIDENT: The ship is docked at pier three. Now, according to the old sailors and their tales, this land they allege to have seen is due west from here. Sanetza is what the sailors call it, after the fabled lost lands you read about in literature. Just head due west like Croxton did and if it's true then that's where they'll be I expect.

(Bonson looked most intrigued.)

BONSON: Sanetza, you say? I read about that in one of my urban myth books.

Could it really exist?

PRESIDENT: Maybe, but I wouldn't put too much stock in that theory. Remember, it could just be an old nautical myth they've been helping to spread. They like to tell tales of Giant Squid, Krakens and Sirens... this Sanetza could just be another of their myths.

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Well, we'll just head due west like you told us and see what happens.

Dock three you say?

PRESIDENT: Yes, she's the wooden ship with the cast iron deck rails, you can't miss her!

(Just then, a Leathrock soldier raced in.)

SOLDIER: Mr President?

(The president looked across to him urgently.)

PRESIDENT: Soldier?

SOLDIER: You're okay! Thank the seas!

PRESIDENT: Yes, yes, I'm fine! Do you have a status report?

SOLDIER: Um... I don't know, some armed men were seen escaping the palace, what happened?

(The president frowned.)

PRESIDENT: I'll tell you what happened! The security here is shit!!! Some armed men came and attacked me, and these nice people from Tifaeris then broke in to rescue me! Where the hell were you? What the hell do I pay security for???

SOLDIER: I'm sorry, sir!

PRESIDENT: I don't want apologies! I want you to put Leathrock on high alert and tell the crew of "The Colloskayak" to prepare to leave immediately. They'll be taking their orders directly from Sir Flaxley here!

(The soldier saluted.)

SOLDIER: Sir!

(As the soldier rushed from the room to carry out his orders, the president turned to Flaxley.)

PRESIDENT: I don't suppose you know where I can hire some decent protection do you? Somebody like you! This is terrible, they just marched right in and nobody noticed them until they left. If you weren't here...

FLAXLEY: Well, thankfully we were.

(He nodded firmly.)

FLAXLEY: Now, if you wouldn't mind telling us where dock three is and we'll be on our way! Oh, and could you take care of our carriage and horses until we get back?

PRESIDENT: Why it's the least I can do! I'll have my stablemen collect it from dock three for you.

KRITZ: Superb!

FLAXLEY: Indeed. Now let's go.

(Once again, a thud then rose up from behind them.)

LEFIAT: Help, I can't get up!!!

(Kritz rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: Crawl across the ice, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: I tried that! I fell flat on my face.

(Just then, Derek yelled down from the balcony.)

DEREK: We'll meet you by the carriage, Flaxley!

(As Flaxley acknowledged him with a thumbs up, Derek nodded then looked to Bonson.)

DEREK: Come on, Bonson!

BONSON: No, I'm going to jump down like Kritz did!

(Derek looked stunned.)

DEREK: Don't be insane, with bones that old you'll shatter like a crystal wine glass!

BONSON: I was joking, Derek! I thought you could read minds!

(And with that, they disappeared from view.)

FLAXLEY: Right, come on!

(As Flaxley led Kritz to the door, Mandika followed them cautiously.)

MANDIKA: Um... do you mind if I see you guys off? You kinda saved me just now so I'm not angry at you anymore.

(She then twiddled her fingers nervously.)

MANDIKA: Plus it'd be nice to get a hug before you leave.

(Kritz smiled, highly amused by Mandika's fickle attitude.)

KRITZ: Sure, come on, babe!

(As Mandika proceeded to hug Kritz, the sound of an anguished man filled the room.)

LEFIAT: Please don't leave me here!!!

(As one, they all turned and faced the defeated looking Lefiat as he lay faced down on the ice with his arms and legs sprawled out around him.)

FLAXLEY: Think, Mandika, you married that man!

MANDIKA: I try not to look at it that way!

(With that, Flaxley walked over and dragged him to what Lefiat considered the “safety” of non-icy ground. Looking quite flustered he dusted himself down.)

LEFIAT: You saved me!!!

FLAXLEY: Hardly! Now come on, you tit!

(And following a brief courteous bow to the president, they all headed out of the door. Kritz and Mandika arm in arm and Flaxley glancing despairingly at Lefiat all the way.)

(Having just come face to face with the bandits who sought Croxton’s neck chain, Flaxley felt a heightened sense of urgency at this moment in time. Desperate to get going as soon as possible, as soon as everyone returned to the carriage, he ushered them all inside it then drove to dock three as fast as he could.

A few minutes later, having arrived at the dockside, Flaxley immediately leapt down from the carriage then raced around the back to open the rear compartment. As he started to retrieve their luggage with a determined expression on his face, the others all climbed out of the carriage and immediately paused to look over the relatively small but nevertheless impressive Colloskayak, moored at their side. It was indeed impressive. Sleek in its design, it could reach speeds most ships could only dream of.

As they stood at the dockside admiring it, Mandika scratched her head nervously and glanced at Kritz.)

MANDIKA: Colloskayak? Hmm... unless I’m very much mistaken, Colloskayak means “very big canoe”!

(At once, everyone slowly turned to face her then looked at the ship and gulped.)

KRITZ: Canoe?

(Flaxley’s voice then rose up from behind the carriage.)

FLAXLEY: Never mind that!

(He then emerged into view with a large wooden chest perched on his shoulder.)

FLAXLEY: I don’t care if it’s called “very dodgy raft with loads of holes in”, as long as it works, who cares *what* it’s called?

(With that, he paced away and headed for the gang plank.)

FLAXLEY: There’s a few bags left in the rear compartment. If someone would care to get them for me, that’d be most helpful.

(As he started to make his way up the gang plank towards the large wooden deck of the ship, Kritz yelled to him lovingly.)

KRITZ: Leave it to me, darling!

BONSON: Quite, let’s leave it to her.

DEREK: Indeed.

(He then gestured towards the ship.)

DEREK: Shall we?

BONSON: We shall.

(Happy to leave Kritz to it, Bonson and Derek then turned away to follow Flaxley up the gang plank.

Left behind on the dockside, standing aside the carriage, Kritz turned to face Mandika while Lefiat stared randomly into space. She didn’t want them to part with any ill feeling and was eager to make peace with her properly before she left.)

KRITZ: Mandika? I know everything didn't exactly go to plan, but Flaxley really did try his hardest to make your honeymoon a success. And he honestly thought you'd like mixing with the people!

(Mandika sighed in acceptance and offered her a smile.)

MANDIKA: I know he tried, Kritz, but... let's not discuss it right now. I'll only get angry again and I don't want us to fall out. Not now.

KRITZ: Yeah, okay! And anyway, there's no point fretting over one bad day. You and Lefiat there have got all your lives ahead of you! Besides, your honeymoon isn't over yet.

MANDIKA: That's true!

KRITZ: Just let yourself enjoy it, whatever happens, yeah?

MANDIKA: I will!

KRITZ: Cool. Now how about another hug?

MANDIKA: Sure!

(She then furrowed her brow and shook her head.)

MANDIKA: Seeing as Flaxley's buggered off without hugging me, *you'll* have to do.

KRITZ: Excuse me?

(Realising she'd spoken out loud, Mandika flinched then offered Kritz a cheesy grin.)

MANDIKA: Not that I didn't want to hug you as well.

(Kritz chuckled then held out her arms.)

KRITZ: Come here, you silly sod.

(Wearing a wide smile, Mandika opened her arms then stepped into Kritz and threw her arms around her.)

MANDIKA: Be safe, Kritz.

(She then pulled back from the hug and glared at her bitterly.)

MANDIKA: This hug doesn't mean I've forgotten, by the way. I still want my eagle back!

KRITZ: Oh yeah... about that!

(Just then, the sound of footsteps bounding up the gang plank rose up into the air, causing Mandika to spin around and glared at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat???

LEFIAT: What?

(Seeing Lefiat still standing where he had been, she swiftly threw a glance at the gangplank. Seeing nobody there, she ran her fingers through her hair nervously.)

MANDIKA: Don't worry, I thought for a minute you'd gone up the gangplank! Must have been a crew member!

LEFIAT: Right. Why would I go up the gangplank?

MANDIKA: Look... never mind!

(Having been lost in a daydream about cakes, Lefiat sighed, his train of thought completely ruined.)

LEFIAT: Can we have some cake when we get back, Mandika?

(Wearing an apologetic smile, Kritz place her hand on Mandika's shoulder and cut in.)

KRITZ: Sorry, Mandika. I hate to interrupt, but I'd better go!

MANDIKA: Oh, okay!

(As Kritz took a step away from her, however, Mandika grabbed her hand.)

MANDIKA: Kritz!

KRITZ: Yeah?

MANDIKA: Look, I do need that eagle, not for me but the people of Guevina!

(Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: Yeah okay, and I'm sorry! Old habits kinda die hard. I see something nice and I get the urge to pinch it. It's a Trepe thing! Anyway, I'd better...

MANDIKA: No, listen, before you go I just wanted to say, you might not find your sister, you know!

(Kritz bit her lip.)

KRITZ: Yeah, but I've got to look. I have to know!

MANDIKA: Oh, I get that. I understand that entirely, I just want you to know that if you don't find her then it's okay!

(She looked into her eyes and smiled sincerely.)

MANDIKA: Whether or not you find her, it doesn't matter; you've already got a sister right here! Okay?

(Kritz's heart melted.)

KRITZ: Aw, Mandika!

(She hugged her close.)

KRITZ: That was such a lovely thing to say! I really needed to hear that!

(Mandika chuckled.)

MANDIKA: Well, you've threatened to beat me up so many times I've lost count and I can't stand the sight of you half the time! You really are the big sister I never had!

(Kritz laughed out loud.)

KRITZ: And you annoy me so much sometimes I want to explode!

MANDIKA: Just like a sister?

KRITZ: Just like a sister!

(Having shared one last warm smile, Kritz then headed for the gangplank.)

KRITZ: I'll see ya, babe!

(As he watched her go, Lefiat's bottom lip drooped.)

LEFIAT: I'm so crap!

MANDIKA: Huh?

LEFIAT: They didn't even ask me to go with them!

(Mandika shrugged.)

MANDIKA: Well, you can't. You're on my honeymoon!

LEFIAT: I know, but they didn't even give me the chance to say no! I can't blame them I guess. I can't use a sword except to protect you and my lightning magic is hopeless. The only person I ever successfully attacked with it is Kritz! If I was them, I wouldn't have invited me either.

(As he hung his head, Mandika sighed. Having been selfish about everything since the minute they'd left Guevina, her heart felt heavy. Feeling it was the least she could do to boost his ego, she then nodded to herself and rushed up to Kritz as she reached the gang plank.)

MANDIKA: Kritz?

KRITZ: Yeah?

MANDIKA: Two things! One, you forgot those bags that Flaxley asked you to get and also...

(She turned back to where a saddened Lefiat was pouting at the floor.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat's ego is a little hurt. He doesn't *want* to go with you guys 'cause we're on my honeymoon, he's just a little down 'cause nobody even asked him, you know?

KRITZ: Oh, okay! You want me to invite him along?

MANDIKA: Yeah, just so he thinks we didn't go because *he* turned it down. I don't want him left thinking he was left out 'cause he's useless, no matter how true it is!

(Kritz nodded.)

KRITZ: Oh okay!

(With that, she stepped up to the ashen faced Lefiat.)

KRITZ: Lefiat?

LEFIAT: Yeah, bye!

KRITZ: No, it's not that! I was just thinking how great it'd be if you were to accompany us on our voyage. Being a knight and all, you'd be an asset to the party, I'm sure.

(She smiled.)

KRITZ: So, would you like to come with us?

(Having expected a grateful refusal, she was most taken aback to see Lefiat beam at her wearing a face of unbridled joy.)

LEFIAT: Would I???

(With that, he took off up the gang plank as fast as his gangly legs could carry him.)

LEFIAT: Woohoo!!!

(Left in his wake on the dockside, Mandika and Kritz gaped.)

KRITZ: Well that was unexpected!

(At once, Mandika's brow furrowed and she clenched her fist furiously.)

MANDIKA: Yeah! Nice job, Kritzeveltia!

KRITZ: Eh?

MANDIKA: Well... if you're going to sleaze up to hot blooded men dressed like *that* it's no wonder they can't say no!

KRITZ: So this is *my* fault?

MANDIKA: Well, duh!

(Not even bothering to entertain her logic, Kritz rolled her eyes and headed for the carriage to grab the two bags that Flaxley had asked her to get, before strolling towards the gang plank.)

KRITZ: See ya then!

(Mandika just scoffed and scowled as she watched Kritz's perfect backside glide up the gang plank, her skirt barely covering her modesty.)

MANDIKA: Tart!

(Stood there on the dockside without a friend in the world, she snarled to herself then put her head down and raced up the gang-plank, determined to retrieve Lefiat and drag him ashore before the ship set sail.)

MANDIKA: If that idiot thinks I'm spending my honeymoon on my own, he's very much mistaken!!!

(As soon as she reached the top of the gang plank and set foot on the deck, however, a dock worker yanked the gangplank away and yelled an indecipherable word through a stumpy metal cone to amplify his voice. Utterly devastated, Mandika could only look on aghast as the sails unfurled and the ship started to slide from the port.)

MANDIKA: No!!! Why???

(Realising there was no going back and whether she liked it or not, she was going wherever the ship took her, she snarled and looked around for someone to blame. Upon spotting Lefiat and Flaxley talking, she was satisfied she'd identified the culprits and stormed towards them in a rage.)

FLAXLEY: So... you're coming then?

LEFIAT: Yeah, isn't that something?

FLAXLEY: Hmm... it's something alright!

MANDIKA: Flaxley???

(As he turned to face her, he immediately received a crisp slap to the face.)

MANDIKA: Bastard!

(She stamped on his foot then turned to punch Lefiat on the nose.)

FLAXLEY: Hey!!!

LEFIAT: Ow!!!

MANDIKA: Flaxley, you ruined my honeymoon!

FLAXLEY: Right. Back to that again, are we?

(With that, he rolled his eyes and walked away, frowning at the thought of having to endure her company again. Knowing that he wasn't going far and she could have it out with him at any time, Mandika let him go and rounded on the miserable looking Lefiat instead.)

MANDIKA: You were supposed to say no!!!

LEFIAT: Eh? When?

MANDIKA: When Kritz invited you, you were supposed to say no!!!

(He looked from side to side and grimaced.)

LEFIAT: I was?

MANDIKA: Yes!!! Obviously!!! We're supposed to be on our honeymoon!!!

LEFIAT: Don't you mean *your* honeymoon?

(Having overheard, Bonson hunched his shoulders and sucked his teeth.)

BONSON: Ooh, wrong answer!

(Sure enough, Mandika was furious. With a face like thunder, she decided to give words a miss and settled for illustrating her feelings with her fists and shoes. The hapless Lefiat could do nothing but cower and shy away as she came at him, slapping and kicking.)

MANDIKA: I gave you the chance to turn down the invite so you wouldn't feel like they didn't want you!!!

LEFIAT: I didn't know! Kritz sounded like she really wanted me to come!

MANDIKA: How would you know how she sounded? I bet you took one look at her cleavage and couldn't say no! You'd have poked yourself in the face with a fork if she'd asked you to!

LEFIAT: It's a lie!!!

(Finally, she stopped slapping him and placed disgusted hands on her hips.)

MANDIKA: Well, just so you know, they *didn't* want you to come. I *asked* Kritz to invite you, so you could say no. They didn't want you here 'cause you're useless!

Worse than useless! You redefine the word useless!!!

(With that, she stormed off to sulk at the back of the ship. If Lefiat had known what "redefine" meant, he may well have been quite offended. As it was, he took it as just another of Mandika's rants and set off to sulk at the front of the ship. As they parted to separate ends of the deck, the others watched them uneasily and all had the same thought. It was going to be a long trip.)

(And so, the voyage had begun. The ship was heading out of the port and other than 'due west' they didn't know where they were going, or indeed when they'd be back.

With a crew of ten or so first class sailors to help them and enough supplies to feed an army, all their needs were catered for and the only thing they could do now was wait and see where the vessel took them. For Flaxley and Kritz the journey would be a tense one. For Flaxley, finding his friend Croxton would mean above everything that his neck chain hadn't been responsible for whatever disaster Heiner intended to use it for. For Kritz, being reunited with her long lost sister, having thought for most of her life that she was dead would be something impossible to quantify with words. Just to

know something about her would be more than she could ever have once dreamt of. For Derek and Bonson, however, there was no such tension. Derek took the attitude that whatever was meant to happen, would happen, and that he'd deal with whatever should arise when the time came. Bonson was just relieved not to be stuck in Leathrock with only Lefiat and Mandika for company. Compared to that, anything was a bonus, even sailing off into uncharted waters with no idea when they'd be back. Lefiat and Mandika, on the other hand, were far less easy going. Lefiat was terrified of the sea and Mandika felt horribly cheated out of a honeymoon. Suffice to say, her majesty would not be good company.)

Ocean – The Colloskayak

(When the president claimed that the Colloskayak was the fastest ship in his fleet, he certainly wasn't misleading anybody. Such was the sleek design of the bow, it cut through the water like a knife through butter. Making short work of the small waves as it thrust forth, it made for quite an impressive sight, one that townsfolk of Leathrock often stopped to admire. There was no exception this time. As the ship gracefully carved up the ocean before it, many gathered on the dockside to watch in awe as it headed for the horizon and out of sight.

On the deck, Bonson smiled to himself as he watched the land behind them disappear from view. Truth was, he loved the ocean and if he could have his time over again, he'd consider joining the navy himself. He wasn't sad to have missed the opportunity however. Being a crew member on a naval ship was immensely hard work and right now he didn't want to think about that. He was quite happy standing where he was, enjoying the sunlight and the cool breeze as he glanced upon the glistening waters.

Part of the crew's work on this particular voyage was to prepare quarters for Flaxley, Kritz, Mandika, Lefiat, Bonson and Derek. Until that task was complete, they'd all have to remain on deck together and wait. Having been verbally assaulted by his new bride, however, Lefiat wasn't feeling sociable. Determined to avoid everybody, he sat himself down behind a pair of crates out of everybody's view at one end of the deck and sighed to himself miserably. He hated the sea with a fiery passion due to his morbid fear of ocean beasts. Taking no pleasure in the journey so far, he was just relieved to have been asked to come along. As a knight, he longed to help even though he was terrible at it and Mandika's claims that he wasn't wanted had fallen on deaf ears. In his heart, he'd deluded himself that he had a role to play and he'd taken her words to the contrary as just one of her cruel jibes. She always took her bad moods out on him and to hear her speak so harshly of him was nothing new. And so, getting as far away as possible from her vile tongue suited him fine right now. As he sat there taking comfort in his solitude, however, he soon received a nasty shock. Much to his horror, a shadow appeared over him accompanied by a small female voice.)

PHISELE: Hiya, Luffy-lops!

(Lefiat almost leapt out of his skin.)

LEFIAT: Argh!!!

PHISELE: Surprise!!!

(Looking somewhat put out, Lefiat climbed to his feet and furrowed his brow at her.)

LEFIAT: You almost gave me a heart attack!

(Phisele giggled.)

PHISELE: I know.

(Annoyed at her giggling, he snarled and raised his voice.)

LEFIAT: What are *you* doing here anyway?

PHISELE: Hey, keep your voice down before the others hear you! They don't know I'm here yet.

LEFIAT: Eh?

(She gave him a loving smile.)

PHISELE: I stowed away so I could be with you, you see?

LEFIAT: What?

(Realising what she was saying, his hair immediately stood on end.)

LEFIAT: Oh crap!!!

(In something of a panic, he shuddered all over and flapped erratically.)

LEFIAT: But... how did you even get here?

(She giggled.)

PHISELE: I hid in the rear compartment of the carriage then I sneaked on when you weren't looking!

LEFIAT: You mean... you've been with us since Tifaeris???

PHISELE: Wow, you figured that out all by yourself?

(He then stopped panicking and beamed proudly.)

LEFIAT: I did!

PHISELE: Gimme a hug, Luffy-lops!

(Not about to entertain the idea, even for a moment, he stepped back and waved her away.)

LEFIAT: No way!

PHISELE: Please!!! I did come all this way. And *did* I make all that effort to sneak on board without anyone noticing.

(Having a mental age not dissimilar to Phisele, Lefiat somehow saw logic in her point.)

LEFIAT: Well, you got me there!

(As soon as he began the process of opening his arms, Phisele swiftly wrapped herself around his gangly midriff and placed her head on his stomach.)

PHISELE: I love you!

LEFIAT: Uh-oh!

(Realising he'd have to do something to get rid of her before the others spotted her, he swiftly tried to reason with her.)

LEFIAT: Um, you should swim back ashore. You'll get in trouble!

PHISELE: Nope!

LEFIAT: Well... you can't stay here!

PHISELE: Can!

LEFIAT: Damn, you're good at this!

(He scratched his head.)

LEFIAT: So *when* did you sneak on here? I mean how come nobody saw you?

PHISELE: I sneaked up the gangplank when Kritz and that ugly woman were talking! (Lefiat looked most offended.)

LEFIAT: Hey, that ugly woman is my wife!

(Phisele sighed but didn't remove her head from his stomach for even a moment.)

LEFIAT: Wait a minute... when they were talking I thought I wasn't coming on this trip. It was only supposed to be Kritz, Flaxley, Derek and Bonson!

(Phisele shuddered.)

PHISELE: Derek's green!

LEFIAT: Yeah, he's from the planet Tryme 23!

PHISELE: 17!

LEFIAT: Yeah.

(She looked up into his eyes and exhaled.)

PHISELE: So when I got on the ship to be with you, you weren't supposed to be getting on?

LEFIAT: Um... yeah! They asked me just before we set sail!

(She exhaled again and squeezed him tighter.)

PHISELE: Wow, you know what that means?

(Lefiat sighed.)

LEFIAT: I rarely know what anything means!

PHISELE: It means we're meant to be together!

(Lefiat's eyes bulged and his hair almost stood on end again.)

LEFIAT: Eh?

PHISELE: Well think about it, you weren't supposed to be here, but once I got on the ship you came!

LEFIAT: That aint what it means!!!

PHISELE: It's fate, Lefiat! We're going to get married! And have lots of wickle Luffy-lops!

LEFIAT: No!!! I'd get arrested and Kritz would kill me!!!

(He then paused and scratched his head.)

LEFIAT: Come to think of it, Mandika wouldn't be too pleased either!

PHISELE: Mandika's ugly!

(She looked up to him again.)

PHISELE: Do you think I'm pretty?

LEFIAT: Um... yeah, now let go of me!

(Eager to run away, he struggled to make her release her grip.)

LEFIAT: Wow, you're strong!

PHISELE: I know! I might beat Mandika up!

LEFIAT: Eh? Oh no.

(Just to make his day complete, Mandika then paced up behind him from the other side of the crates. Thankfully, the crates blocked her view of Phisele.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat?

(Lefiat almost had a heart attack and spun to face her, making Phisele spin with him.)

PHISELE: Wee!!!

LEFIAT: Mandika? Oh god no!

(Mandika scowled.)

MANDIKA: Hey, I had come to apologise but if that's what you're going to be like...

(Just then, Phisele jumped on a crate in front of her.)

PHISELE: Hi, poo-poo face!

(Taken by surprise, Mandika jumped back and screamed at the top of her lungs. Her anguished cries caused Derek, Kritz, Flaxley and Bonson to all rush over to her assistance.)

MANDIKA: What the hell is she doing here???

LEFIAT: Um...

KRITZ: Phisele?

PHISELE: Hey, Kritz!

(With a disgusted look on her brow, Mandika turned to face those who'd come to assist her.)

MANDIKA: He only smuggled her on board didn't he???

LEFIAT: Eh?

(At once, Lefiat received dagger stares from all those around him.)

LEFIAT: I didn't do anything!

MANDIKA: No? Then why were you hiding here?

(She started to sob.)

MANDIKA: We've been married for a couple of days and already he's having an affair?

LEFIAT: Eh? Affair? But, she's nine years old!

(Looking most insulted, Phisele stamped on his foot.)

PHISELE: I'm ten!

MANDIKA: And that makes it okay does it?

(Looking likely to explode any second now, Kritz folded her arms and tapped her fingers.)

KRITZ: Lefiat! You've got five seconds to explain!

LEFIAT: But...

KRITZ: Four seconds!!!

LEFIAT: I didn't do it!!!

(Phisele grinned.)

PHISELE: Don't be mad, Kritz!

KRITZ: Two Seconds!!!

LEFIAT: What happened to three?

KRITZ: One!

(Before she could reach zero, however, a terrified Lefiat sprinted away for all he was worth. Knowing he'd be easy to catch with just the ship's deck to run on, she slowly turned and watched him.)

KRITZ: He won't get far!

(Much to her surprise, however, Lefiat was so terrified, he raced up to the edge and leapt the side of the ship like an Olympic hurdler. As soon as they heard the splash, Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Leave it to me! Get them to stop the ship!

(With that, he leapt overboard to rescue him. Knowing Lefiat couldn't swim and wanting to punish him for bringing Phisele, he figured he had no choice.)

(Once Lefiat had been successfully retrieved from the sea, the voyage began again. Luckily for him Phisele had explained how she came to be on the ship and how Lefiat was innocent of all charges. She'd also explained how Lefiat and herself were destined to be together forever, much to Mandika's infuriation.

As Lefiat shivered, wrapped in a towel, they all sat together on the deck, Phisele on Kritz's knee as they discussed the dilemma.)

FLAXLEY: Well, it looks like you're a very resourceful young lady, Phisele!

MANDIKA: Not to mention a pain in the arse!

(Phisele scowled at her.)

PHISELE: Belt up, you old boot! You don't deserve Lefiat!

BONSON: Well... nobody does! Not even rapists and serial killers deserve that!

LEFIAT: Hey!

PHISELE: Leave him alone, baldy!

(Bonson was most taken aback.)

BONSON: Good god! Did you see that?

DEREK: We *heard* it!

BONSON: But did you see it?

(He looked at Kritz.)

BONSON: She pulled the same angry face you do! She's turning out like a mini you!

KRITZ: You reckon?

BONSON: Well, except you'd never have a crush on a tit like Lefiat, obviously.

Other than that, yes!

FLAXLEY: Look chaps, it's all very well knowing how she got here and why, but what are we going to do with her?

(Mandika scowled.)

MANDIKA: Do they still make stowaways walk the plank?

DEREK: Let it go, Mandika! She's just a kid!

PHISELE: I'm not a kid! I'm taller than *you*!

DEREK: A rude one at that!

KRITZ: Listen, Phisele! Your mum is going to be going crazy not knowing where you are!

(Phisele chuckled.)

PHISELE: She knows I'm with you!

KRITZ: What?

PHISELE: I said bye to you and ran in...

KRITZ: I remember.

PHISELE: Well, I told her you said I could come. So she let me!

(Looking towards the back of the ship, Flaxley grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Good thing too, we've gone too far to turn back now!

PHISELE: So can I stay?

(Kritz nodded.)

KRITZ: Yeah, I guess so. But behave and don't get in anybody's way!

(Phisele gave her a cute smile then hugged her lovingly.)

PHISELE: I won't! I'll be a good girl, I promise.

(As she hung off of Kritz's neck innocently, Phisele then gave Mandika a stealthy, murderous glance. Mandika shuddered; such was the evil look in the child's eyes.)

MANDIKA: She's the devil's spawn!

KRITZ: Hey, be nice!

(And so, the ship had a new passenger; one that terrified the life out of Lefiat and Mandika. Lefiat knew he'd be living in fear of Phisele trying to snuggle up to him every five minutes, giving Mandika the wrong idea. And Mandika, having witnessed the unnaturally strong, miniature version of Kritz, physically outmuscle her former bodyguard, Shaka, the day before, would be in genuine fear of being thrown overboard or beaten.

With the debate over what to do with her settled, they all set about dispersing to various parts of the deck once again. Bonson and Derek went to see if they could spot some fish, Mandika and Lefiat went to tremble in the corner and Flaxley and Kritz took a seat on deck with Phisele sitting between them. The plan was to discuss the mission. Unfortunately, Phisele had a lot of questions.)

FLAXLEY: So, if we see land, the likelihood is that Croxton's shipwrecked on it. If we don't... well how far should we go before we stop looking? That's the question.

PHISELE: Where are we going?

(Kritz gave her a smile.)

KRITZ: We're not actually sure, sweetheart! Just... west... because there might be

land that way. Sanetza or something.

PHISELE: Why?

KRITZ: Because... we're just looking in case some people we know are out there!

(Phisele nodded.)

PHISELE: Are they mermaids?

FLAXLEY: Eh?

PHISELE: Well, they live in the sea!

FLAXLEY: No. Kritz just told you, we think there might be land out there!

PHISELE: Oh!

FLAXLEY: Anyway...

PHISELE: Can I have something to eat?

(Just then, before Flaxley could even begin to reply to her, a crewman burst from the cabin doors and rushed to the side of the ship, yelling out a warning as he did so.)

CREWMAN: Ship approaching!!! Ship approaching!!! It's catching fast!

(Flaxley and Kritz looked to one another.)

FLAXLEY: A ship?

KRITZ: So much for this being the *fastest* ship!

FLAXLEY: Indeed.

(With that, they raced over to the edge of the ship to join the crewman in staring down at an approaching oriental sampan. The tiny little craft was indeed very fast. As they watched the three-manned boat pull alongside them, Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: That's not a ship. It's a teeny weeny boat!

CREWMAN: Even so. Floaty thing approaching!!!

(Flaxley gave him a sideways glance then looked back down at the sampan, immediately performing a double take as soon as his eyes caught sight of one the crew members.)

FLAXLEY: Is this a wind-up? It's... him!

(Kritz squinted down at the sampan, 50 feet below them, as one of the 3 man crew stepped up onto its raised front edge and held his arms aloft.)

KRITZ: He *does* look like... nah, can't be!

(The crewman bit his nails nervously.)

CREWMAN: What should I do?

(Flaxley gave him a condescending glance.)

FLAXLEY: Well, you can start by pulling yourself together!

CREWMAN: Huh?

FLAXLEY: Keep going, I'll handle this!

CREWMAN: Oh, okay! And, um... the cabin master says your quarters are ready!

FLAXLEY: Righto!

(As the crewman left, Flaxley looked down at the sampan again. The oriental man at the front was now standing akimbo, staring back hatefully. With a roll of his eyes Flaxley yelled down to him.)

FLAXLEY: Is that all you're going to do? If so, I'm going to sit back down with my wife!

(In a cocky and menacing manner, the oriental man yelled back in a thick Tang Yul accent.)

CHUNG LEE: So, at last we meet, Flaxley! I am...

FLAXLEY: Yeah I know, you're Dim Dum junior! You look just like your halfwit brother!

(Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: It's 'Dim Lee', dear!

(Flaxley gave her a sideways glance.)

FLAXLEY: That's what I said!

(He then looked back towards the plucky oriental gentleman and yelled.)

FLAXLEY: Did you want something?

(Remaining in his cocky stance, Chung Lee tilted back his head.)

CHUNG LEE: You killed my father, the great Dim Lee! Then you wasted the life of my brilliant brother, Chum Lee! Now you will die at my hand, for I am the great Chung Lee!!!

FLAXLEY: Right! Chum Lee said he was great too! And your father was a self-pissing fool! What makes you so special, Ching?

CHUNG LEE: Chung! What makes me so special is that I, I will be the one to vanquish you and settle the score for the Lee dynasty!

FLAXLEY: Well okay, but how did you find us out here?

CHUNG LEE: I was fortunate enough to spot you in Leathrock. I did not bring shame on my name by attacking you there in front of innocent bystanders, but now we are here on the ocean wave. I am making my move!

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Well, we're not stopping for you and I'm not going down there, so if you want me to kill you any time soon, you'd better get up here!

(Flaxley grinned.)

FLAXLEY: I bet he didn't think of that!

(Much to his amazement, Chung Lee nodded.)

CHUNG LEE: Then it shall be done!

(With that, he crouched down before springing up with superhuman strength in his legs and leaping up towards the side of the Colloskayak.)

KRITZ: Wow!!!

(Unfortunately for Chung Lee, he may have been superhuman, but gravity makes an exception for no man. Having looked as if he was going to leap the full fifty feet to the deck with ease, he then fell away and slammed into the side of the ship. Kritz and Flaxley glanced at one another in bewilderment then looked down at him wearing baffled expressions.)

FLAXLEY: You okay down there?

(Chung Lee looked up and whimpered.)

CHUNG LEE: Do I look okay to you?

(With that, he slid away then fell into the sea.)

KRITZ: Oh dear!

(As the Colloskayak thundered onwards, they watched on with interest as the two remaining sampan crewmen slowed and tried to turn, only for a shark to appear from beneath the ocean surface and bite Chung Lee in two.)

KRITZ: Ooh!

FLAXLEY: Ouch!

KRITZ: That had to hurt!

(Flaxley shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Oh well! The only good Lee is a dead one! Let's check out our cabin!

KRITZ: Oh, good idea!

(And with that, they headed inside to inspect their quarters. A move already made by Bonson, Mandika, Lefiat, Derek and Phisele. Naturally, Phisele had merely been following Lefiat. Quite where she was going to sleep, they didn't know.

Chung Lee's futile attempt to challenge Flaxley hardly registered on their minds and

within minutes, he was forgotten.)

(With nothing but clear seas ahead for the time being, the six allies and their uninvited guest were now confronted with the challenge of finding a way to keep themselves occupied, just to stop themselves from going stir crazy. Travelling on the high seas could be tedious even on a good day with nothing to do and only an endless expanse of blue on the horizon to look at. Even when surrounded by close friends, being stuck upon a lonely ship in a never-ending ocean could be a maddening monotony.

Little did the allies know, however, they were not alone. Ever since they'd left the dock a second ship had been right on their tail, trying to keep just enough distance between itself and the Colloskayak as not to be spotted by the naked eye. Unfortunately for the chasing ship's crew, however, keeping up with the Colloskayak wasn't easy. Going at full speed as not to fall too far behind, the captain of the pursuing craft, Heiner, was becoming increasingly edgy. Fearing getting left behind by the awesome speed of the ship ahead, he bit his nails and looked to his second in command for advice.)

HEINER: I don't like this, Morten. What if we can't keep up? I don't like this plan! I knew we should have attacked them as soon as they left port!

(His second in command, an educated and intelligent scholar, looked quite out of place among the rest of Heiner's crew of blaggards and villains. In a calm, well spoken voice he replied confidently to his captain as he peaked over the top of his circular specs.)

MORTEN: Relax, sir!

HEINER: Relax? How can I relax? That ship is phenomenally fast!

MORTEN: Even so, sir. What good would attacking them do? The whole point of this trip is to find Commodore Croxton!

HEINER: But...

MORTEN: As I mentioned before, Heiner, we stole Sir Flaxley's chain only yesterday, and today he appears at the last known whereabouts of commodore Croxton, the bearer of the one remaining chain. Therefore I think it's safe to assume that he's in search of the commodore's chain too. Why, I don't know, maybe he found out what we're up to and plans to stop us, I can't say, but it'd be a bit of a coincidence otherwise, don't you think?

(He nodded.)

MORTON: Anyway, I digress. My point is, if we follow Sir Flaxley he'll lead us to our man. If we attack him and kill him now then we'll never find the commodore. Unless you'd like to try asking the president again, what with Leathrock being on high alert now!

(Heiner sighed.)

HEINER: Yes, yes, you're right. No attack then. But what if we lose them? That ship has speeds we can't even begin to think of reaching!

(Morten gave him a knowing glance and smiled.)

MORTEN: What if we lose them, you say? Well, that's easy.

HEINER: It is?

MORTEN: It is. I mean, how did you find out about the three chains that power the sceptre of the gods in the first place?

(Heiner gave him a distrusting glance.)

HEINER: Why?

MORTEN: Humour me!

HEINER: I'm in no mood to tell you jokes!

MORTEN: No, I mean tell me and you'll see what I'm getting at!

(Heiner looked uncertain.)

HEINER: Well, okay. I used to work for a wise elder, I was his assistant. He told me allsorts of facts and details about the mystic forces behind our world. I found this one too good to resist. So, I set about stealing the sceptre of the gods from where he told me it was hidden, and now I'm after the chains that power it.

(He exhaled joyfully.)

HEINER: With a key empowered by myself, I could rule... no, I could own the entire planet!

MORTEN: And therein lies your answer!

(Heiner looked baffled.)

HEINER: It does?

(Morten nodded.)

MORTEN: Yes. If we lose them or they slip out of sight, we can use all the wonderful things the elder taught you to track him down!

(With that, Morten bit his lip and looked away innocently, leaving Heiner to contemplate what he'd said.)

HEINER: So... hmm... wait a minute! I still haven't got a clue what you're getting at!

(Looking furious, he paced up to Morten and scowled.)

HEINER: That was useless advice! You don't know what we'll do either do you?

(Morten sighed.)

MORTEN: I admit it. I thought you'd tell me something I could use but you didn't! If we lose them we're screwed.

HEINER: Well thanks a bunch!

MORTEN: Well there is *one* simple answer, sir!

(He gave him a sceptical glance.)

HEINER: Oh really?

MORTEN: Yes! Don't lose them!

(When the sun descended over the horizon that evening, it revealed a thousand stars, sparkling in the sky above and a glorious moon that reflected a stream of light onto the shimmering sea. On a bright, calm night, the sights in and around the ocean were a joy to behold. On board the Colloskayak, Bonson in particular was enjoying the view from the dining hall window. Absorbing every aspect of nature's darkened glory, he mused to himself calmly. Seated around the table with him, Lefiat and Mandika tried to share an intimate conversation only for Phisele to keep interrupting. At the other end of the table, Flaxley and Kritz were desperately trying to explain to Derek how the world couldn't possibly be round like he thought. Shutting out the conversations, Bonson sighed and leant forward to admire the view once more, the cabin lanterns reflecting brightly off of his bald pate and he did so.)

DEREK: Flaxley, I came here from space. I've seen this planet from a distance, and trust me, it's round!

FLAXLEY: Derek, that's ridiculous!

KRITZ: Yeah! If it was round we'd slide off!

DEREK: No! That's where gravity comes in. I already explained gravity to you once!

FLAXLEY: Yes, and that was just plain silly!

(Derek looked most exasperated.)

DEREK: I can't believe you're disputing me. I've seen the whole planet. The whole thing! It's a round object I tell you!

KRITZ: Maybe it just *looked* round!

DEREK: What?

KRITZ: Well like you said, you only saw it from a distance!

DEREK: But...

FLAXLEY: She's right! From close up, as in from here, you can quite clearly see it's flat!

(Not knowing what else he could say to convince them, Derek spammed his forehead.)

DEREK: I give up!

(Having been distracted from his silent vigil of the sea, Bonson leant his head towards them.)

BONSON: To be honest with you, if Derek says it's round then it probably is!

DEREK: Thank you, Bonson!

BONSON: Although if that's the case, it leaves us with more questions than answers!

KRITZ: Exactly, like why we haven't fallen off!

DEREK: I already explained...

KRITZ: Yeah, gravity...

(She scoffed.)

KRITZ: A likely story!

BONSON: Well all that matters is that it appears flat. Who cares if it is or it isn't?

As long as we can drink our ale and ogle nice boobs, who gives a flying cuddyfinkles arse what shape the planet is?

(Derek chuckled.)

DEREK: Well there is that!

KRITZ: I still say it's flat!

(Bonson raised an indignant eyebrow.)

BONSON: And I still don't give a toss!

(He then turned to Mandika.)

BONSON: Speaking of flat, how you holding up there, Mandika?

(Having been chastising Lefiat for the last five minutes after he deliberately and maliciously talked to Phisele, Mandika was in no mood for the old man's meanness.)

MANDIKA: What did you say?

BONSON: I was asking how you were!

(She scowled.)

MANDIKA: I'm fine!!! And who are you calling flat???

(She pushed her breasts together and sneered.)

MANDIKA: See?

(Bonson frowned and contorted his head away.)

BONSON: Please, Mandika.

DEREK: I thought you liked ogling boobies, Bonson?

BONSON: Not hers I don't!

MANDIKA: Well shut up then! I'm not flat. How dare you?

BONSON: Flat?

(He gave a nod of concession.)

BONSON: Sorry, Mandika. I meant fat!

(As Bonson chuckled to himself, Kritz rolled her eyes sarcastically.)

KRITZ: Yes, Bonson. We were discussing how the world is fat.

BONSON: Hey! I don't go dissecting *your* every comment!

KRITZ: Well your every comment is an insult!

FLAXLEY: And that wasn't even a good one!

BONSON: Oh no?

(He gestured with his head towards where Mandika was glaring at him with flared nostrils.)

BONSON: I seem to have struck a nerve, wouldn't you say?

(Dismayed by the old man's joy at having upset her, everyone was most amused when she fought back with matching vigour.)

MANDIKA: You of all people shouldn't be dissing people on the grounds of aesthetics, Bonson!

(Annoyingly for her, however, Lefiat chose to aid her retaliation.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, your crap at athletics! You've only got to jog 10 feet and you're knackered!

(Mandika glared at him.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat! If I ever get desperate enough to need your help, I'll call you okay? Until then shut your face and sit still!

(As Lefiat pouted, Mandika turned to Bonson and continued.)

MANDIKA: Where was I?

(Bonson looked furious.)

BONSON: You were about to apologise!

MANDIKA: Like hell I was! I'm not flat and I'm certainly not fat. I'm young, I'm slim, I'm pretty and what's more, I'm a queen! You on the other hand are wrinkled, overweight and bald.

BONSON: Why you little...

MANDIKA: Shut it! You've got no right to be mean, especially when it comes to looks!

(Derek chuckled.)

DEREK: Or athletics!

MANDIKA: Now let that be an end to it! I can't keep looking at you, Bonson; the lantern's reflecting off your head and dazzling me!

(With that she turned and faced Lefiat, leaving Bonson gaping speechlessly behind her.)

MANDIKA: That told...

(Her face then dropped.)

MANDIKA: Him.

(Much to her disgust, Phisele was patting Lefiat's saddened head.)

PHISELE: There, there. Don't be sad, Luffy-lops!

LEFIAT: Leave me alone, you just make her worse!

PHISELE: Aw...

(Seeing Mandika was about to explode, Kritz rolled her eyes.)

KRITZ: Phisele, come here! I've got something we can do!

(Phisele looked horrified.)

PHISELE: But...

KRITZ: Come with me!

(As Kritz stood up, Phisele headed over to her looking back at Lefiat with saddened eyes. She desperately wanted to pet him some more but wasn't about to defy Kritz, not even for a moment. As Kritz and Phisele left the room, Mandika watched them go and sneered.)

MANDIKA: I really hate that little shit!

FLAXLEY: Lighten up, Mandika! She's not that bad, besides... she's just a kid!

MANDIKA: She's a psycho!

LEFIAT: An out of control psycho at that!

BONSON: Out of control? One word from Kritz and she left. Maybe you two are just feeble in some way!

FLAXLEY: Well, you're not wrong, Bonson! Kids can sense fear and those two have it in abundance.

(He turned to face Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: Lefiat, as long as you're afraid of Mandika, Phisele will keep thinking she can use it to come between you!

(Lefiat scoffed.)

LEFIAT: I'm not afraid of Mandika!

(He looked up at her then cowered in his seat.)

LEFIAT: I see your point!

FLAXLEY: And as for you, Mandika...

MANDIKA: What?

FLAXLEY: You're jealous of a ten year old girl! I don't know how you ever got to be that insecure but for heaven's sake get over it!

(Not about to be spoken down to in such a manner, Mandika fumed and stormed towards the door.)

MANDIKA: I won't be spoken to in such a way! Especially on my honeymoon!

Come on, Lefiat!

(Fearing reprisals if he didn't comply, Lefiat leapt up and raced after her.)

LEFIAT: Coming!!!

(As they watched them go, Flaxley, Derek and Bonson shook their heads.)

DEREK: I really thought she'd changed after we saved Guevina last summer!

BONSON: She'll never change!

FLAXLEY: That's just what I was thinking!

BONSON: Oh well, seeing as we're on a ship, who wants some rum?

(Derek and Flaxley's eyes lit up.)

DEREK: Excellent!

FLAXLEY: Grand idea, old chap!

(Bonson then froze with confusion. His eyes twitched and he slumped back in his seat.)

BONSON: Good golly!

FLAXLEY: You okay?

BONSON: I don't know! I recognise this feeling. It's familiar but distant!

DEREK: What feeling?

(Bonson looked startled.)

BONSON: Great skies of the east, I think I'm... in a good mood!!!

(He looked to Derek and beamed.)

BONSON: I forgot how that felt.

(He then exhaled merrily.)

BONSON: It's no small wonder either, really. Everything's perfect. I'm sailing away on a calm sea, I've annoyed Mandika and Lefiat and now I'm about to have a drink with the two of the three people on this planet I can actually abide.

(His face dropped as he remembered their circumstances.)

BONSON: Oh yes, Daman Siria's name's came up and the six of us are all together again... forgot about that. Perhaps I should put the good mood on hold. We're bound to end up in mortal danger before long.

FLAXLEY: Don't be so defeatist. You never know, things might run smoothly for once.

BONSON: We should be so lucky.

(He then rolled his eyes in defeat.)

BONSON: How do I keep getting myself in such messes?

(A bewildered expression then crossed his brow and he leant towards Flaxley uneasily.)

BONSON: That's a good question, actually. What *am* I doing here, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Eh?

BONSON: I remember deciding not to go on the honeymoon so I got off the carriage! And yet... I ended up in Tifaeris with you lot anyway!

(He scratched his head.)

BONSON: And... I was having a drink with Derek in Tifaeris then suddenly I was in Leathrock!

DEREK: You're missing time?

BONSON: Yes! Most if it from the looks of things!

FLAXLEY: Hmm... maybe it's because you drink too much, Bonson!

BONSON: Bollocks. I wasn't drunk when I jumped off the carriage in Guevina and I didn't drink that much in Tifaeris! There was something odd about that tequila.

(Derek and Flaxley looked to one another uneasily as Bonson shrugged with indifference.)

BONSON: Oh well, doesn't matter.

(He chuckled.)

BONSON: It'll just be interesting to see what town I wake up in tomorrow! Now let's forget all about it and enjoy that rum, shall we?

(Flaxley looked to his aging friend with a worried look on his brow. Normally Bonson wanted to be in possession of every minor detail so he could give out all the answers and belittle everyone around him. The fact he wasn't demanding an in depth account of exactly what had happened to him since he leapt from the carriage in Guevina, troubled Flaxley greatly.)

FLAXLEY: Are you okay, Bonson? Normally, you'd...

BONSON: Demand a detailed essay? Yes well, fact is, I'm here now and how I got here is irrelevant. It's been a long old day and right now, I just want a quiet drink with my friends.

FLAXLEY: Right, okay. I just wondered, that's all.

(Bonson shrugged.)

BONSON: We'll don't. I'm fine. And I'll be even better after a few swigs of rum!

(He beamed and rubbed his hands together.)

BONSON: What you waiting for then? Fetch the bottle and let's get this thing started!

(Accepting Bonson's reassurances, Flaxley offered him a smile then upped and headed for the drinks cabinet.)

FLAXLEY: I have to say, I'm looking forward to this. A glass of rum is going to go down pretty well right now.

DEREK: Indeed.

(Much to Flaxley and Derek's horror, however, as soon as Flaxley fetched half a bottle of rum and three glasses, Bonson poured some in two of the glasses before thrusting the bottle to his lips and availing himself of the rest. As they watched him, open-mouthed, he allowed the last few drops to slide down his throat before slamming the empty bottle on the table.)

BONSON: Superb!

(As he looked up and saw the dismayed looks on Derek and Flaxley's faces, he gave a dismissive shrug and looked down at the two glasses.)

BONSON: Well, if you don't want them...

(With that, he scooped the glasses up and gulped them both down in an instant.)

BONSON: Your loss!

(As he whacked the glasses onto the table, Flaxley looked to Derek.)

FLAXLEY: Tell me you saw that too!

(An equally stunned Derek shook his head.)

DEREK: I saw it, Flaxley!

BONSON: What?

(As he picked up his empty glass, Flaxley frowned.)

FLAXLEY: Thanks, Bonson! I enjoyed that!

BONSON: Hey! If you wanted it that badly, you'd have drunk it! We don't know how long we'll be at sea and there's a finite amount of rum. Drink it while you can, I say, before somebody else does. Now, if you don't mind, this old sea dog's going to enjoy forty winks.

(With that, he promptly fell asleep in his chair.)

DEREK: Shall I get another bottle?

FLAXLEY: Yeah, but let's drink it over there!

(He gestured towards the other side of the room.)

DEREK: Good idea!

(An hour or so later, as they enjoyed a quiet drink to the sounds of the ocean washing against the ship, Flaxley and Derek found themselves reminiscing about funny things that had happened to them in the past. They both found the chance to sit and chat quietly quite refreshing after what had been a hectic few days for both of them.)

FLAXLEY: Well, I panicked you see! In my head, I had to throw something and next thing I knew you were flying at the beast, cursing me for all you were worth!

(Derek chuckled.)

DEREK: In hindsight it's pretty hilarious, but at the time...

FLAXLEY: I remember! You wanted to kill me!

DEREK: Could you blame me?

(They both laughed. As they enjoyed their trip down memory lane, oblivious to anything going on around them, Kritz and Phisele returned to the room. So engrossed were they in their conversation, they didn't even notice an extremely proud looking Kritz lift Phisele onto a table. Beaming as she smiled up to the equally proud looking Phisele, Kritz held her arms in Phisele's direction then sung excitedly.)

KRITZ: Ta-da!!!

(Woken with quite a start, Bonson leapt to his feet and flapped wildly.)

BONSON: Kayfu made me do it!!!

(As Bonson rubbed his eyes and tried to remember where he was, Flaxley and Derek looked up to see Kritz showing off Phisele's new outfit.)

KRITZ: Behold. The Kritz junior range of clothing!

(She beamed.)

KRITZ: As modelled by the lovely Phisele!

(Phisele pursed her lips and put her hand behind her head while Bonson, Flaxley and Derek looked on in bewilderment. Having expected a much more enthusiastic response, Kritz frowned.)

KRITZ: Don't get too bloody excited will you?

BONSON: Good god! Now she *really* looks like you!

(He gaped at Flaxley.)

BONSON: Kritz has a mini-me!

(Sure enough, Kritz had taken in one of her skirts to fit Phisele and cut her a new top from the captain's white silk sheets that she'd stolen from his quarters. Although she'd taken extreme care to make sure Phisele's modesty was well and truly covered, Bonson couldn't help but feel dismayed.)

BONSON: That's just wrong!

(Flaxley scoffed in his direction then smiled at Phisele.)

FLAXLEY: Nonsense, she looks very pretty!

DEREK: Exactly. Very cute indeed!

BONSON: She's dressed like Kritz! That can only be wrong on a ten year old girl!

FLAXLEY: Rubbish. Ignore him, Phisele. You look nice!

DEREK: Yes, she does!

(Kritz beamed.)

KRITZ: Told you!

(Phisele leapt from the table merrily.)

PHISELE: Now me and Kritz look like twins!

(Bonson slapped his forehead.)

BONSON: I suppose it beats having two Lefiat's!

DEREK: Don't be like that, Bonson! Kritz you did a great job!

FLAXLEY: I concur!

DEREK: You made her look like a classy version of you!

KRITZ: Eh? What's that supposed to mean!

DEREK: Aw crap, that came out wrong!

(Kritz frowned.)

DEREK: I meant she looks like you but seeing as she's a kid you managed to do it without making her look like a tart!

(As Bonson started to laugh, Kritz started to turn red with rage.)

DEREK: Oh hell! If you need me, I'll be on the deck!

(With that, he took off like a rocket and raced for the door. Watching him go, Kritz shook her fist furiously.)

KRITZ: Yeah, you'd *better* run!

(And run he did. As Mandika and Lefiat returned from their prolonged sulk, they flung open the door and Derek ran straight into it, knocking himself old cold, much to Bonson's amusement. As he fell about laughing however, he looked enlightened and stood up straight.)

BONSON: A door to the face! So *that's* how I ended up unconscious in Tifaeris!!!

(Kritz looked to him and grinned.)

KRITZ: Derek has his magic, Flaxley has his swords and Mandika is absolutely lethal with doors!

(Allowing himself a brief chuckle, Flaxley stood tall and smiled.)

FLAXLEY: You know chaps, seeing as we're all here now, we should revive Derek and sit down together to drink a toast to Mandika's marriage!

(Lefiat frowned.)

LEFIAT: Yeah! Congratulations, Mandika!

FLAXLEY: Right, yes! Lefiat *and* Mandika's marriage!

BONSON: Excellent idea! Just small glasses though, don't go wasting all the rum.

(Flaxley scowled Bonson's way.)

FLAXLEY: You want it all for yourself, don't you?

BONSON: I just don't want us to run out, Flaxley. I'm being responsible.

(Flaxley gave him a distrusting glance and furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, well... I'll pour, if you don't mind.

(Having revived Derek, they soon found themselves seated in a group in comfortable chairs in one corner of the room. Having been warned by Flaxley, they all kept a tight grip on their glasses. Not knowing exactly how long they'd be at sea for or whether the rumoured lands of Sanetza really existed or not, Flaxley knew that a gathering like this would be excellent for morale, if only they could keep each other calm.

Unfortunately, with Bonson and Mandika seated around the table, that was never going to be easy. A few minutes into the gathering, however, a toast had been said and everybody seemed to be suitably relaxed and amiable. Enjoying the harmony, Lefiat smiled to himself and took a sip of his rum.)

LEFIAT: Ew!!! What's this muck?

(Bonson leant forward eagerly.)

BONSON: If you don't want it...

(Lefiat passed his glass to Bonson.)

BONSON: I always liked you, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: Could have fooled me!

BONSON: Well obviously! Kritz's babies could fool *you*, and they can't even talk yet!

LEFIAT: Hey!

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Look, never mind squabbling! Let's just enjoy the moment!

BONSON: Quite right! Shame on you, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: Eh?

BONSON: So, Flaxley? This Sanetza place, where is it?

DEREK: In the sea somewhere!

(Bonson frowned Derek's way.)

BONSON: Yes, Derek. If you see an advert saying "comedians wanted", don't bother applying!

DEREK: I wasn't joking. That's where it is!

BONSON: Okay, you obviously missed my sarcasm, so I'll be blunt. You're not funny, Derek! I meant how far is it?

DEREK: That's not what you said!

BONSON: Quiet, you! I'm talking to Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Bonson, all we know is to head west and see what's there. We don't *know* how far, that's the problem. This Swan Vesta place might not even exist and this could all be a massive waste of time!

KRITZ: It's Sanetza, darling!

(Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: That's as maybe, my love, but we're going anyway!

KRITZ: Eh?

FLAXLEY: Whether the presence of land is a certainty or not, we have to look. We *must* find my friend Croxton before the bandits do and this is our only lead.

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: Indeed we must! The last thing we need is another bloody key in existence.

KRITZ: Precisely.

(She then sighed nervously.)

KRITZ: And I know it's a long shot, but if we *do* find him, I really hope my sister's with him!

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: It's not that much of a long shot. She left on the same ship as Croxton and if Daman says Croxton is still alive then chances are, so is she.

KRITZ: Not necessarily. They may have been shipwrecked and only a few survived. Maybe my sister didn't make it. Anything could have happened.

(Bonson gave a nod of concession.)

BONSON: That's true, actually. Literally anything. She might have fallen overboard and got eaten by sharks, maybe the ship sunk and she got mangled in the rigging and drowned. In fact, being a sailor, it's quite possible she simply succumbed to a horrible debilitating disease like scurvy, beriberi or malaria. There's a whole host of horrible ways you can kick the bucket on a ship! Maybe they came under cannon fire and she had her limbs blown off, thus bleeding to death. Or perhaps she...

(As Kritz pouted at Bonson, deeply disturbed by his words, Flaxley growled furiously.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson! I think you've said enough, don't you?

(Bonson glared back at him bitterly.)

BONSON: I'd have stopped if I did!

FLAXLEY: Okay, then let me rephrase that. I think you've said too much, so shut up before I punch you in the face.

(Bonson growled at him indignantly and mumbled under his breath.)

BONSON: When I've said too much, Flaxley, you'll know.

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

BONSON: I said, fine! I'll change the subject.

(With that, he rolled his eyes then threw a dismissive hand in Kritz's direction.)

BONSON: I'm sure your sister's fine.

KRITZ: Yeah well, I was kind of hopeful too until you said all that!

BONSON: I see.

(Again, he rolled his eyes and threw her a dismissive wrist.)

BONSON: Look, just... don't worry about it. Chances are she's fine.

KRITZ: Well... I hope so.

(She then sighed and shook her head.)

KRITZ: You know, it would be nice if I found her but... what are the odds? Yeah it'd be amazing but I don't want to count my chickens!

(Having never heard anything so ridiculous in all his life, Lefiat glared coldly into Kritz's eyes.)

LEFIAT: Count your chickens? How's that gonna help???

KRITZ: What?

LEFIAT: If I'd said that you'd have all started on me!

KRITZ: Lefiat, it's a common phrase!

LEFIAT: No it's not! The only phrase even remotely like that is counting baboons! Like when you're trying to sleep!

KRITZ: That's sheep!

LEFIAT: No. Sleep!

(He looked to Mandika.)

LEFIAT: Tell her!

(Mandika just stared at him with empty eyes.)

MANDIKA: What the fuck do I see in you?

LEFIAT: Eh?

KRITZ: Aw, come on, be nice. It's not his fault he's...

(She looked sheepish and shrugged.)

KRITZ: Just be nice to him!

(A pinging sound then rose up from next to her seat. As she swung her head around she saw Phisele asleep in the seat beside her.)

KRITZ: Aw, so cute!

(She then furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: Wonder what that ping was, just now.

FLAXLEY: Phisele probably kicked the metal chair leg by accident when she dozed off.

KRITZ: Yeah, probably.

(In no mood to investigate something so trivial, she shrugged then let it go. In stark contrast to her, Derek stared to the ground to where the ping had come from and a wry smile crossed his face. There on the ground lay Phisele's skipping rope where she'd dropped it from her sleeping hand. Anxious to take it outside and play with it, Derek yawned and made his excuses.)

DEREK: Well, chaps, I'm really tired! Think I'll turn in!

(With that, he leapt from his seat, scooped up the rope and whizzed out of the door before anyone could even bid him goodnight.)

BONSON: He didn't look tired!

MANDIKA: I was just thinking that!

BONSON: Aliens!

(Bonson rolled his eyes then smirked bitterly at Flaxley before turning to face Kritz.)

BONSON: So, Kritz... this sister of yours, what's she like?

(Having spotted Bonson's smirk, Flaxley immediately knew he was up to something and snarled at him suspiciously.)

KRITZ: I don't know really. I still haven't remembered that much about her! Just bits and pieces.

BONSON: I see!

(Wearing a devious grin he then glanced vengefully into Flaxley's eyes.)

BONSON: Why don't you ask Flaxley then?

(Trying desperately to remain calm, well aware of what Bonson was trying to do, Flaxley's scoffed at him dismissively.)

FLAXLEY: I already told her everything I know!

(At once, his nostrils flared and he ran a finger across his neck in a gesture to stop Bonson talking.)

KRITZ: Yeah, despite them being school friends, he didn't really know her that well at all, it seems.

BONSON: Well that's odd. Derek told *me* that Flaxley knew her *intimately* as a teenager!

(Flaxley's hair immediately stood on end.)

FLAXLEY: I told him that in confidence!!!

(He looked mortified and clammed up.)

FLAXLEY: Whoops.

KRITZ: Wait? What... what are you saying?

(Bonson just smirked and climbed to his feet, straightening his tie as he did so.)

BONSON: Oh no, was the fact you shagged Kassamandra supposed to be a secret, Flaxley? My bad.

(As Flaxley snarled at him furiously, Bonson sneered arrogantly back and pulled the

lapels of his jacket taut.)

BONSON: *Now* I've said too much, Flaxley! I told you you'd know when.

(With that, he turned and headed for the door.)

BONSON: On which note, I think I'll retire my quarters. Night all!

(He then mumbled bitterly under his breath.)

BONSON: Nobody tells *me* to shut up and gets away with it!

(As Bonson continued on, Flaxley tried to climb from his chair to throttle him only for Kritz to pull him back down again and glare at him.)

KRITZ: Well, Flaxley???

(Looking utterly livid, Flaxley immediately tried to get up again.)

FLAXLEY: I will be when I've killed that old git!

(Again, Kritz pulled him down, this time she sounded hurt rather than angry.)

KRITZ: If there's something you haven't told me, Flaxley, then for fuck sake you'd better do it now, or I swear I'll never speak to you ever again!

(As Bonson headed out of the door chuckling to himself, Lefiat and Mandika looked to one another. With Kritz fuming and Flaxley cowering in his seat, this seemed like an excellent time to make their exit. Something they did with little subtlety or hesitation.)

(Left behind with Phisele sleeping at his side, Flaxley stared with fear into Kritz's eyes. He knew he had some explaining to do but he didn't have any idea how or where to even begin.)

KRITZ: Well?

FLAXLEY: Um...

KRITZ: Fuck sake, just tell me! Is it true?

(Flaxley bit his lip uneasily and offered her a nervous nod.)

KRITZ: So it is.

(She hung her head and looked to the floor.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz, I didn't tell you before 'cause you didn't remember her and it didn't make any sense to bring it up and upset you!

(Gritting her teeth and staring at the floor, Kritz replied coldly.)

KRITZ: You slept with my sister and didn't bother to tell me, Flaxley. How do you think that makes me feel?

FLAXLEY: Well, in my defence, it's hardly the easiest thing to slip into a conversation! Picture it. Cup of tea, Kritz? Oh, by the way, I shagged your sister once.

KRITZ: Wow. That's your defence, is it? I hate to think what you'd say if you were *trying* to piss me off!

FLAXLEY: Kritz, she was just a conquest in my teens. It was a long time ago.

KRITZ: That's not the point! She was my sister! Before you met me, you were intimate with my own flesh blood! I mean, is that why you like me? Because I remind you of her?

FLAXLEY: No! Good god, no! Look... when we first met, you mentioned the name Balleventios and I remembered Kassy, yes, true. I wasn't into *you* because of *her* though. You don't remind me of her at all, you're nothing like her. So please don't go thinking I only like you because of her!

KRITZ: How can I not?

FLAXLEY: Because it's the truth. I wouldn't lie to you, my love. I may have omitted a few things, but only because what happened between Kassy and I doesn't

matter!

KRITZ: Doesn't matter?

FLAXLEY: We were kids, Kritz!

KRITZ: You still should have told me!

FLAXLEY: No I shouldn't!

(He mumbled under his breath.)

FLAXLEY: And Derek definitely shouldn't have told Bonson!

KRITZ: What?

FLAXLEY: You see... Kritz, I love *you*! Kassy is irrelevant! That why I never told you anything. Telling you I once knew your sister intimately just seemed wrong to me. It feels like something you'd only say to hurt someone. I don't want to hurt *you*! Ever! I do however, want to hurt Bonson; very much so, in fact!

(Kritz sighed and looked into his eyes.)

KRITZ: Okay, I get it. You didn't say anything because you didn't want to hurt me and she meant nothing to you anyway!

FLAXLEY: Hey, that sounds like I used her, I didn't! The memory of being with her *intimately* means nothing to me. I was devastated when I heard she'd been killed.

She was a friend, but there was nothing romantic about my feelings for her. The only woman I've ever loved or ever *will* love is you, Kritzeveltia!

KRITZ: You promise?

FLAXLEY: I swear on Bonson's life.

(Accepting Flaxley's reasoning, Kritz looked into his eyes and smiled softly.)

KRITZ: Fair enough. Let's go and have sex then just to confirm how we feel about one another! We'll come back and get Phisele when we're done!

(Flaxley sighed as if seriously contemplating her proposal.)

FLAXLEY: Yes... I think affirming our love for one another with sexual relations would definitely be the right thing to do at this point.

(With that, they upped and hurried from the room, hand in hand, giggling fiendishly all the way.)

(Up on the deck at this point, Derek was having a fantastic time. With a wide smile on his little green face, he commentated to himself as he joyfully made full use of Phisele's skipping rope. Extremely delighted with his skilful skipping he validated himself with every leap, safe in the knowledge that the others were all in the dining hall and couldn't see him playing merrily in the moonlight.)

DEREK: Oh and it's another majestic leap by Derek, now can he do the special move?

(With that, he threw up the ropes and jumped around in a full circle before catching the ropes and continuing to skip.)

DEREK: He can!!! And surely now the three foot tall green alien from the planet Tryme 17 stands on the verge of being crowned world champion!!!

(He beamed.)

DEREK: He just needs to complete the speed section now and the trophy is his!!!

(Looking delighted with himself, he stepped up the pace, spinning the ropes at a crazy pace.)

DEREK: Oh... and look at him go! Can anyone beat Derek? I don't think so!!!

(Getting extremely carried away he then mimicked the sound of a crowd going wild with delight.)

DEREK: And the crowd go crazy! They know they've seen a champion at work

today!

(Unfortunately for Derek, he'd been so engrossed in his fantasy, he hadn't noticed a shadow appear next to him a few minutes earlier. As he continued to commentate on his own actions, however, he heard a voice that scared him to death. Of all the people to catch him in the act, it was Bonson.)

BONSON: And surely now, the crowd will roar with laughter when they hear about Derek; world skipping champion!!!

(Chilled to the bone, Derek literally screamed and threw the skipping rope into the sea. Looking tortured, he turned to face Bonson and whimpered.)

DEREK: How long were you standing there???

(Bonson grinned.)

BONSON: Long enough to know you'll *never* live this one down! I only came out here for a breath of fresh air before bed and I'm so glad I did. You wait until the others hear about this.

(Derek gaped. Having been caught skipping once before, he knew only too well how much he'd be berated when Bonson told the others.)

DEREK: Bonson, I beg you!!!

BONSON: Go on then.

DEREK: What?

(Derek frowned.)

DEREK: I'm not literally going to beg you!

BONSON: Fair enough! It wouldn't do any good anyway; if you think I'm going to keep this one to myself you've got another thing coming!

DEREK: But...

BONSON: Sorry, old boy...

(Bonson turned to go, mimicking Derek's commentary as he did so.)

BONSON: And Bonson turns brilliantly, now he's going to make his way to tell the others...

(Looking flustered, Derek waved his fist.)

DEREK: I'll tell everyone your secret!!!

(Bonson froze to the spot looking utterly mortified.)

BONSON: You wouldn't???

(Derek nodded desperately as Bonson slowly turned back to face him.)

DEREK: I would! Don't make me do it!

BONSON: But... Derek, I trusted you, surely you just wouldn't!

(Derek pointed his shaking, flustered finger his way.)

DEREK: Don't push me, man. I'm an alien on the edge!

(Bonson held his hands up and trembled.)

BONSON: Okay! I won't say a word!

(Derek pointed at him and raised his voice, sounding more and more insane.)

DEREK: You've gotta promise me, Bonson! Or I'll come for you!!!

BONSON: I promise! Please, just let me go!

(Just then, there was a loud bang that rocked the whole ship.)

BONSON: What the fuck???

(They looked all about themselves when a crewman rushed from out of the cabin doors.)

CREWMAN: Pirates!!! Coming straight at us!

(With that, he raced to the edge of the ship and dived into the sea.)

BONSON: Right... bye!

DEREK: Pirates?

BONSON: Hmm... yes, better get Flaxley!
(With that, they raced back inside through the cabin doors.)

Moments later, Flaxley rushed out on to the darkened deck followed by Bonson, Derek and Kritz. Flaxley looked extremely peeved.)

BONSON: Look, we didn't know!

FLAXLEY: Even so, you should knock!

DEREK: It was an emergency!

BONSON: Exactly, and anyway, we've all seen Kritz's beaver a million times, it's not like it was anything new. After a while you get used to it!

KRITZ: Hey!!!

BONSON: Well you do!

KRITZ: Yeah okay!

FLAXLEY: Never mind that! Where are these pirates?

(At this point, Mandika, Lefiat and Phisele all rushed onto the deck.)

MANDIKA: What was that bang?

PHISELE: It woke me up!

BONSON: Pirates, we think!

LEFIAT: Pirates? Good thing we came to help!

(Flaxley was sceptical.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, Lefiat!

(With that, he paced up to the front of the ship.)

FLAXLEY: Well shiver my timbers!

(Sure enough, a large wooden vessel was sailing towards them. You could barely make out the flag in the darkness but it appeared to be a skull and crossbones. As he squinted at it, Flaxley drew his sword.)

FLAXLEY: Now what?

(As his comrades lined up behind him, Derek looked thoughtful.)

DEREK: Well that sword won't be any use if they don't come aboard!

BONSON: Do we have cannons?

LEFIAT: What are cannons?

(The loud bang they'd heard earlier echoed across the sky once more.)

BONSON: Those are cannons!

(As a cannonball whizzed overhead, Flaxley turned to Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: Does this ship have cannons?

BONSON: I don't bloody know, do I?

FLAXLEY: Then find out!!!

BONSON: Right!

(He turned to Lefiat.)

BONSON: Lefiat, find out if we have cannons!

LEFIAT: But, he told you...

FLAXLEY: Somebody!!!

(Thankfully, the ship's captain appeared on the scene in a blind panic.)

CAPTAIN: We've got no cannons! We didn't think there'd be traffic out here, especially not pirates!

FLAXLEY: Well that makes sense. I mean, what with us going off into uncharted waters and everything, the last thing anyone would expect us to bring is a cannon!

CAPTAIN: Exactly!

FLAXLEY: I was being sarcastic!!!

(He stared to the advancing ship.)

FLAXLEY: Okay chaps, looks like magic is the only way!

(He grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: That leaves me rather redundant!

(Annoyed that his only spell was weak fire spell for lighting a stove, he clenched an angry fist.)

FLAXLEY: Fire or lightning?

(Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: I guess my H2O is a little redundant at this point!

MANDIKA: And my ice!

(They shared a smile.)

MANDIKA: Come on, we can paint each other's nails instead!

KRITZ: Cool!

(With that, they both went back inside.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz? Nails before fighting? Since when?

BONSON: She's gone, Flaxley.

PHISELE: Don't worry; *I'll* take her place!

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Good grief!

(As the enemy ship gained closer, it fired another cannonball, this time it whacked into the side of the Colloskayak, rocking it violently. Having been shook to the floor, Phisele screamed and ran back inside.)

BONSON: That's better! I hate children!

FLAXLEY: We can't wait any longer chaps! Fire magic, okay?

DEREK: Fire?

FLAXLEY: Or lightning! Just start shooting the bloody thing before it fires again!!!

(As Flaxley stood tall and sneered at the advancing ship, Bonson, Lefiat and Derek leapt into action. Wearing a determined sneer, Derek aimed strategic streaks of lightning at the mast and various points along what he could make out of the deck in the darkness. Not as adept as Derek, Bonson gritted his teeth and desperately tried to muster enough force to send a fireball far enough to set alight to the sail. Lefiat for his part, being far from adept at magic, only managed to fire his lightning magic into the sea and blew himself ten feet into the air. As he lay unconscious behind them, Flaxley implored his men to try again.)

FLAXLEY: Come on, chaps, we're relying on you!!!

(As another cannonball crashed into the hull, Flaxley grimaced. He knew they couldn't keep taking hits like this and tried desperately to think of another course of action.)

FLAXLEY: Captain?

CAPTAIN: Yes?

FLAXLEY: If this thing's so fast, I say full speed ahead! We'll get pummelled if we stay here!

CAPTAIN: Aye, aye!

FLAXLEY: I'd have thought that'd have been obvious though!

(The captain shrugged.)

CAPTAIN: Not to me, I'm not a very good captain!

FLAXLEY: Great!

CAPTAIN: In my defence though, that ship was in our path and we couldn't just ram it could we?

FLAXLEY: Point taken, now go!!!

(As the captain rushed away, Flaxley turned and watched Bonson and Derek fire their

magic with increasing ferocity. Alas, they were still making little impact.)

FLAXLEY: You can do it, chaps!

(With every failure to stop the pirates, their ship was gaining ever closer. Before long they could see the angry eyes of the ship's dirty faced crew standing in readiness to leap onto the Colloskayak and attack. Although, he was keen for that not to happen, Flaxley knew he'd be back in the game if the pirates boarded their ship.)

FLAXLEY: We're going to need Kritz, I think!

(Looking frustrated that his magic hadn't had a better effect, Derek snarled.)

DEREK: If only we had cannons!

(As soon as he said it, a cannon fired from the pirate ship. Immediately, Derek spun in its direction and much to his horror, saw the cannonball flying straight at him.)

DEREK: Holy horseshit!!!

(Desperately, he flung himself to the ground as the cannon ball whizzed over his head, missing him by inches. Unfortunately, Flaxley had been standing directly behind him, trying to encourage Bonson and hadn't seen the cannonball coming. As soon as Derek hit the ground, Flaxley caught sight of him in the corner of his eye and turned just in time for the cannon ball to fly into his midriff. Looking back, Derek bellowed.)

DEREK: No!!!

(Much to Derek's amazement, Flaxley staggered back a few feet and then stood there looking puzzled with the cannonball in his hands. Bonson gaped.)

BONSON: He... he caught it!!!

DEREK: Well I never...

(As he stood there looking perplexed, a fiendish look enveloped Flaxley's brow.)

FLAXLEY: So, no cannons eh?

(As the pirate ship edged nearer they could hear the merciless screams of the crew, baiting for their blood. Unperturbed, Flaxley smirked and looked across to Derek, then to Bonson.)

FLAXLEY: If it's cannons you want, get a load of this!!!

(With that, he charged forth, holding the cannonball in his right hand like a cricket ball. Wearing a venomous sneer he raced up to the edge and launched it with all his might from the side of the ship. Alas, for all his posturing, Flaxley's bark was much worse than his bite and Bonson and Derek could only gape as they watched the cannonball fall into the sea a few feet in front of them.)

BONSON: You throw like a girl!

DEREK: Yeah, that was feeble!

(Flaxley fumed.)

FLAXLEY: It got caught in my gauntlet!!!

BONSON: Yes, of course it did!

DEREK: Well, looks like we have to fight then!

BONSON: Crap! I'm not good at that!

(Seeing the pirates only twenty or so feet away from being able to board them, Flaxley sighed.)

FLAXLEY: We did our best...

(Just then, another cannonball whizzed towards them. Bonson and Derek immediately ducked but Flaxley grimaced angrily and inexplicably plucked it out of the sky with one hand.)

BONSON: Wow!

DEREK: He certainly doesn't catch like a girl!

(Looking furious at the audacity of the pirates to fire at him, Flaxley snarled and

threw the cannonball back at their ship.)

FLAXLEY: Fire at me while I'm talking!!!

(As the cannonball thudded into the hull of the pirate ship, just below sea level, Bonson did a double take.)

BONSON: Good shot, sir!!!

FLAXLEY: What?

(Sure enough, the perfectly placed hole in the pirates hull was letting water through at such a rate it was smashing the wood around it to create an even bigger hole.)

DEREK: Excellent!

(Such was the devastating effect of the cannonball Flaxley had thrown, the pirate ship tilted in a matter of moments. As all kinds of panic broke out on its decks, Flaxley, Bonson and Derek watched on, open-mouthed and motionless. With screams and howls from her condemned men, it took the ship only 60 seconds to sink beneath the waves, leaving its desperate crew at the mercy of the sea. As he watched them drown in the dark sea, Flaxley nodded to himself, satisfied with his work. Before he could comment on his achievement however, the captain reappeared and raced up to him.)

CAPTAIN: What was I supposed to be doing again?

(Feeling nothing but contempt for the man, Flaxley ignored him and paced alongside Bonson as he scoffed at the drowning pirates.)

FLAXLEY: Come on, I think we deserve a night cap!

(Bonson gave him a sideways glance.)

BONSON: Right... not going to smash the bottle over my head for telling Kritz about you doing her sister, are you?

FLAXLEY: Far from it. You gave me an excuse to say romantic things to her and that never fails to get me laid. Yes, you burst in and ruined it, but I'm sure we'll carry on from where we left off later.

BONSON: Right. Superb. Everyone's a winner then. I get to keep my skull and you get to hump Kritz!

(He then sighed in defeat.)

BONSON: No, there's definitely only one winner there. I hate you, Flaxley.

(And as the last few pirates drowned in the wake of the Colloskayak, Flaxley and the others headed back inside. Never ones to over celebrate a single battle when many others could lay ahead, they put the pirate episode down to experience and with a single toast to their success, called it a night. By now they were wise enough to know they should only celebrate if and when their journey reached a successful conclusion.)

(The following morning, as the sun emerged from the sea directly to the rear of the ship and chased away the darkness of night, the allies all continued to sleep soundly. After what had been a most gruelling day, it was safe to say they'd not be waking any time soon. For the crew, however, it was a different story. The rising sun had merely meant another rotation of its personnel as the ship maintained its course and speed. With sleep just another way for the allies to get through what could potentially be a mind-numbing wasted trip to nowhere, it was long past what was normally considered breakfast time before Mandika finally stirred. As she opened her eyes to a new day, she felt her hair then looked across at her husband's face as he snored merrily beside her. Much to her horror, she then spotted Phisele, huddled up to his back with a satisfied smile on her face. With a look of fury emblazoned on her face, her four letter rant turned the air blue and immediately woke the sleeping Lefiat. Looking completely startled, he instantly sat bolt up right, tortured by the screaming.)

LEFIAT: Jacquit and Suzbit are back!!!

(Releasing it was only Mandika, he frowned and rubbed his head.)

LEFIAT: Mandika? What are you screaming about?

(Looking on the verge on insanity, she thrust a pointing finger to his side of the bed.)

MANDIKA: What's *she* doing here???

(Baffled as to what she was saying, he looked down to his side and immediately let out a scream of his own. As naked as the day he was born, he then leapt over Phisele and out of bed in a blind panic.)

LEFIAT: What the bloody hell is *she* doing here???

(As he gaped in horror, Phisele opened her eyes and smiled at him.)

PHISELE: Hi, Luffy-lops!

(Mandika was beside herself.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat!!!

LEFIAT: What? I didn't do anything, I swear!!!

(His eyes then bulged and he covered his groin.)

LEFIAT: Oh crap, I'm naked!!!

(Petrified and desperate, he immediately made a dash for the door. His heart was racing. He was in little doubt that Mandika would somehow make it his fault and he was absolutely terrified. Watching him go, Mandika cringed and Phisele covered her face.)

PHISELE: Ew!!!

(Flinging his free hand behind himself to cover his backside he raced up to the door then stopped dead in bewildered horror.)

LEFIAT: Oh no, I've run out of hands!!! Now what???

(Swiftly, he released his manhood from his grip and yanked open the door before covering himself up again and racing out of the room. With a heart full of fear and no idea where he was going, the panicking halfwit then charged down the corridor almost in tears, such was the extent of his fear. As he bolted down the ships passageway as fast as his legs would carry him, the desperate Lefiat threw a glance over his shoulder, praying that neither Mandika or Phisele had followed him out. He simply wanted to get as far away from them as possible. Having failed to look where he was going, however, his run soon came to an end as he charged straight through Flaxley and Kritz's cabin door, leaving a Lefiat shaped hole in the wood. Much to his utter dismay, Kritz had just got up and was just about to reunite herself with her clothes when he thundered straight into her naked body, knocking her backwards and landing face down on top of her. Naturally, she was not amused.)

KRITZ: Get off me!!!

(As if fate was having a laugh at the unfortunate lad, Kritz's angered words woke Flaxley. Somewhat perplexed by his wife's scream, he sat bolt upright and got the shock of his life.)

FLAXLEY: What???

(As he sat there, confronted by the sight of a terrified, naked Lefiat laying face down upon his naked, prone wife, Flaxley's entire face started to twitch. Recognising that look from such episodes as the slicing and dicing of the giant airborne killer "Aleclaw", Lefiat gulped and started to sweat profusely. Flaxley looked on the verge of entering his trademark dark rage, normally reserved for any beast who dared to touch his precious sword. Scared witless, Lefiat tried desperately to calm the situation.)

LEFIAT: I can explain!

(At this point, Derek and Bonson arrived outside the broken door to see what all the

fuss and noise was about. Half asleep, they both received quite a start.)

DEREK: Great savage meteors of the Tryme solar system!!! I knew she liked knights, but... Lefiat?

BONSON: I know! First he bags a princess, now Kritz! He's always been a jammy little bugger but that's just taking the piss!

(Lefiat however, was oblivious to their mockery. His eyes were fixed on Flaxley's snarling, growling face. Completely forgetting about his nakedness, he slowly pulled himself to his feet, his eyes unable to remove themselves from Flaxley's enraged expression. Somewhat dazed, Kritz also staggered to her feet then looked between the two of them and rubbed her chin, as always, not caring for a second about her own nudity. Seeing what was clearly about to happen, she looked to Lefiat with extreme urgency etched into her brow.)

KRITZ: Lefiat! Run!!!

(Sparked into action by her words, the hapless lad did just that. In fear for his life, he crashed through the remainder of the door and sprinted down the corridor for all he was worth. Derek and Bonson, stepped back to let him through and watched him race away in desperation. Looking like he'd been possessed by a satanic entity, Flaxley growled like a beast, leapt out of bed, grabbed his sword and immediately sprinted after him. As the two men charged down the corridor, one screaming, the other crying out for vengeance, Kritz looked through the gap at Derek and the drooling Bonson and shrugged nonchalantly.)

KRITZ: Better go and sort this out, I suppose!

(And with that, she too raced out in the corridor, stark naked to give chase.)

BONSON: And you thought this would be a dull trip?

DEREK: Well what can I say? I'm embarrassed!

BONSON: Come on, we can't miss this!

DEREK: Indeed!

(With that, they set off down the corridor looking forward to watching the fireworks.

Having caused all the trouble in the first place, the fully dressed Phisele had exchanged a few rude names with the equally childish Mandika before going back to her room to read like a good girl. Mandika, fearing Lefiat had been in such a panic he might accidentally run off of the side of the ship again, then dug out her robe and went off to find him. After a solid five minutes of searching, she eventually emerged onto the deck and received quite a start. Bonson and Derek had availed themselves of deckchairs next to a set of storage hatches, just outside the cabin doors to watch the show as a naked Flaxley chased a terrified, naked Lefiat all around the deck while a naked Kritz raced after them, trying to broker a solution.)

MANDIKA: What the?

BONSON: Indeed, ma'am!

(She looked on agape, hardly believing what she was seeing.)

MANDIKA: What's going on?

DEREK: Just pull up a seat, this is great entertainment!

(He bit his lip then offered an apologetic grin.)

DEREK: Though maybe not for you, I'd wager!

(Convinced that Lefiat had been caught having sneaky sex with Kritz behind Flaxley's back, they both clammed up, dreading how Mandika would react at finding out her husband had been unfaithful.)

DEREK: Just pull up a seat, Mandika!

(Not about to let Flaxley disembowel her new husband, as was clearly his intention,

Mandika ignored them then stormed into the fray.)

DEREK: She's going to ruin it!

BONSON: Actually, Derek. This just got interesting!

(Mandika immediately found herself in the same hopeless position as Kritz. Every time she tried to say something or physically intervene, somebody would either yell over her or Flaxley's sword would get too close for comfort. It was rare for anyone to be able to yell over Kritz but such was Flaxley's fury and Lefiat's terror, she couldn't even begin to make herself heard. With his eyes on stalks, amazed he hadn't been chopped into pieces yet, Lefiat desperately tried to explain as he ran for his life.)

LEFIAT: I was an accident!!!

FLAXLEY: I'll show you an accident!!!

LEFIAT: Eh?

FLAXLEY: Come here you slippery little shit!!!

LEFIAT: But I didn't do anything!!! I fell on her!

FLAXLEY: Lefiat!!! One little slash of this sword and you'll be cured of the urge to *fall* on women forever!!!

LEFIAT: Eh?

(As the realisation of exactly what Flaxley meant sank into his mind, Lefiat suddenly found the energy to run even faster.)

LEFIAT: Not my love stick!!!

(Watching on, Bonson mused out loud.)

BONSON: Hmm, if that's Flaxley's plan he'd better be a good shot!

DEREK: Indeed! Though... maybe Lefiat just looks small compared to Flaxley!

(Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: Yes, well, that's not a fair comparison is it? I mean Flaxley's is like a third leg!

(As they chuckled, Lefiat's torture continued. Desperate to end the embarrassing charade, Kritz tried to intervene once again as she raced about the deck.)

KRITZ: Flaxley, he ran in and fell on me, it wasn't deliberate!!! You just woke up at the wrong time!!!

(Pursuing Lefiat whole-heartedly, Flaxley yelled back.)

FLAXLEY: Clearly, I woke up at just the *right* time!!! Anyway, I haven't finished with you yet, woman!

KRITZ: Me?

FLAXLEY: Yes you, you philandering hussy!!!

(Kritz was absolutely furious and bellowed back at him.)

KRITZ: Like I'd ever be so desperate for attention that I'd have to sleep with *that*!!!

(She then felt an icy coldness to her left.)

KRITZ: Um... no offence, Mandika!

(Mandika glared at her bitterly.)

MANDIKA: None taken!

(With that, she yanked at Kritz's hair with all her might.)

KRITZ: Yow!!!

(Having heard Kritz's yelp, Bonson and Derek turned to face Kritz and Mandika.)

BONSON: Oh! Now this is even better!

DEREK: Indeed!

(While Lefiat continued to desperately evade the marauding Flaxley and somehow cling onto his life, Mandika and Kritz glared at one another coldly, forgetting the poor lad completely.)

KRITZ: Oh dear, Mandika!

MANDIKA: Oh dear to you too, bitch!

KRITZ: Tell me you didn't just do that!

(Mandika snarled.)

MANDIKA: What? This?

(With that, she grabbed her hair and yanked at it even harder.)

KRITZ: Ouch!!!

(Mandika then snarled venomously. She knew Kritz could beat her black and blue without even breaking a sweat, but she was so completely disheartened by her disastrous honeymoon, she simply didn't care anymore.)

MANDIKA: Hurt's doesn't it? Well, you should just be grateful I didn't do this!

(With that, Mandika released Kritz's hair then grabbed her nipples and twisted them in opposite directions.)

KRITZ: Yeow!!!

(As Kritz folded and grabbed her painful breasts, Bonson and Derek sucked their teeth.)

DEREK: Nasty!

BONSON: Hmm... and yet, bloody marvellous!

DEREK: 100 lig says Kritz stuffs her in a storage hatch!

BONSON: You're on!

(As Kritz straightened up, her eyes were full of intense fury. On the verge of exploding she spoke through gritted teeth.)

KRITZ: You've gone too far!!!

MANDIKA: Oh, have I?

KRITZ: Yes! Bitch!!!

(Mandika gave her a smarmy look and held her palms out to the side arrogantly.)

MANDIKA: Is that all you've got? Name calling? And I thought you were supposed to be tough.

KRITZ: I am!

MANDIKA: Then give it you best shot, bitch!

KRITZ: Fine!

(With that, Kritz punched her in the face then dragged her across the deck by the arm. Having nearly always got away with it when she was mean to Kritz, Mandika cried out in distress as she was yanked forth to the middle of the deck.)

MANDIKA: My face, you hit my face!!! I can't believe you hurt my precious face!!!

(Kritz just snarled, not caring where she was hurt even for a moment.)

KRITZ: Who cares??? Bon voyage, bitch! Have a nice swim!!!

(At once, Bonson and Derek stood up and gaped in horror. Realising what Kritz intended to do, they knew it had all gone too far.)

DEREK: She's going to throw her overboard!!!

(Bonson looked horrified.)

BONSON: Kritz!!! Don't!!!

(Fortunately for Mandika, having spun her around three times to gain momentum, Kritz was completely disorientated and threw her down the deck instead.)

KRITZ: Crap!!! Missed!

(Her eyes bulged.)

KRITZ: Look out!!!

(She then hunched her shoulders and cringed as Mandika flew straight into the fleeing Lefiat.)

LEFIAT: No!!!

(Having been knocked off balance, Lefiat's arms flailed wildly until eventually his

feet gave way from underneath him. Desperate to grab something and stop his fall, he reached out just as Flaxley arrived to strike him down.)

FLAXLEY: A-ha!!!

(As Lefiat desperately grabbed hold of Flaxley manhood, pulling it downwards with him, Flaxley immediately went cross-eyed and cried out in agony. Realising what he'd grabbed hold of, Lefiat instantly let go and shrieked. Looking on, Bonson and Derek crossed their legs and winced.)

DEREK: I can't watch this anymore!

BONSON: Me either!

(And with that, they both charged inside. As Flaxley collapsed to cradle his personal area, Lefiat leapt to his feet and swiftly pulled Mandika to hers.)

LEFIAT: Run! Flaxley's a psycho!!!

(Looking somewhat livid, Mandika grabbed Lefiat and snarled.)

MANDIKA: No! You stay here and protect me from *that* psycho!

(She pointed to where Kritz was slowly walking over to them.)

LEFIAT: But, Mandika...

MANDIKA: That's an order!

LEFIAT: But... my love stick!!!

(Much to Mandika's relief, as Kritz approached, she held out her palm and offered them both a smile.)

KRITZ: Guys, I think we should talk about this like adults!

(In full agreement with her, Flaxley looked up and nodded. At this moment in time, he was in too much pain to fight anybody, even Lefiat.)

KRITZ: Good!

(Very much on edge, Lefiat looked to her uneasily then sighed to himself.)

LEFIAT: I didn't even do anything wrong!

(He then looked to Flaxley and pouted.)

LEFIAT: I was just running and I crashed into your room by accident.

(Flaxley said nothing and rolled onto his back to continue writhing with pain.)

LEFIAT: It was all Phisele's fault anyway!

KRITZ: Why? What did *she* do?

LEFIAT: I was running because of her!

(Kritz looked deeply suspicious and snarled at him.)

KRITZ: Phisele? You were naked! What were you doing naked around Phisele???

MANDIKA: He kinda panicked!

(Lefiat looked stunned that she even had to mention it.)

LEFIAT: You'd panic too if your other half caught you in bed with a ten year old girl!

KRITZ: What???

(As Lefiat folded to the ground holding his freshly crushed testicles, Mandika interceded.)

MANDIKA: He meant to say, Phisele sneaked into our room in the night and cuddled up to him. You know, she was in our bed, not in bed with him in the rude sense!

(Kritz looked enlightened.)

KRITZ: Oh, so he panicked, ran away and ended up landing on top of me!

MANDIKA: So it would seem, yeah.

(They both nodded acceptingly.)

KRITZ: That's cleared that up then! Friends?

MANDIKA: Friends! Sorry I pulled your hair and twisted your boobies!

KRITZ: That's okay! Sorry I was going to throw you to the sharks!

(They shared a warm smile.)

KRITZ: Come on, let's go and get some breakfast then we can do each other's hair!

MANDIKA: Awesome!

(They then looked down to where Flaxley and Lefiat writhed in pain on the deck.)

KRITZ: You boys gonna be okay?

(Groaning in agony, they both barely managed a weak thumbs up.)

MANDIKA: Great!

(As they headed away, Kritz turned just before reaching the cabin doors.)

KRITZ: Oh, Flaxley. Forgive, Lefiat! He was only pulling your plonker!

(Mandika burst out laughing.)

MANDIKA: Oh my god, that's a good one!

KRITZ: Hehe, well I thought so!

(As they disappeared inside, Lefiat groaned.)

LEFIAT: I hate women!

FLAXLEY: You and me both, Lefiat, you and me both!

(Many miles behind the Colloskayak at this time, Heiner was in despair. The sheer speed of the ship they were pursuing was simply too much for them contend with. They'd lost sight of it in the early hours and knew they'd continue to fall behind further and further by the hour. Fearing failure was becoming a certainty, Heiner sat slouched in his seat in the bridge, his expression bearing the look of a broken man. To his right, his second in command, Morten, stared thoughtfully ahead, not sharing his commander's sense of pessimism.)

MORTEN: Looks like another glorious day outside, Heiner!

HEINER: What?

(Heiner looked up to him and frowned.)

HEINER: How the hell can you be so bloody cheerful, Morten?

MORTEN: Sir?

HEINER: We haven't seen hide nor hair of the Colloskayak since the middle of the night! How you can be cheerful about that is beyond me!

(Morten nodded knowingly.)

MORTEN: Well sir, I don't think we'll lose them!

(Heiner gave him a furious scowl.)

HEINER: We already did, you complete pillock!

MORTEN: With respect, sir, there's no need for name calling and more importantly, I don't think we have lost them!

(Heiner was sarcastic to say the least.)

HEINER: Oh and pray tell, what in that view of empty seas ahead, gives you that impression?

MORTEN: Nothing, sir!

HEINER: Exactly!

MORTEN: But judging by their movements so far, I'd say they were heading due west on a linear course!

(Heiner looked to him thoughtfully.)

HEINER: Linear?

MORTEN: Linear!

HEINER: No, what does linear mean?

MORTEN: Oh right, my mistake, I keep assuming you're intelligent, how silly of me!

HEINER: Morten?

MORTEN: Linear means something that follows a clearly defined path, like a straight

line. Their course so far has been unerring, due west all the way!
(Heiner rubbed his chin.)
HEINER: Well that's just weird!
(Morten gave an amused grin.)
MORTEN: You know there's an old wives tale about a mythical land due west of Leathrock!
(Heiner looked shocked.)
HEINER: You mean Sanetza?
MORTEN: You've heard of it?
HEINER: Don't sound so surprised!
(He looked uncertain.)
HEINER: Hey, you don't think they're looking for Sanetza do you?
(Morten laughed out loud.)
MORTEN: Maybe!
HEINER: Wow! That's ridiculous!
MORTEN: Maybe their expedition to find the tooth fairy went belly up so they're doing this instead!
(Heiner grinned.)
HEINER: Let's just hope they don't get attacked by any dragons while they're there!
MORTEN: Pillock!
(Heiner looked furious.)
HEINER: What?
MORTEN: Not you! The president of Leathrock, he's the idiot who commissions these expeditions!
HEINER: Oh right!
MORTEN: Anyway, sir, they're heading due west and once they get where they're going, it'll only be a matter of time before we catch them up!
(Heiner looked enthused.)
HEINER: And they'll lead us straight to Croxton!
MORTEN: Yes! Either that or over the end of the world!
HEINER: What?
MORTEN: Nothing! Just relax sir, we'll keep on our current course and we'll catch them in no time, maybe even on their way back with Croxton!
(Heiner was ecstatic. All his fears and worries had evaporated. With the Colloskayak on such a course, stealth was the easiest thing in the world. Rather than worrying about being spotted by the ship they were following, they didn't even have to keep it in sight. With his confidence restored, Heiner sat back and allowed himself to relax. Like the crew of the Colloskayak, he had no idea where he was heading or what might lay in store for him but for now at least, he knew he could take it easy.)

(There was one thing *all* sailors from novice deckhands to veteran seadogs very much lived in fear of. Despite tales of sea beasts and a morbid fear of drowning, this one thing terrified them more than any other. The onset of insanity. Spending day after endless day aboard a ship with nowhere to go and the same plain deck for exercise, it was no surprise that many a sailor had returned a madman. Stuck with only a monotonous blue ocean stretching for miles as the only view from a ship that felt more like a prison, some had literally gone "over the edge". A phrase tailor made for the madness of sea going folk. Aboard the Colloskayak, the allies were far from reaching that stage but had certainly begun to understand how such a thing could

happen. Mandika's mood swings and Bonson's relentless sarcasm had become something of a treasure; such were the boredom levels they started to feel as the ship sailed on through the seemingly perpetual ocean. Any lively trait, even those negative ones were something to focus on just to take their minds off of things.

As their second day at sea wore on, Flaxley and Kritz had started to argue just to kill time. Of course, each argument would result in them "making up" and killing even more time. Phisele was passing time reading and annoying Lefiat and Mandika. Having a child's imagination, she was far from bored. The same applied to Lefiat. Derek and Bonson were just grateful for a large supply of rum.

Paradoxically, by the time the third day dawned, they were all sick of the sight of each other and yet glad of each others company. Such was the curse of the confined conditions on a ship. Had they been cramped together in the same way but with the option of escaping to an open meadow outside, things would have been different. It was the knowledge of being trapped that sent so many sailors to the asylum.

Some hardened sailors didn't see land for weeks on end. Supplies would run low but somehow they remained sane and kept their morale high. The reason they could do this was that they knew their location, they knew their destination and they knew how long it'd take to get there. Those on the Colloskayak had no such luxury. They could be sailing for another day, they could be sailing for another week; they didn't even know if there was anything to sail to. Had they been in possession of any of that information, sailing fatigue might not have set in as quickly as it had.

As night fell near the end of that third day at sea, tempers had started to fray even more than normal. The allies were becoming increasingly edgy and stressed at what was beginning to feel more like a jail sentence than a voyage. Flaxley was by now having to use all his knight training to remain calm and try to influence his travelling companions.

Fearing Daman Siria's involvement may well mean that something terrible was in store for them, the last thing Flaxley wanted was to be surrounded by deflated and spiritless allies. Croxton could be the prisoner of a demonic tribe or he could be trapped on an island inhabited by dangerous, killer beasts. Nobody knew. With everything that lay ahead so uncertain, all Flaxley knew was that it was down to him to pull his friends and companions out of the spiritual nosedive they were currently in.

Confident that he knew exactly what to say to appease everyone, he decided it'd be a good idea to call everybody out onto the deck so he could pace around and talk to them individually without them knowing they were actually being taken aside for an intervention. Unfortunately, for him, they all knew his tactic for psyching them up by now and did nothing but complain when he asked them to join him on the deck. They knew what he wanted to do but were past caring about making peace with one another.

Having spent what felt like an eternity going from room to room convincing them, they finally all went up onto the moonlit deck just to humour him or stop him complaining. For Flaxley, however, it didn't matter *why* they were there, just as long as they were. As Kritz led Phisele to the end of the deck to watch the sea, Bonson and

Derek chatted by the storage hatches. Lefiat and Mandika just stood in the doorway, wondering who'd be taken aside for a talk first. Mandika had been in a bad mood pretty much since she'd arrived in Tifaeris, and she was certain it'd be her. As it turned out, she was half right. He did indeed approach her first. Much to her surprise, however, he asked to speak to her and Lefiat together.

Having given each other a brief uneasy glance, Lefiat and Mandika shrugged then followed Flaxley to a quiet corner of the deck. Once he was satisfied that they were out of earshot of the others, Flaxley then turned to face them and began.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika, Lefiat! Thanks for giving me the chance to...

(As he mused to find the correct phrase, Mandika raised a dismissive eyebrow.)

MANDIKA: To what? Patronise us?

FLAXLEY: Please, Mandika, don't be like that!

(She folded her arms and looked away.)

LEFIAT: What's on your mind, Flaxley?

(Flaxley offered them both a smile.)

FLAXLEY: Well, it seems obvious to me that there's still a lot of tension between us and all I want is to clear the air, here and now!

LEFIAT: Sounds fair to me!

(Mandika clearly didn't agree.)

MANDIKA: Do you mean 'clear the air' or get away with all the awful things you've put me through?

FLAXLEY: Awful things? What awful things?

MANDIKA: I thought so!

(She scoffed.)

MANDIKA: Come on, Lefiat, let's go indoors!

LEFIAT: But...

FLAXLEY: Oh, don't be like that, Mandika! We need to talk about it!

MANDIKA: Do we? Do we really, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: Yes, we do!

(Mandika nodded arrogantly.)

MANDIKA: Okay, let's start from the beginning!

FLAXLEY: Sounds good to me!

MANDIKA: Let's talk about how despite claiming to be my friend for all these years, despite having been part of my life since before I can remember, you didn't even bother coming to my wedding!

(Flaxley looked most taken aback.)

FLAXLEY: You know damn well why I didn't go! I was arranging your honeymoon!

(Mandika scoffed.)

MANDIKA: Oh yeah, right!

FLAXLEY: I was!

MANDIKA: Liar! You didn't come to my wedding because you didn't want to come to Guevina! I'm right aren't I?

(Flaxley looked deeply offended that she should even suggest such as thing.)

FLAXLEY: I'd never be that petty! What made you think that?

MANDIKA: Well apart from it being obvious, Kritz told me so!

(Flaxley grimaced, knowing he'd been well and truly rumbled.)

FLAXLEY: Oh!

MANDIKA: How could you do that, Flaxley? Regardless how you feel about Guevina, it was my wedding!

(Flaxley sighed. Having been found out, he realised that from hereon in, honesty would probably be the best policy.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, I can't lie...

(Mandika scowled at him.)

FLAXLEY: I mean, anymore!

MANDIKA: Okay, so let's hear it then!

FLAXLEY: Fine... Mandika, Guevina is full of tossers. I vowed to myself after last summer, never to return there and I meant it. I'm sorry I missed your wedding but if you think I wanted to go all that way to be booed and taunted in the streets by those idiots, then you're very much mistaken!

MANDIKA: But it was my wedding!

FLAXLEY: Yes, I know that. But how would you like to go somewhere where they classify you as a complete buffoon and give the credit for all your achievements to pillocks like him?

(He gestured to Lefiat.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, I love you too, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: No offence, Lefiat but after we saved the key of peace I left for Tifaeris with Kritz, knowing Mandika would be safe. Somehow those idiots got the impression that I ran away with Kritz, leaving you to save Mandika!

LEFIAT: Yeah, I see how that would be annoying!

(Flaxley shook his head and looked to Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika, ever since then, those tossers in Guevina have given Lefiat the credit for everything we've achieved and made me out to be the incompetent idiot of the group! Well, fuck 'em, I say! I'm never going there to get abused and pelted with insults ever again. I don't care *what* the occasion is!

(Mandika nodded, quite clearly not accepting his excuse.)

MANDIKA: Okay, so you decided to get me back just because the people of my kingdom hate you?

FLAXLEY: What? What do you mean by that?

MANDIKA: Why else would you deliberately sabotage my honeymoon???

FLAXLEY: Hey, I resent that!

(Noticing that Flaxley and Mandika were beginning to get irritated with one another, Lefiat stepped back for his own safety.)

MANDIKA: Well, boo-bloody-hoo!!! Just answer the question!

FLAXLEY: There's nothing to answer, I gave it everything I had, you're just an ungrateful, spoilt, bitch!

MANDIKA: Ungrateful??? Flaxley, when are you going to realise something? You were my knight!

FLAXLEY: I already realised that!

MANDIKA: Now what do you do? Supervise building work?

FLAXLEY: Among other things, why?

MANDIKA: Do any of those other things include arranging honeymoons?

(Flaxley looked baffled.)

FLAXLEY: Eh? What? Not normally, no!

MANDIKA: And yet you went ahead and did mine, knowing that you're a rank amateur on the subject!!!

(Flaxley looked confused and rubbed his chin.)

FLAXLEY: What are you getting at?

MANDIKA: I'm supposed to be your friend and yet you refused to come to my wedding. Then, without even considering my feelings if things go wrong, you

arranged my honeymoon yourself. You, a bloody building supervisor! You didn't even care enough to get a professional to do it!

FLAXLEY: Hey, I did my best!

MANDIKA: Even so, a pro would have done a better job! You don't get farmhands to build houses in Tifaeris do you?

(Flaxley scoffed sarcastically.)

FLAXLEY: No Mandika, we use the experienced ones as school teachers! Of course we don't!

MANDIKA: Then why get a builder to arrange my honeymoon and not a honeymoon specialist???

(Flaxley went to dispute her and raised his finger to chastise her but couldn't even begin to think of an argument.)

FLAXLEY: Um...

(Mandika nodded arrogantly and folded her arms.)

MANDIKA: So you admit you ruined my honeymoon!

FLAXLEY: What? No...

MANDIKA: Flaxley, I'm not even going to begin forgiving you or being nice until you admit it!

(Flaxley frowned.)

FLAXLEY: Well fuck you then!

(Shocked to her very core by his audacity, Mandika stepped into Flaxley's face.)

MANDIKA: Fuck you too!

FLAXLEY: Fuck you first!

MANDIKA: Fuck you harder!!!

(As they stared into each other's hate-filled eyes, Lefiat raised his hand nervously.)

LEFIAT: So, um... this is clearing the air is it?

(Flaxley averted his gaze for a moment and glared at Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: Haven't you got something you can be setting fire to?

(He glared back at Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: Me and this bitch have a lot to discuss!

LEFIAT: Yeah. Fuck this, fuck that, very productive! You two make *me* look mature!

(Fearing he may be right, Mandika and Flaxley stepped back from one another.)

MANDIKA: He started it!

FLAXLEY: Like crap I did! I told you my reason for not going to Guevina, just accept it!

MANDIKA: Your reasons were weak!

FLAXLEY: So is your husband!

LEFIAT: Hey!

FLAXLEY: Well you are!

LEFIAT: Even so!

FLAXLEY: Look! The people of Guevina make me puke and I'm never going there again, just accept it!

(Mandika scoffed.)

MANDIKA: Flaxley, even if you did go to Guevina, they wouldn't know it was you!

FLAXLEY: What?

MANDIKA: Your wife came to my wedding dressed for a funeral, she even brought a wreath!

FLAXLEY: A wreath?

MANDIKA: Bonson's doing! He even told Mrs Whitley, the biggest gossip in the

castle, that Kritz was in mourning! By now they're probably holding street parties to celebrate your death!

(Flaxley looked bewildered.)

FLAXLEY: Are you serious?

(He mused.)

FLAXLEY: Hmm, that book prophesied my death!

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Never mind that! Mandika, you've been rank out of order. I apologise if my non-appearance offended you but I spent three days working my arse off to make your honeymoon perfect and you did nothing but complain!

MANDIKA: Perfect?

FLAXLEY: Yes, perfect!

MANDIKA: Really? Let's analyse that perfection shall we? A choir that forgot to sing, banners spelt wrong and hung upside down, a street party with nowhere for me to sit, a honeymoon suite that disintegrated in the night... that's without even mentioning my missing suitcases!!! Now, shall I go on? Or would you like me to describe my idea of a perfect honeymoon and see how they compare?

(Flaxley scowled.)

FLAXLEY: No need! You know, if you weren't so infantile you'd have seen a choir of youngsters desperate to sing for you, banners made by well-meaning citizens, a chance to party with people who'd love to get the know the real you and... um... well, the honeymoon suite was unfortunate. But the rest of it...

MANDIKA: I'll never forgive you, Flaxley!

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Look, I tried okay? I didn't mean your honeymoon to come out like this!

MANDIKA: Well it has! It's been awful!

FLAXLEY: Yes, so you keep saying!

MANDIKA: What?

FLAXLEY: You've done nothing but complain about it for three fucking days, we're all sick of hearing about it!

(Lefiat sighed.)

LEFIAT: Are you going to make peace or what? Only if you're just going to keep arguing, I'm going in the cabin!

(Looking thoroughly peeved, Flaxley grabbed Lefiat by his collar.)

FLAXLEY: You're going nowhere! Now we're going to have peace, even I have to kill you both to achieve it!

(As he set him down, Lefiat shied away nervously.)

MANDIKA: Flaxley, you're a bully!

FLAXLEY: *I'm* a bully? *You've* done nothing but boss the idiot around since you met him!

MANDIKA: I know, but that's okay 'cause he's *my* idiot! You keep your hands off!

(Lefiat beamed, lifted by her claim upon him.)

LEFIAT: Shucks!

FLAXLEY: Whatever, Mandika. Your threats don't bother me; this has been a complete waste of time. You just don't want to stop feeling bitter, do you? I'm wasting my breath!

MANDIKA: Flaxley, until you admit what you did, I'm not going to apologise for being upset about it!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Fine! Let's just stand here in silence then!

MANDIKA: Suits me fine!

(Much to Lefiat's bewilderment the two of them proceeded to fold their arms and stare away from each other like sulking teenagers.)

LEFIAT: Um...

(Knowing he'd either get hit or insulted if he said anything, he clammed up and watched them silently ignore each other for another 60 seconds or so until Flaxley turned his head in Mandika's direction.)

FLAXLEY: You ready to apologise yet?

MANDIKA: *You* apologise!!!

(Flaxley frowned and stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: You!!!

(Immediately she stepped right to his face again and craned her neck up to glare into his eyes.)

MANDIKA: You!!!

FLAXLEY: Seriously Mandika, you're starting to piss me off now!!!

MANDIKA: I aint scared of you, you overgrown ape!!!

FLAXLEY: You'd better watch your mouth, you ungrateful bitch!

(Furious to be called such a name yet again, Mandika's temper increased several times over and her face burnt red.)

MANDIKA: And you'd better watch yours!!!

FLAXLEY: Yeah?

MANDIKA: Yeah!!!

FLAXLEY: Or what???

(Looking insane with rage, she jumped back and snarled venomously.)

MANDIKA: Or this!!!

(With that, she fired her ice magic straight at him. As his armour froze and icicles formed on his helmet, Flaxley shivered uncontrollably. Unable to believe she'd do such a thing, he stared at her in sheer horror. Too cold to react, he turned blue and said nothing. Appalled at herself for doing it in the first place, Mandika also gaped in horror. Lefiat, for his part was onto his 50th double-take. Having seen the whole thing from where they'd been merrily watching the argument, Bonson, Derek, Kritz, and Phisele rushed over in a state of shock.)

BONSON: Mandika!!!

(Mandika looked like she was about to cry.)

MANDIKA: I know!

(Finally, Flaxley mustered a single word.)

FLAXLEY: C-cold!

(With that, he fell backwards to the deck, unable to bend. They all watched with bemusement as some of the ice on his armour smashed as he landed.)

DEREK: I can't believe you did that!!!

(Sounding considerably distressed, Mandika's bottom lip quivered.)

MANDIKA: Nor can I!!!

BONSON: We'd better defrost him, I suppose!

(Having been staring, open-mouthed at her shivering, ice clad husband, Kritz then started to snarl.)

KRITZ: Mandika!!!

LEFIAT: Uh-oh!!!

(Thankfully for Mandika, Lefiat was quick to draw his sword and get in Kritz's way. Knowing that this time, Kritz would definitely throw her in the sea, he stood firm with his sword between himself and Mandika and a murderous looking Kritz. Derek,

Bonson and Phisele could only look on helplessly.)
KRITZ: Move it, mistake boy!
LEFIAT: No! You'll kill her!!!
KRITZ: I'll be doing the world a favour!!!
(Mandika quivered behind Lefiat and bit her nails.)
LEFIAT: I order you to disdain, Kritz!
(Kritz sneered.)
KRITZ: You mean, desist!
(Looking peeved, Lefiat lowered his fighting stance and frowned at her bitterly.)
LEFIAT: Hey, who's the knight here, me or you???
(Spying an opportunity, Kritz immediately bashed him to one side, eager to get to Mandika, only to be foiled by Derek leaping on her face.)
DEREK: You can't kill her, Kritz!!!
(As Kritz staggered about furiously, trying to pull Derek off of her face, Bonson rolled his eyes and bellowed.)
BONSON: Enough!!!
(Immediately, all eyes turned his way. Except for Kritz who just paused and listened, unable to see for Derek sprawled over her face.)
BONSON: Stop this right now! The poor girl is terrified!
(They all looked to where Phisele was trembling and hunching her shoulders, looking absolutely terrified by the disharmony. Feeling a little guilty, they all hung their heads, Derek allowing Kritz to peel him off of her face.)
BONSON: It's just not right to behave like this in front of a child!
(Looking more ashamed than most, Kritz nodded.)
KRITZ: You're right!
(She beckoned Phisele over.)
KRITZ: Come here, babe!
(Slightly defrosted, Flaxley managed to sit up and watch, a smile breaking the ice on his lower chin.)
BONSON: That's better!
DEREK: Yes, we should be thoroughly ashamed of ourselves. The poor kid doesn't want to see that!
(Kritz nodded.)
KRITZ: I agree!
(With that, she opened a storage hatch and ushered Phisele inside. Being unerringly obedient to Kritz's word, Phisele obliged.)
KRITZ: Just for a moment, love!
(With that, she closed the hatch, opened the small grate on the top to allow moonlight inside then rubbed her hands together.)
KRITZ: Now, where is she???
(And with no more ado, she set about trying to beat Mandika senseless. Once again, Lefiat was called to do the only job he was competent at. In all his time as Mandika's knight, it seemed he'd spent more time protecting her from Kritz than everything else combined.)
KRITZ: Lefiat, I have no beef with you, I just want to pound Mandika for a while!
LEFIAT: Well you can't!
(He then gave her an uncertain glance.)
LEFIAT: Well... how long do you mean by "a while"?
(Shaking his head, he regained his focus.)
LEFIAT: What am I saying?

MANDIKA: Kritz, stop this madness!

KRITZ: You fired magic at my husband!!!

MANDIKA: I didn't mean to!!!

KRITZ: Didn't mean to?

(Desperate to help, Derek was kneeling by Flaxley, slowly and carefully using his fire magic to defrost him. He knew that Flaxley and Flaxley alone could pacify Kritz when she went into one of her rages.)

DEREK: Just a bit more!

FLAXLEY: That burns!

DEREK: Oops! Okay! Try getting up!

(Desperate to calm his furious wife, Flaxley managed to climb to his feet despite his poor circulation.)

DEREK: We need to warm your body, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Sounds like a job for Kritz!

(As he took one step forwards, his frozen left knee guard shattered.)

FLAXLEY: Oh crap!

(Just grateful to be able to move, he then rushed over to the furious Kritz as she continued to try to get past Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: Darling!

KRITZ: Not now, my love. I'm about to kill Mandika.

(She snarled.)

KRITZ: That's if haircut here will get out of my way!

LEFIAT: Haircut?

FLAXLEY: Never mind that...

(Just then, a tremendous roar echoed across the sky. Looking horrified, the embittered allies all tossed their anger aside and raced to the side of the ship to see a giant pink squid like creature emerge from the ocean.)

MANDIKA: Oh shit!

(Lefiat trembled and pointed to it desperately.)

LEFIAT: See? I told you!!! Sea beasts!!!

(As the massive creature raced alongside of them, it roared once again, leaving them in no doubt of its murderous intent. Immediately, Flaxley went straight into knight mode. Looking extremely urgent, he turned to his allies.)

FLAXLEY: Okay, let's take this fucker down!

(Bonson looked unsure.)

BONSON: We can try, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Try? Okay, we might all be at loggerheads now, but when we get into battle we're better than a fucking army!

(He looked to their eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Right?

(He received several determined nods in return.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent. We can fight in perfect harmony when we want to, so let's bloody well end this thing!

(Feeling chivalrous, Lefiat turned and placed his hands on Mandika's shoulders.)

LEFIAT: Darling, I can't allow you to get hurt!

(Mandika swooned.)

MANDIKA: Oh, Lefiat!

(Remembering the storage hatch that Kritz had put Phisele in, he rushed Mandika over to it and thrust it open.)

LEFIAT: You'll be safe in here!

(Just then, the giant beast made its first move. With an almighty thud, it whacked into the side of the Colloskayak, making the entire ship rock violently. Almost too typically, having been knocked off balance, Lefiat fell inside the storage hold, the hatch slamming shut behind him. Still on the deck looking perplexed, Mandika gaped in horror.)

MANDIKA: Hey!!! Let me in!!!

(To make matters worse, a large tentacle then thrust over the side of the ship. Immediately, Bonson fired his inferno magic and Flaxley slashed at it with his sword. As the beast recoiled it's murderous, slippery extremity, Derek yelled over to Mandika.)

DEREK: We're going to need all the help we can get here, Mandika!!!

MANDIKA: No way!!!

(Looking utterly terrified, she desperately tried to open the hatch to retrieve Lefiat and hide in there herself, as originally planned.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat!!!

(Having slammed with extreme ferocity, however, the hatch wouldn't even budge.)

MANDIKA: No!!!

(With that, her shoulders sunk and she headed for the battle, taking one last begrudging look behind her as she did so.)

MANDIKA: Thanks a bloody lot, Lefiat! My hero! I'll do the fighting then, shall I?

(As she trudged into line, born leader Flaxley stood tall and availed them of his intended tactics. Waiting, poised and ready for the beasts next move, they listened intently.)

FLAXLEY: Right! Bonson, Derek, one of you head to the front of the ship, the other to the back. Pound the bugga with as much inferno as you can! Mandika, next time it throws a tentacle over, hit it with ice and Kritz and I will attack it! Got it?

(Derek nodded determinedly.)

DEREK: Roger that, Flaxley!

(Bonson stood tall.)

BONSON: Indeed, roger that for a game of soldiers, I'm too old for this, I'm going back to my cabin!

DEREK: Bonson, "roger that" means affirmative!

(Bonson furrowed his brow.)

BONSON: Like I didn't know that! Oh... fine! I'll do what I can!

(With that, Bonson raced to the front of the ship and Derek headed swiftly in the opposite direction. Left in the centre of the deck, Flaxley looked to Kritz and Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: Ready, ladies?

KRITZ: Ready!!!

MANDIKA: I guess so!

FLAXLEY: Then let's get busy!

(Not wanting to make an issue of Flaxley using his favourite love making phrase to begin the battle, Kritz braced herself accordingly.)

KRITZ: Give it to me, big boy!

(She mused.)

KRITZ: What the fuck did I just say?

(Thankfully, she had no time to dwell on her poor choice of words, or her Freudian error of doing exactly as her husband had. As soon as the last syllable passed her lips, the colossal squid once again, cast a giant tentacle towards the deck. With bulging eyes, Flaxley gulped as the slimy, giant arm bore down on him at great speed.)

FLAXLEY: Crap!

(With stunning agility, he dived to his right and allowed the tentacle to thud down on the deck beside him. Ever mindful of the intended battle tactic, Kritz immediately yelled to Mandika.)

KRITZ: Ice it!!!

(Unfortunately, the sight of the slimy suckers on the long, outstretched tentacle had filled Mandika with dread. Looking terrified, she screamed and ran away from it. Wholly unsurprised by Mandika's failure to help out, Flaxley leapt at it with his sword.)

FLAXLEY: Die!!!

(As his mammoth blade sliced into the flesh of the squid's flailing limb, he bellowed furiously.)

FLAXLEY: Feel my wrath, slimy one!!!

(As the squid threw up its wounded tentacle and released a deafening scream, a slick, black oil sprayed from its suckers. Immediately, Flaxley was covered in it from head to toe.)

FLAXLEY: What the fuck???

(As the tentacle slid back overboard, Kritz raced across to the trembling Mandika.)

KRITZ: What happened to the ice???

(Quite obviously scared stiff, Mandika pouted and looked deep into her eyes.)

MANDIKA: I froze!

KRITZ: Look, Mandika! The only one who's supposed to be freezing is that beast, now if you can ice Flaxley, surely you can ice that thing!

(Mandika nodded positively, trying to remain upbeat and conquer her fear.)

KRITZ: That's my girl!

MANDIKA: Kritz! Stay here with me.

KRITZ: But...

MANDIKA: I'll be more confident if you're nearby!

(Kritz nodded warmly.)

KRITZ: Okay, babe! If it helps!

(With that, she glared to where the squid continued to hurriedly swim alongside, with a devilish glint in her eye.)

KRITZ: Let's pound this sucker together!

(Mandika frowned.)

MANDIKA: Was the pun intended?

(Kritz could only offer her a cheesy grin, before looking out to the beast once more. Meanwhile, Bonson and Derek were carrying out Flaxley instructions to the letter. With extreme precision, Derek fired fireball after fireball towards the creature's face, slowing down its opportunities to attack with great effect. Not quite as adept as his little green ally, Bonson wasn't having as much luck. On the rare occasions he'd found the target, he'd managed to somehow pick a spot that was immediately hit by a wave.)

BONSON: Fuck sake! Stupid sea! Stop splashing!!!

(He looked thoughtful.)

BONSON: It'd make more sense if I joined Derek and pounded it from the back!

(On the deck, Flaxley had barely had time to wipe the oily ink from his face and make sure his sword handle wasn't slippery before the beast struck again.)

FLAXLEY: Incoming!!!

(Sure enough, the enormous tentacle flashed towards the deck once more, this time aimed straight for Kritz and Mandika. As its mammoth shadow engulfed Mandika,

Kritz immediately leapt into action and pushed her aside. Not about to wait around on the off chance that Mandika would fire her ice, Flaxley immediately charged.

Unfortunately, in the darkness, he didn't notice the thick puddle of oil that spread across the deck. Almost as if doing a ninja style high kick, his feet left the ground as soon as they made contact with it. To make matters worse, Kritz had pushed Mandika straight into the same patch of oil. As Flaxley landed with a thud, Mandika slid past him face first, screaming like a banshee. Focussed solely on her enemy, Kritz didn't even notice them and proceeded to pummel the tentacle with her fists. Barely feeling the attack, the squid once again squirted oil everywhere, covering Kritz from head to toe before batting her to the side with tremendous force. With a yelp of agony, she thudded into the storage hatches. As she sat there looking dazed, Mandika slid to a halt and leapt to her feet.)

MANDIKA: Gross!!!

(Seeing her dress covered in the black slime, her nostrils started to flare and her nose began to twitch. Upon realising the oil had soaked through her beloved hair as well, she completely lost her temper. Looking like a crazed psychopath, she jumped into an attacking stance and proceeded to fire her ice towards the tentacle with anger raging inside her. Unfortunately for her, Flaxley had picked exactly the same moment to leapt to his feet. With shameless inevitability, the ice thudded into Flaxley and sent him flying over towards Kritz. As he landed in a heap next to her, Kritz looked up and gaped in horror to see him literally frozen solid, having not defrosted properly from last time Mandika had iced him. While Mandika held her head and screamed with horror at her deed, Kritz held her head and desperately tried to think of a way to help him.)

KRITZ: Think, you dozy tart!!!

(She looked stunned and furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: I called myself a tart!

(Just then, Bonson raced past, determined to join Derek and play an active part in the fight. Sadly, he didn't notice the oil on the darkened deck either and immediately slipped onto his backside.)

BONSON: Shit!!!

(Kritz looked enlightened.)

KRITZ: Bonson, come here!!!

(Looking extremely peeved, he started to crawl towards her.)

BONSON: This is ridiculous!!!

KRITZ: Bonson, quick! Fire inferno at Flaxley!!!

(Bonson couldn't believe what he was hearing.)

BONSON: What?

(As she tried to explain her desperate plan, the beast attacked once again. As it's outstretched appendage lashed onto the deck and flailed about, however, there was no attack. With a growl, it once again fired its oil and withdrew to the sea.)

KRITZ: See? He's frozen. Now do it!!!

BONSON: Well, it has to be worth a try!

(With that, he fired inferno at Flaxley. Immediately, he burst into flames, helped immensely by the oil that covered his body. Wasting no time whatsoever, Kritz doused him all over with H2O. Unfortunately, the oil made it harder work than it should have been and for a moment she thought the fire would never go out. Thankfully, once she managed to extinguish the flames, she saw her husband alive and glaring back at her.)

KRITZ: You're alive!!!

FLAXLEY: Yes! But the next person to fire their magic at me *won't* be!!!

KRITZ: I had no choice!

FLAXLEY: Never mind that, my love!

(He leapt to his feet.)

FLAXLEY: We've got a beast to kill!!!

(As he raced back into the centre of deck and fell head over heels on the oil, Mandika gave a sigh of relief at seeing he was okay and held her hand to her heart.)

MANDIKA: Thank fuck! I must do better next time!

(As Bonson slid across the oil to join Derek, he found the tiny alien looking bored and half asleep as he fired endless rounds of inferno at the beast.)

BONSON: I've come to help, Derek!

(Derek yawned.)

DEREK: No need, I've got it covered! I could do this all day! I just wish they'd hurry up and kill it so we can all go and have a glass of rum!

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: Well, I'm going to help anyway!

(On the deck at this point, Flaxley, Kritz and Mandika stood poised, covered in oil, waiting for the tentacle to slam onto the deck once more. The beast constantly growled and roared but the attack seemed slow in coming.)

FLAXLEY: Come on beast!!!

MANDIKA: It's taunting us, I know it is!!!

(Kritz looked enlightened.)

KRITZ: A-ha!

(They both stared her way.)

FLAXLEY: You have a plan?

KRITZ: I do!

(She gave Flaxley a sexy smile.)

KRITZ: Can I hold your sword a minute?

FLAXLEY: My sword?

KRITZ: Yeah!

(She fluttered her eyelashes at him.)

FLAXLEY: Don't! A man can't fight properly with an erection!

(With that, he handed her his sword.)

KRITZ: Thanks!

(Much to Flaxley's horror, she then proceeded to charge towards the beast with his sword held aloft like a spear.)

FLAXLEY: No!!!

(His eyes almost popped out of their sockets as she then thrust the sword like a harpoon, straight at the beast's head. As it embedded itself in the beast, it cried out and flailed its tentacles wildly, splashing everywhere and even hitting the ship. As the ship rocked violently, however, Flaxley paid no heed to that or the oil slick he was standing in. Like a man possessed he raced with his head down and leapt from the deck to retrieve his sword from the giant squid.)

FLAXLEY: I'm coming, Louise!!!

(As he completed his majestic leap from the ship to the beast, Bonson barely managed to stop Derek firing inferno blasts in time. He then joined his allies in watching Flaxley yank his sword from out of the beast he was standing on and duck and dive to avoid its flailing tentacles.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz, you stupid cow! Now what am I going to do???

(Kritz faked an astonished look, all part of what she considered her cunning plan.)

KRITZ: Did I throw your sword? I must have been under the squid's thrall!

(As he continued to bob and weave, Flaxley yelled back in a panic.)

FLAXLEY: Do you think I was born yesterday??? Now look what you've done!

KRITZ: Oh!

(Having thought she could trick him into one of the usual dark rages he fell into when a beast interfered with his sword, Kritz started to tremble. Continuing to panic, Flaxley was going red with rage.)

FLAXLEY: You threw my sword at it??? What did I ever do to you???

(Consumed with both guilt and fear, Kritz put her hands over her face.)

KRITZ: I'm sorry! You were supposed to go nuts!

(Just then, as he continued to surf upon the beast back, Flaxley ducked a tentacle only to have his sword whacked from his hand by another.)

FLAXLEY: My sword!!!

(Fearing the worst, his allies gaped.)

BONSON: Now he's unarmed!

DEREK: Shit!

(Mandika gave Kritz and astonished look.)

MANDIKA: Wow, Kritz! I know I've never exactly been overly affectionate or loving to my husband, but at least I've never tried to kill him!

(Kritz could only whimper, completely devoid of hope and answers to the mess she'd left him in. As they all looked on in distress, however, Flaxley watched his sword fall into the sea and turned red with rage.)

FLAXLEY: Why you?

(With that, he leapt off of the squid and into the water after it.)

KRITZ: No!!!

BONSON: Flaxley, why???

MANDIKA: Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god!

KRITZ: My Flaxley!!!

(She fell to her knees.)

KRITZ: I killed my Flaxley!!!

(Just then, like a well-trained dolphin, Flaxley leapt through the surface of the ocean and landed upon one of the squid's tentacles before racing back to the same place he'd been standing a moment before, his sword gleaming in his hand.)

KRITZ: Darling???

BONSON: That's not even humanly possibly! Is it?

DEREK: Nope! And yet it's quintessentially Flaxley to do something like that!

BONSON: Indeed! He must have grabbed a tentacle with one hand, caught the sword with the other and swung back again in one swift movement! He's like a god!

DEREK: Absolutely. He's hot too!

(Bonson gave him a cold glance.)

BONSON: What?

DEREK: I mean, if I was several years younger, human and female, I definitely would!

(As Bonson ran back to his cabin, screaming all the way, Derek grinned.)

DEREK: He's so easy!

(Allowing himself a chuckle, he turned towards Flaxley and folded his arms to enjoy the show. He, like Kritz and Mandika, knew exactly what was coming. In quite a stress at Flaxley's presence the squid was slapping itself repeatedly to rid itself of him. Flaxley, however, only had one thought. The squid had, albeit briefly, endangered his sword and therefore had to die. The fact Kritz had thrown it in the

first place, was neither here nor there. Any beast that dared threaten his sword, generally paid a very high price. Avoiding all the attempts by the creature to bat him with its tentacles, with all the grace and athleticism of a wild cat, he proceed to cut, chop and slash the squid like a butcher late for his daughter's wedding. Having witnessed such rages before, Mandika, Kritz and Derek all turned their backs as Flaxley sliced up the beast, without even giving it the opportunity to sink beneath the waves. As pieces of squid meat flew in the air and splattered everywhere, they winced and hunched their shoulders. A futile gesture as blood and flesh rained down on them. Within moments, the squid was dead. Looking triumphant, Flaxley stood tall upon the sinking body and beamed.)

FLAXLEY: I said it before and I'll say it again. Nobody messes with Sir Flaxley of Tifaeris!

(Relieved that the battle was over, Kritz, Mandika and Derek all stepped to the edge, being wary of the oil, and gave him a round of applause as he stood upon the carcass. Kritz was especially relieved, her plan may not have worked out exactly as she imagined it would but ultimately, Flaxley had gone into the dark rage she hoped he would.)

DEREK: Bravo, Flaxley!

KRITZ: Well done, my love! It all worked out brilliantly in the end!

DEREK: Indeed!!!

MANDIKA: Yes, nice work, Flaxley!

(As he stood there wearing his fixed, triumphant smirk, Flaxley placed his hands on his hips and looked across their faces.)

FLAXLEY: Well done to everybody! A real team effort. Now, if someone wouldn't mind throwing me a rope, I'm sinking!!!

(Mercifully, there were several lengths of rope tied to the life rings that were dotted around the edge of deck. Reacting swiftly, Derek grabbed one and cast it to Flaxley.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

(Once back on the ship, Flaxley stood before Mandika and Derek, while Kritz draped all over him, kissing him frantically all over.)

KRITZ: Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry...

(Flaxley forced a smile.)

FLAXLEY: Are you trying to say sorry, Kritzeveltia?

(She turned red with embarrassment.)

KRITZ: Sorry!

(As he looked at them standing there, covered in blood and oil, Flaxley shook a solemn head.)

FLAXLEY: I only asked you chaps out here to make peace and stop all the madness. So much for that, eh?

(Mandika shook her head.)

MANDIKA: Oh, Flaxley! Don't you see, you couldn't have planned it better?

DEREK: I'm sure he could!

MANDIKA: Well maybe but... fighting alongside you guys again...

(She smiled warmly.)

MANDIKA: It reminded me that I'm part of the team!

KRITZ: Yeah?

MANDIKA: Yeah! I mean, I might not be much use but I tried my best and you've never asked more from me. It reminded me why we've all come so far together!

DEREK: Well said, Mandika!

MANDIKA: So, I'm sorry I've been grouchy, okay? I love you guys!

(Her allies were amazed. For the first time in days, Mandika was showing her better side. Reciprocating her affection, they all threw out their arms and a group hug ensued. With Derek's horns a little too close to Flaxley's crotch for comfort, however, the hug was a brief one. Stepping back from it after only a few seconds, he nodded sternly then gestured towards the cabin doors.)

FLAXLEY: Come on, let's get ourselves cleaned up.

DEREK: Good idea.

(With that, they all started to head inside.)

MANDIKA: Will you help me sort my hair out, Kritz?

KRITZ: I was going to ask you the same thing, Mandika.

MANDIKA: Cool.

(They shared a warm smile then Kritz exhaled happily.)

KRITZ: So... another victory to our names, guys.

MANDIKA: Yeah!

DEREK: We should have some rum to celebrate!

(Kritz chuckled.)

KRITZ: You've taken quite a shine to the rum supply, haven't you?

DEREK: So?

KRITZ: Looks like Bonson also has a mini-me!

DEREK: Hey, I'm nothing like Bonson!

MANDIKA: Actually...

(As they neared the cabin doors, she caught sight of the storage hatches and gasped in horror at herself.)

MANDIKA: Oh my god, I forgot about Lefiat!

(Derek grinned.)

DEREK: Easily done, Mandika!

(He looked horrified.)

DEREK: Great seas of Wendigo!!! I *am* like Bonson!!!

(As Flaxley chuckled, he stepped up to the hatches and yanked them open.)

FLAXLEY: Out you come!

(Much to Mandika's horror, as soon as the hatch was opened, Lefiat climbed out with Phisele hanging off him, kissing him all over just as Kritz had done to Flaxley.)

LEFIAT: Help me! She won't let me go!

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Good grief, man!

(Trying not to laugh, Kritz beckoned to Phisele.)

KRITZ: Come here, missy. Leave him alone!

(As Phisele downheartedly obliged, Lefiat stood tall and pouted to Mandika.)

LEFIAT: It was horrible, Mandika! You don't know the hell I've just been through!

(As Flaxley, Derek and Kritz turned to see what Mandika would say, they spotted her nostrils twitching and immediately rushed inside; Kritz dragging the lovesick Phisele behind her. As he watched them go, Lefiat realised he was in trouble.)

LEFIAT: Uh-oh!

MANDIKA: What *you've* been through??? What *you've* been through??? Do you have any idea about the hell I just endured while you were safely shackled up in there with your jailbait floozy girlfriend? Do you???

LEFIAT: Eh? She's not...

MANDIKA: Look at my hair!

LEFIAT: I...

MANDIKA: I can't believe you did that!

LEFIAT: It weren't *my* fault! I didn't *mean* to fall in the hatch!

(Suddenly losing her rage, Mandika shook her head then looked to the floor. Her anger had been replaced with disillusionment as the events since her wedding finally caught up with her.)

MANDIKA: I don't think I've *ever* been *this* disappointed in you before. Right now... I don't even like you.

LEFIAT: But, Phisele was...

MANDIKA: It's not about that little shit. It's you.

(Lefiat hung his head.)

LEFIAT: I'm in trouble, aren't I?

MANDIKA: Yes, you are!

(She then gestured to the doors.)

MANDIKA: I'm going to wash myself then we need to talk, okay?

(As she slowly walked away, Lefiat watched her go and bit his lip. The angry Mandika he knew all too well didn't seem so bad. She was clearly heartbroken and he feared for their relationship.)

(Within hours of the squid being so horrifyingly butchered by Flaxley, the seven weary travellers noticed a shift in their general attitudes. As Mandika had suggested, the battle had served as a reminder to one and all that when they were together and united, they were capable of achieving great things. As a result the mood on the ship improved immensely. Rather than feeling like individuals stuck on a ship heading nowhere in particular, the feeling became one of being on a voyage into the unknown as a united force, a team. That togetherness was exactly what Flaxley had set out to find earlier in the day.

The general mood wasn't all sunshine and roses, however. Despite feeling part of something bigger with their allies at their side, Lefiat and Mandika still felt somewhat estranged from one another. It was safe to say that events after their wedding had set their relationship to its lowest point ever.

As midnight approached and the stars glistened into the cloudless sky above the ship, Mandika decided to take action. Having found peace with the rest of her companions it had become clear to her where the source of her remaining tension lied. The unease she'd been feeling remained, but solely towards her husband, Lefiat. Knowing she had to address the problem rather than take her woes out on the whole group as she normally tended to do, she called Lefiat away from where Flaxley was giving him some advice for an intimate chat.

With strict instructions given to Phisele by Kritz to stay away from them, Mandika and Lefiat soon found themselves on the freshly swabbed deck of the ship. Having been covered from head to foot in oil, Mandika had been forced to borrow a sailor suit from one of the female crew members. It was either that or borrow clothes from Kritz and that was the last thing she wanted to do. Much to her horror, however, the skirt of the sailor suit was just as short as one of Kritz's anyway. Bedecked in the black and red suit of the Leathrock navy, Mandika stepped up to the edge of the ship and looked down at the sea, the moon reflecting off her face as she did so. With a nervous sigh,

Lefiat walked up behind her. He rarely, if ever, knew what was going on before his very eyes and Mandika's quietness had him well and truly rattled. Normally he'd opt to stay out of her way rather than risk a severe tongue lashing and the fact he couldn't do that this time, made him extremely uncomfortable. As he stepped aside her, Mandika averted her gaze from the moonlit sea and looked into his worried eyes.)

MANDIKA: Romantic out here, isn't it?

LEFIAT: Yeah!

(He looked uneasy.)

LEFIAT: Well no actually, did I mention that I hate the sea?

MANDIKA: You did!

(Sounding calm and almost resigned, Mandika took a deep breath and glanced out to sea again.)

MANDIKA: Where are we going, Lefiat?

(Lefiat shrugged and pulled a confused grimace.)

MANDIKA: You're going to say "Sanetza", aren't you?

LEFIAT: No... I couldn't remember what it was called!

(She shook her head.)

MANDIKA: I didn't mean that!

LEFIAT: I'm confused!

(She sighed and stood tall as she turned to look at him.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat...

(She frowned.)

MANDIKA: My face is up here!

(Lefiat quickly looked her in the eyes and grinned.)

MANDIKA: Stupid skirt!

LEFIAT: You've got great legs though, Mandika! I can't help wanting to look!

MANDIKA: Lefiat, this is important!

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: I know but I'm worried, see?

MANDIKA: Worried?

LEFIAT: Yeah...

(He looked down.)

LEFIAT: After what you said about not even liking me right now... I'm worried that you think you made a mistake by marrying me!

(She lifted his chin with her finger to look into his eyes.)

MANDIKA: And did I?

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: That's for you to decide!

MANDIKA: Then let me do that!

LEFIAT: Mandika, you've been in a bad mood ever since Tifaeris. And now you say you don't even like me. You can't blame me for being worried.

(She sighed and looked out to sea once more.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat? Do you really wanna know why I'm angry with you?

(Lefiat glanced uneasily from side to side.)

LEFIAT: Um... kind of. Flaxley's the one who messed up our honeymoon, not me.

MANDIKA: No. Well... yeah.

LEFIAT: Eh?

MANDIKA: When you agreed to go on this trip and raced up the gangplank, you crushed me. And the worst part is, you don't even know why it crushed me.

(Lefiat sighed.)

LEFIAT: Yes, I do. I was supposed to say no.

MANDIKA: Yes, you were. That's not what hurts though. In that moment it was as if you didn't even know me. Like I married a man who'll never be able to comprehend what really matters to me. I've never felt so unloved. So *you* tell *me* if marrying you was a mistake or not.

(Lefiat looked enlightened and sighed to himself.)

LEFIAT: I understand!

MANDIKA: Do you though? Do you really?

LEFIAT: Yeah, actually I do!

(She looked sceptical.)

MANDIKA: Really?

LEFIAT: Well... Flaxley kind of explained it to me just now!

(Mandika scoffed.)

MANDIKA: Flaxley? Our resident honeymoon expert! What does *he* know about love and marriage?

LEFIAT: Eh? You're kidding? Have you seen his wife? She's well...

(Noticing the furious glare he was receiving, he then clammed up.)

MANDIKA: She's well what?

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: Um... she's pretty!

MANDIKA: She's sexy, you mean? She's hotter than hell?

LEFIAT: Yeah, but she's not you!

(Mandika shook her head.)

MANDIKA: You probably thought that was a compliment, didn't you?

LEFIAT: Eh?

MANDIKA: Kritz is sexy, unlike me, huh?

LEFIAT: Hey, I never said that!

MANDIKA: It doesn't matter!

LEFIAT: But it does! She might be sexy, but what use is that to me? I love *you*, Mandika!

(She smiled.)

MANDIKA: And I love you too! I just wish you understood *why* I'm so upset about you agreeing to come on this voyage! If you can't understand *that* then you don't understand *me*.

LEFIAT: But I *do* understand!

MANDIKA: No, I don't think you do!

LEFIAT: I do, much better than you think!

MANDIKA: Oh really? I doubt it!

LEFIAT: Well, you're wrong!

MANDIKA: Am I? Am I? Can you really even begin to comprehend why I'm so stressed? I even cast magic at Flaxley, one of my best friends in the whole world!

(Lefiat nodded.)

LEFIAT: I can actually!

MANDIKA: Go on then. Tell me why I'm so upset.

(Lefiat looked to her and sighed.)

LEFIAT: Mandika... I was just wanted to be your husband; I wasn't worried about much else! The ceremony, the parade, the honeymoon, it didn't really bother me *what* we did or where! But it did to you! All I wanted was the honour of being your husband... but Flaxley reckons *you* probably started planning this wedding when you were just a kid! Perfect honeymoon included. To *you*, it was everything. A

childhood dream. It meant the world to you.

MANDIKA: Well, yeah, I mean I always dreamt of a beautiful wedding followed by the perfect honeymoon!

LEFIAT: See? I get it. You ached for everything to be just like it was in your dreams. It was really important to you, it meant everything. Then it went horribly wrong from the minute we arrived in Tifaeris. And like you weren't hurting enough, *I* then made it ten times worse by choosing to come on this voyage without even pausing to consider *your* feelings. In that moment, I completely ruined what little chance you had of getting your ideal honeymoon back. No wonder you're pissed off at me.

(He pouted at her sorrowfully.)

LEFIAT: I'm so sorry, Mandika. I didn't think. I'm an idiot... that's not news to anyone, but I do understand why you're so angry with me. Your dream just fell apart then I banged the final nail into its coffin.

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: Maybe you *did* make a mistake marrying me because you deserve so much better than that.

(Mandika just stared at him in astonishment.)

MANDIKA: Wow, you really do understand!!!

LEFIAT: I told you. Fat lot of good it'll do now though. The honeymoon's already ruined.

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: You're gonna divorce me now, aren't you?

MANDIKA: No.

(Hope returned to Lefiat's eyes.)

LEFIAT: You're not?

(He whimpered.)

LEFIAT: You're gonna have me beheaded!!!

MANDIKA: Don't be stupid!

LEFIAT: What then?

(Mandika offered him a smile and looked into his eyes.)

MANDIKA: Marrying you, I fully expected mistakes and stupid decisions, it comes with the territory. What I was afraid of is that you didn't understand what's important to me. I was afraid that you wouldn't be able to comprehend my feelings, because that would make me so lonely.

LEFIAT: No way, Mandika. I understand you perfectly... now Flaxley's explained it to me... and I feel awful about it. I ruined your dream.

(Mandika smiled then glanced out to sea.)

MANDIKA: Well, my dream's gone now. There's nothing we can do about that. It's okay though, at least I have a man who understands me.

LEFIAT: Flaxley?

MANDIKA: You, you fool.

LEFIAT: Oh, right.

MANDIKA: Okay, you had to have it explained to you, but you get it. And you feel bad about it. Knowing that, I can at least see a future for us now. You've put my mind at rest.

(She looked him lovingly in the eye.)

MANDIKA: So the answer is, no. I didn't make a mistake marrying you.

(Lefiat looked most relieved.)

LEFIAT: Phew.

MANDIKA: I mean our honeymoon may be in tatters, but that doesn't mean we can't have a perfect marriage.

LEFIAT: Sounds good to me.

MANDIKA: And it wasn't *all* bad. The wedding itself *was* amazing, let's not forget that.

LEFIAT: Was it everything you dreamt it would be?

MANDIKA: Not really, but it was still amazing.

(Recalling her dream wedding extremely vividly, she stared to the stars and mused out loud in a love struck voice.)

MANDIKA: In my dreams it was perfect from beginning to end, everything was so incredible. When the holy man said "you may kiss the bride", my husband would pick me up in his thick, muscular arms...

(Lefiat looked at his skinny forearms and pouted.)

MANDIKA: And I'd run my fingers through his slick, brown hair...

(Lefiat felt his curly black locks and frowned.)

MANDIKA: And I'd say, "I love you, Flaxley"...

LEFIAT: Eh???

(Realising what she'd said, she slung her hand over her mouth and gaped.)

MANDIKA: Oops!

LEFIAT: You fantasised about marrying Flaxley???

MANDIKA: Um... no!

LEFIAT: Yes you did! You just said so!

(Mandika looked peeved.)

MANDIKA: Oh... so what if I did? It's not like you didn't know I used to have an almighty crush on him!

LEFIAT: You did?

MANDIKA: Yes! You know I did! I was always trying to seduce him right up until Kritz took him away! You were there!

(He sighed.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, fair enough!

MANDIKA: Thank you!

(He hunched his shoulders and pouted again.)

LEFIAT: Sorry I wasn't good enough for you! I didn't mean to ruin your perfect wedding. Serves me right for not being Flaxley.

(With that, he folded his arms and sulked.)

MANDIKA: Don't sulk!

(At once, he unfolded his arms and sighed.)

LEFIAT: Fine, I won't then!

MANDIKA: Good, because I see now that you *do* understand me and we can be happy together forever! That'll be much easier without you sulking.

LEFIAT: Gotcha.

(He smiled.)

LEFIAT: And just so you know, I'll always *try* to understand, Mandika. I won't always get it right but I'll have a go. You mean everything to me. I live to love you!

(Mandika's heart melted.)

MANDIKA: Aw...

LEFIAT: Why do you think I suddenly learn how to sword fight when you're around? I'm bloody useless the rest of the time. I'm always here for *you* though.

MANDIKA: You are!

LEFIAT: I mean, the rest of the time I walk into stuff, break vases, burn down castles,

but when I'm with you...

(At his point Mandika walked into his arms and wrapped herself around him.)

MANDIKA: Don't spoil it! We know you can be useless but it's your love that matters!

LEFIAT: Okay!

(He beamed.)

LEFIAT: Does this mean I'm getting some later?

(She frowned.)

MANDIKA: Had to speak, didn't you?

LEFIAT: Sorry!

(Mandika sighed.)

MANDIKA: It's okay!

(She stepped back from his arms and smiled.)

MANDIKA: You know, I really thought you wouldn't understand why accepting this mission crushed me. I mean, some people just don't get how important weddings and honeymoons *are* to girls.

LEFIAT: Not me. Flaxley told me pointless and trivial things like that mean everything to women.

MANDIKA: Excuse me?

LEFIAT: I swear Mandika, if I could turn back time I'd look Kritz dead in the boobs and tell her I'm not coming on this voyage!

(Mandika practically stared right through him.)

MANDIKA: Loving you forever isn't going to be easy.

LEFIAT: Eh?

MANDIKA: Nothing. Anyway, maybe I expected too much. I mean it's not like I could ever realistically expect any man to live up to my perfect fantasy!

(Lefiat frowned.)

LEFIAT: Yeah well... I think I've heard enough about your perfect fantasy, thank you! Stupid Flaxley.

(Mandika rolled her eyes.)

MANDIKA: Oh, get over it! I kindly let Kritz have Flaxley and chose you instead. You've got me now, so stop complaining.

LEFIAT: You *let* her have him?

MANDIKA: Yes! You should know, you were there.

(She shook her head in annoyance.)

MANDIKA: Why does everyone always doubt me on that?

(Lefiat grinned at her nervously.)

LEFIAT: Um... no reason. So, um... everything's okay now, is it?

(She looked into his eyes and smiled merrily.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, it is!

(She hung her head and sighed.)

MANDIKA: I just wish my dad could have been at the wedding.

LEFIAT: Yeah, must have been hard for you! I just wish I'd remembered to invite my mum!

(He looked nervous.)

LEFIAT: She's going to kick my arse when she gets hold of me!

(Mandika chuckled.)

MANDIKA: I invited her; she was in the front row!

LEFIAT: Eh? I never saw her!

MANDIKA: Well she was there. Of course she was, she's your mum.

(She hung her head and wiped a tear.)

MANDIKA: That was what really hurt, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: My mum?

MANDIKA: No, mine!

LEFIAT: Eh? But she's been dead for like... ages.

(It then dawned on him that making ill-thought out comments probably wasn't the best course of action at this moment in time. For most people this wasn't such a revelation but Lefiat was always uniquely himself.)

LEFIAT: Fuck sake, Mandika, you married an idiot!

(She sighed.)

MANDIKA: I know!

(As Mandika stood before him looking thoroughly miserable, Lefiat looked from side to side feeling extremely uncomfortable. Eager to take her mind off her mother, he said the first thing that came into his head.)

LEFIAT: I never knew your mum, what was she like?

(He spanned his forehead.)

LEFIAT: What's wrong with me?

(Mandika looked up.)

MANDIKA: My mum? She was a wonderful, loving woman. She wasn't like me at all. She cared so much about everyone she ever met.

LEFIAT: Sounds nice!

MANDIKA: She was!

(At this point, Bonson emerged from the cabin doors and called over to them.)

BONSON: You two, we just had a game of cards to see who came out to get you!

(He frowned.)

BONSON: Flaxley won and sent me! The crew just brought us some sandwiches, come and get them if you want any.

(Offering him a warm smile, Mandika waved him over.)

MANDIKA: Come here a moment, Bonson!

(Bonson frowned.)

BONSON: But I already did my forfeit!

MANDIKA: Oh come on!

(Reluctantly, he did as she asked.)

BONSON: What do you want? I'm trying to win my money back, but they're all cheating like buggery. Flaxley and Kritz especially. And I'm pretty sure Derek is mind reading. Never play cards with those three!

MANDIKA: Thanks for the tip!

BONSON: You're welcome. Can I go now?

MANDIKA: Bonson, I was just telling Lefiat about my mother!

(Suddenly taking an interest, Bonson raised a curious eyebrow.)

BONSON: Your mother?

MANDIKA: Yeah, I mean, from what I remember she was a wonderful woman but I was only ten when she died. You know more about her than I do!

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: Well... what do you want to know?

MANDIKA: Anything really. Am I like her?

(Bonson scoffed.)

BONSON: Oh god no. You're half the woman she was!

LEFIAT: That's just mean, Bonson!

BONSON: Oh don't get me wrong, Mandika here... she's alright...

(He smiled.)

BONSON: But your mother, the queen... let me put it this way... do you ever hear me make cruel jokes or rude comments about people?

(Lefiat and Mandika frowned angrily.)

MANDIKA: Hell yeah!

LEFIAT: All the bloody time!

BONSON: Exactly, but have you ever heard me disrespect your mother, even for a moment, Mandika?

(She looked stumped.)

MANDIKA: Um... no actually!

BONSON: Well when you consider the source, me, maybe that'll give you some sort of clue as to how much high regard I held her in!

LEFIAT: Wow!

(Bonson looked to the stars and reminisced.)

BONSON: Right from the very day she arrived from Ashrin to marry your father, life in the palace and indeed Guevina just got better and better.

MANDIKA: Really?

BONSON: I kid you not. She didn't behave like a princess, she behaved like a lady!

(Mandika looked uncertain.)

MANDIKA: Are you saying I didn't behave like a lady when I was a princess?

(Bonson frowned.)

BONSON: I don't know. Maybe we should ask some of the soldiers you slept with!

MANDIKA: Hey!!!

LEFIAT: She'd never do that!!!

(Mandika looked away innocently and Lefiat shook an angry head.)

LEFIAT: Awful thing to say!

BONSON: Anyway, seeing as you asked, it was my duty to take care of your mother. The queen to be, Princess Anoka of Ashrin!

(He sighed with wonderment.)

BONSON: She treated me like a friend, not like a servant. I loved her to death, I really did!

(He then bit his lip.)

BONSON: Well, that *was* an unfortunate turn of phrase!

MANDIKA: Wow, Bonson. I've never seen you speak so highly of anybody! Ever!

BONSON: Well, there you go. She was a wonderful woman! Miles better than you!

MANDIKA: Yeah okay, don't rub it in!

(Lefiat looked baffled.)

LEFIAT: Hold on, she was princess of what?

BONSON: Ashrin!

LEFIAT: Eh? So why did she come to Guevina and not be queen of there?

MANDIKA: She was the third child of the king, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: I don't follow! Spell it out to me; remember who you're talking to!

(Bonson chuckled.)

BONSON: Maybe we should draw pictures for you!

LEFIAT: That'd be helpful!

MANDIKA: Oh Lefiat, it's pretty simple...

BONSON: You said it!

MANDIKA: Her oldest brother was heir to the Ashrin throne...

(Lefiat looked confused.)

MANDIKA: Her oldest brother was destined to be the king of Ashrin, so she could

either remain a princess there or marry my dad and become Queen of Guevina!

BONSON: Well... that's not exactly it. It sounds bad when you put it that way. She didn't have any choice but to become queen of Guevina. Her marriage to your father was arranged. She didn't marry him out of lust for power, she isn't *you*!

(Mandika looked peeved.)

MANDIKA: Hey! What's that supposed to mean?

(She gestured at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: Look what I married!

(Bonson burst out laughing as Lefiat placed his hands on his hips.)

LEFIAT: What's that supposed to mean!

MANDIKA: I mean I didn't marry out of lust for power either, I already have the power. *I* married a peasant!

LEFIAT: Wow, Mandika. You really know how to make a guy feel special!

(She gave him a smile.)

MANDIKA: We'll have sex later!

(And lo and behold, she really did know how to make a guy feel special.)

LEFIAT: Yay!!!

BONSON: Anyway Lefiat, it's simple. She married out of her own royal stock into the Guevina royal family.

LEFIAT: So both your parents had royal blood then Mandika?

(She beamed.)

MANDIKA: Yup!

LEFIAT: I didn't know that!

MANDIKA: See, my uncle is the king of Ashrin!

LEFIAT: Cool! We should have gone there for our honeymoon!

(Mandika was crestfallen.)

MANDIKA: Why didn't I think of that???

BONSON: Anyway, you two, have you made peace? Only, I'm going back inside in the warm!

MANDIKA: Yeah, we have!

(The newlyweds gave each other a loving smile then embraced lovingly.)

BONSON: Good grief, spare me!

(With that, he walked inside leaving the young couple to hold each other in their arms.)

LEFIAT: I love you, Mandika!

MANDIKA: I love you too, Flaxley!

(Lefiat beamed for a moment growled furiously.)

LEFIAT: Hey, you're fantasising again!!!

(Mandika laughed out loud.)

MANDIKA: I'm only joking, darling. Let's go and make love!

LEFIAT: Okay, but keep your eyes open and no fantasising!!!

(As she led him away by the hand, Mandika shrugged.)

MANDIKA: Like you never fantasise about Kritz.

LEFIAT: Hey! I only do that when I'm on my own!!!

(And with that, Mandika stormed indoors. Lefiat could only hang his head. He may have pacified the prolonged niggles of doubt in Mandika's mind about their marriage, but once again, there'd be no sex for him on this night.

As the night wore on, the allies all found their way to their cabins and embarked on another night's sleep. Still with no clue as to where they were going or if indeed

they'd ever get there, they made no preparations to be woken, preferring to sleep in as long as possible. All in all the day had been a great success, especially for Flaxley having managed to pull them together as a team. With the attitude remarkably more relaxed as a result, they all slept a lot easier than they had done ever since they left the port. Feeling her marriage was salvageable, Mandika slept extremely well and snored as Lefiat curled up on the floor in punishment for his latest moment of stupidity. Things may not have been ideal, but at least now they all felt a lot more comfortable about being able to handle whatever lay ahead.

(As the sun rose from the night sky and turned the dark sea back to blue, something in the air seemed different. Normally, at sea, the sounds in the air remained the same, night and day. Nothing but the drone of the ship cutting through the ocean would be heard. The dawning of this fourth day, however, was different. The noise in the air was a cacophonous delight. Having heard nothing but their own voices and the water splashing against the ship for days, the sound of seagulls that echoed across the sky were a joy for the crew to behold. Excited by the early morning birdsong, the captain sent one of his men up into the crow's nest to confirm the obvious. With a look of sheer exhilaration on his face, he watched his man climb to the tallest point on the ship's mast and awaited his call with eager anticipation. Sure enough, moments later, came the cry he'd been longing to hear.)

CREWMAN: Land ahoy!!!

(With joy in his heart, the captain kicked his heels together and raced to tell the passengers that their voyage was at an end. Above all, his excitement lay in the fact that he'd go down in history as the captain who discovered the mythical land of Sanetza. Not even contemplating for a minute that they may have miscalculated and sailed to an already well known part of the world, he danced for joy as he ran. To sailors, Sanetza was the Holy Grail in a way, most however, had been too proud to admit they believed in it, let alone face the indignity of trying and failing to find it. The captain of the Colloskayak, on the other hand, had tried and succeeded. His place in nautical folklore was assured.

As soon as he informed the passengers of Sanetza's appearance on the horizon, they all leapt out of bed and dressed in a blinding hurry. The thought of putting their feet on solid soil seemed truly wonderful. Flaxley however didn't quite see it that way. He armed himself to the teeth, ever mindful that Croxton may need rescuing and that they had no idea what this strange land had in store for them. Knowing he'd need to take the lead and keep his companions feet on the ground, he prepared himself accordingly. As he rushed his armour on and stowed weapons upon his person, Kritz sat nervously upon their bed and bit her nails. Should they find Croxton, then they'd possibly find the sister she thought the Trepe had slaughtered. All she could do was try to remain calm and prepare herself to accept whatever they found.

Within five minutes of receiving the news, the allies made their way to the deck to join some of the crew members in watching the land approach. Mandika especially had never got dressed so quickly in all her life. Partly because of the excitement at reaching land and partly because her dress was now clean and she'd never have to wear the mini-skirted sailor suit ever again. Being the last to arrive, she joined her awestruck friends in gasping with delight at the glorious sight of the rapidly approaching land.)

KRITZ: Wow, it's beautiful!

BONSON: It really is!

(They all watched on, open mouthed at the sight of the golden sands and palm trees on the beach ahead. Beyond the beach, there was a spectacular looking forest with a large mountain peak in the distance. In many ways, it looked like the coast around Tifaeris only unspoiled by human hands. This was the tiny speck in the distance that some sailors had reported seeing and yet never investigated. This was history in the making. Sanetza would no longer be a mythical land but a feature on a map. Taking in the sense of history as the Colloskayak approached the shore, Bonson nodded happily.)

BONSON: If we all get brutally slaughtered then I can think of worse places to be! (Having brought his allies straight back down to earth, he rubbed his hands together.)

BONSON: So, are we getting in a rowing boat or not?

MANDIKA: A rowing boat?

BONSON: Yes ma'am. Or would you rather we run the ship into the sand so it can be stuck there forever?

MANDIKA: But... I didn't realise!

BONSON: Well, of course you didn't. The ship can only get so close and then we... I mean Flaxley and Kritz will have to row us all ashore!

(She nodded.)

MANDIKA: Okay but, I'm not sure Phisele should go ashore, she's just a kid and she might get hurt!

(Phisele looked most put out.)

PHISELE: I won't get hurt! I'm tougher than you! *You* stay on the boat!

(Mandika held her palm towards her.)

MANDIKA: I'm not staying here; I want to get on dry land!

KRITZ: Hey, we're all going, okay?

BONSON: Maybe some of us don't want to!

KRITZ: Yeah? Like who?

(They looked around their silent allies.)

KRITZ: That's settled then!

(Not wishing to spend another moment near Phisele, Mandika's face bore a devilish expression.)

MANDIKA: Kritz!

(She took her to one side.)

MANDIKA: Are you sure about letting Phisele come ashore? I mean, it really might not be safe and you don't want to be responsible should anything happen to the poor child!

(Realising she may have had a point, Kritz nodded.)

KRITZ: Hmm, I never thought of it like that!

(She stepped up to Phisele.)

KRITZ: Phisele!

(Mandika beamed, delighted she was about to get her way for once.)

KRITZ: When we get on land stick with me, I don't want you to get hurt!

(She smiled at Mandika.)

KRITZ: Thanks for the advice, babe!

(Mandika snarled through gritted teeth.)

MANDIKA: My pleasure!

Landfall – Land of Sanetza

(Within 10 minutes or so of the Colloskayak anchoring at sea to signify the end of the outbound voyage, Bonson, Derek, Flaxley, Kritz, Lefiat, Mandika and Phisele found themselves lined up on Sanetza's golden sand, delighted to be on solid ground. Having secured their rowing boat and signalled their success to the captain of the ship, they were then ready to begin their search of this uncharted wilderness. The beach upon which they stood consisted of the lightest, finest sand they'd ever seen and the light blue sea that washed against it made it a delight for the eye to behold. With palms trees gently swaying in the soft breeze, it was about as perfect as it could possibly be. At the top of the beach, the sand turned to forested earth and millions of trees dominated every inch of land in sight. It all looked so calming and pure that Mandika in particular couldn't wait to have a look around. Flaxley, on the other hand, was a lot more cautious.)

FLAXLEY: Well chaps, we're here! This is where the hard work begins!

MANDIKA: Don't be such a killjoy, Flaxley! Your friend might just appear any minute having survived a shipwreck. Why must you assume there'll be danger?

FLAXLEY: Well, Daman Siria is involved and you lot are here.

BONSON: He's right you know. This isn't going to end well!

FLAXLEY: Oh it'll end well, but I certainly doubt it'll go smoothly!

MANDIKA: Well, we'll see!

FLAXLEY: Indeed! Okay, here's the plan! Kritz, don't let Phisele out of your sight!

KRITZ: I wasn't going to!

FLAXLEY: Derek, keep an eye on Bonson!

BONSON: Eh? Since when did I become so lame?

DEREK: Excuse me? You're always complaining that you're too old and frail!!!

BONSON: Yes, but that's only when it suits me to be so!

FLAXLEY: I'm just saying, should anything happen, be wary of him!

DEREK: I will!

FLAXLEY: Excellent, right...

(He turned to Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: As for you, Lefiat...

(Lefiat rolled his eyes.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, I know, don't touch anything!

(He mumbled under his breath.)

LEFIAT: Always telling me the same bloody thing...

FLAXLEY: Um... actually, Lefiat, I was going to tell you to protect Mandika!

LEFIAT: Oh!

(His face lit up.)

LEFIAT: I can do that!

FLAXLEY: Good, then do it well. Right, here we go, stick close together and keep your eyes peeled for danger, okay?

MANDIKA: I still think you worry too much, Flaxley!

BONSON: Hey, so who are you going to be looking out for, Flaxley?

(Flaxley stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: All of us, obviously!

KRITZ: Good grief!

FLAXLEY: Now there could be all sorts of weird and bizarre creatures in these woods, you just don't know! We followed the course Croxton did and it brought us here. We know he's still alive, so I think it's safe to assume he's here somewhere. Now until we find out if he's being held captive or if he's in any danger, it makes

sense to treat this place as dangerous! Am I wrong?

(There was silence.)

FLAXLEY: Right, now let's march! And stay close!

(As he headed off, Mandika took Lefiat's hand and followed on. Derek and Bonson strolled just behind them and Kritz knelt to allow Phisele to jump on her back. With Flaxley as lead, they then stepped from the beach and onto the brown floor of the forest and disappeared inside.)

(Little did Flaxley and his crew know, the ship that had followed their course since Leathrock was now also approaching Sanetza. Although still some distance away, they could see the land through their telescope.

Unable to remove the telescope from his eye, Heiner was stunned to his very core.)

HEINER: There *is* land! Morten, Morten?

MORTEN: Sir?

HEINER: Sanetza is real!

(Morten puffed out and nodded.)

MORTEN: So it would seem, sir!

HEINER: How long until we can make landfall?

MORTEN: A few hours yet, sir!

HEINER: I see.

MORTEN: Shall I prepare the men, sir?

HEINER: What? Oh, yeah, that's a good idea! And tell whoever's driving not to park near the Colloskayak, we don't want to be spotted!

MORTEN: Park?

HEINER: Moor, anchor, whatever!

(He flapped.)

HEINER: I don't fucking know!

MORTEN: Very well, sir!

HEINER: We'll take 100 men or so...

MORTEN: 100, sir? Are you sure that's wise?

HEINER: You have a problem with strength in numbers?

MORTEN: No sir, I have a problem with stealth in numbers!

HEINER: Meaning?

MORTEN: Well, instead of taking a sledgehammer to crack this walnut, I say we should take our best 30 or something!

(Heiner looked uncertain.)

HEINER: Well... how many men do we have altogether?

MORTEN: 143 altogether, Flaxley killed a good 30 or so!

HEINER: Tosser! What we'll do is find Croxton, take his chain then go and kill Flaxley!

(Morten looked unsure.)

MORTEN: That is one idea, sir!

HEINER: Oh, once again you have a better one?

MORTEN: Well, it might be a little foolish to risk a battle out here sir, I mean what if we don't win?

HEINER: What? How can you even think we won't win?

MORTEN: Sorry sir, I was foolishly basing my suggestion on the right royal arse kicking Flaxley gave us last time!

(Heiner gave him a dagger look.)

HEINER: Is that sarcasm?

MORTEN: Sorry! I just think it'd make more sense to find Croxton before Flaxley does and get away as quickly as possible before he notices. I don't care how quick their ship is, they'll never find our hideout unless they can somehow guess our coordinates! So I'd suggest a smaller landing party for ease of movement without being spotted...

HEINER: Hmm, I see!

MORTEN: Of course, if Flaxley finds Croxton first then we'll have to attack them. In that scenario we can always come back for more men!

HEINER: Well... that sounds like a plan! Let's do it!

MORTEN: Sir!

HEINER: Now, let's make sure we go prepared! I want that chain, Morten!

MORTEN: Yes, sir!

(Heiner gave an evil grin.)

HEINER: When I rule the world, I'm going to come for you, Flaxley!

(With that, he sat back and gave an evil laugh while Morten rolled his eyes and headed off to carry out his orders.)

(Out on the newly discovered land at this point, Flaxley continued to lead his party forth under the sprawling umbrella of a million trees. The shade provided by the plethora of leaves was broken now and again by dazzling sunlight breaking erratically through the branches to create hazy spotlights between the trees. Making full use of the spots of light on the ground, Kritz was jumping from one to another with Phisele on her back to keep her entertained as she brought up the rear. Being careful not to alert Flaxley to her lack of concentration, she giggled quietly much to her young protégé's amusement. Just ahead of her, looking like awestruck tourists, Bonson and Derek mused happily and glanced around at the glory of nature's creation and marvelled to themselves. Mandika would also have liked to take in the view but kept having it obscured by an overenthusiastic Lefiat. Having had his skill to watch over Mandika validated by Flaxley, he somehow got it into his head that he was on high alert. With eyes on stalks he circled around her and leapt from side to side, his eyes wide open for danger. Leading them along the safest looking path, Flaxley had *his* eyes open for the more hidden dangers. Being more than adept at survival and forest etiquette, he was looking out for snakes hidden in leaves or upon branches. He was also looking for signs of human life. Be it a piece of torn Leathrock uniform or a footprint, he felt sure that if it was there, he'd spot it.

After less than half a mile of walking, Bonson convinced himself entirely that this was an abandoned island and completely forgot all about Flaxley's instructions to remain alert for any signs of danger. Looking every inch a man on a Sunday stroll in the park, he exhaled merrily then looked to Derek.)

BONSON: Isn't this beautiful?

DEREK: It is. It reminds me of Tryme 13 actually!

BONSON: Really?

DEREK: Yeah, Tryme 13 is just one big forest!

BONSON: Hmm... sounds lovely. Have you ever been?

DEREK: No! It doesn't have a breathable atmosphere!

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: I see. Guevina is like that sometimes, especially on Lefiat's bath night!
(Derek mused solemnly.)
DEREK: I remember. I helped the maids throw his bath water into the river once!
BONSON: Yes, I heard. All the fish floated to the top.
(Derek sighed remorsefully.)
DEREK: It was a massacre!
(As the two of them enjoyed a crafty giggle, Mandika raised her voice and brought the entire party to a complete stand still.)
MANDIKA: Stop! For the love of life, will you stop doing that???
LEFIAT: Eh? Who?
(They all turned to face the cheesed off royal complainant.)
MANDIKA: You, you twerp!
LEFIAT: But...
MANDIKA: Stop leaping about!
LEFIAT: Me?
MANDIKA: Well nobody else was jumping around like a retarded baboon!
(Everybody except Flaxley grinned, understanding just how annoying Lefiat's leaping about must have been.)
LEFIAT: I'm just doing what Flaxley taught me!
(Unsurprisingly, Flaxley was not amused.)
FLAXLEY: No, you bloody weren't!
LEFIAT: I was! You taught me that stealth technique between those trees, remember? It was my first and only day of training.
(Flaxley gave him a condescending glance.)
FLAXLEY: I taught you how to sneak from tree to tree. I didn't tell you to randomly jump about and get in your charge's way!
LEFIAT: I wasn't!
MANDIKA: You were!
LEFIAT: Was I?
FLAXLEY: And while we're on the subject of stealth, take that pot off your head, the sun's reflecting off it so brightly, the crew of the Colloskayak can probably still see us!
(Lefiat looked peeved.)
LEFIAT: It's not a pot. It's a helmet!
FLAXLEY: Lefiat, it still has the handles on it!
LEFIAT: Eh?
(Mandika looked a little sheepish and spoke up in his defence.)
MANDIKA: It's not really his fault, Flaxley. His old one looked a bit shabby so I fetched him a new one from the galley this morning. It must have been recently polished!
(Lefiat stood tall.)
LEFIAT: See? She got it from the galley! So it's not a pot! In your face, Flaxley!
(Flaxley raised an unimpressed eyebrow.)
FLAXLEY: In my face?
(A vengeful glint then appeared in Flaxley's eye and he looked to Bonson.)
FLAXLEY: Bonson?
BONSON: Flaxley?
FLAXLEY: Knock yourself out, old boy!
(At once, Bonson's eyes lit up.)
BONSON: Really? Thank you!

(Bonson rubbed his hands together gleefully then stepped up to Lefiat.)

BONSON: Lefiat, you curly haired, key losing, vase-breaking arsonist, a galley is a kitchen on a ship. It's where they keep pots!

LEFIAT: Eh?

BONSON: It's not an armoury or sword shack, it's a kitchen. They keep plates, spoons and pots, or as you call them, shields, swords and helmets!

(Looking deeply distressed, Lefiat turned to Flaxley with imploring eyes.).

LEFIAT: Make him stop!

BONSON: Look at me while I'm insulting you!

LEFIAT: Flaxley!!!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: That's enough, Bonson!

(Bonson clicked his fingers and sneered.)

BONSON: Crap, I was just getting going!

FLAXLEY: Now, in *whose* face was it, Lefiat?

(Lefiat hung his head.)

LEFIAT: Mine!

FLAXLEY: Correct. And don't you forget it!

(With that, he about turned to look the way they'd been marching.)

FLAXLEY: Now try to keep the noise down, chaps! Remember, we don't know what's in these woods!

MANDIKA: And no more leaping about!

LEFIAT: Yeah, fine!

(Having been leaping from sunny spot to sunny spot, Kritz and Phisele shared a sneaky smile.)

FLAXLEY: Right!

(With that, he started to walk on.)

FLAXLEY: Now let's go!

(And so, they all followed on once more.)

BONSON: Is it okay if we whisper?

DEREK: Bonson, I can read your mind and talk directly into your head!

BONSON: Let's do that then!

(Moments later, Flaxley stopped again and threw his hands out to his sides to stop his allies.)

FLAXLEY: Wait!!!

(Much to his annoyance, they'd all been so taken by the scenery, they all marched straight past him as if he wasn't there. Thankfully, despite jumping around with Phisele on her back, Kritz had managed to pay attention. Looking miffed that they'd ignored Flaxley's warning, she issued her own.)

KRITZ: Stop!!!

(Immediately they all leapt out of their skin. When Kritz bellowed at the top of her lungs, anyone who claimed not to hear her was either deaf, lying or on another continent at the time. At once, everyone stopped and glared at her, Bonson trying to clear his ears as he did so. Flaxley nodded to her.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you, Kritz!

KRITZ: You're welcome!

LEFIAT: So why have we...

(At this point, thirty or so wild antelopes charged from the trees just ahead of them. The allies could only look on in bewilderment as their hooves thundered right through the very spot they'd have been walking if Flaxley hadn't spotted them. Too relieved

about not being trampled to appreciate the magnificent beasts as they raced past, they all just looked on in amazement and said nothing. As the last one rushed past, Flaxley drew his sword, finally provoking a reaction.)

MANDIKA: What are you doing, Flaxley?

(Without facing her, he replied coldly.)

FLAXLEY: You'll see!

(With concentration etched into his face, he stared in the direction the antelope had charged from. Moments later, some of the low lying grass he was facing, started to twitch and bend.)

FLAXLEY: Here we go!!!

(With that, he leapt forward and embedded his sword in a black panther. The allies were in a state of shock. The panther had run at such a stunning pace after the antelopes, they hadn't even seen it approaching. Lefiat's mouth fell open. It was almost as if Flaxley had flashed his sword at nothing and conjured a dead panther on the end of it.

As he yanked his sword free, Flaxley turned and smiled at his allies.)

FLAXLEY: Antelope don't run away like that for nothing, you know!

(Bonson nodded and raised his chin.)

BONSON: Flaxley, I salute you! Nice spot!

LEFIAT: Yeah!

DEREK: I certainly wouldn't have seen them coming!

(Flaxley beamed, taking their compliments to affirm what he already knew, he was the greatest knight who ever lived.)

FLAXLEY: Yes well, one does ones best!

(Phisele, however, didn't quite agree. She'd been busy telling Kritz what spot of light to leap on and hadn't heard nor seen Flaxley's attempt to stop them.)

PHISELE: But... it was Kritz who saw the antelopes!

(Kritz smiled.)

KRITZ: He saw them first, sweetheart!

PHISELE: Did he? Then why did *you* have to stop everybody walking? Why didn't *he*?

(She mused to herself.)

PHISELE: Does he want Mandika dead too?

(Mandika's hair almost stood on end.)

KRITZ: Um...

BONSON: Anyway, well done to both of you. Good thing you swallowed that foghorn, Kritz!

KRITZ: Hey, I'm not *that* loud!

(She received several disagreeing glances.)

KRITZ: Hey!

BONSON: Point being, job well done.

DEREK: Indeed, you saved our lives there. Thanks, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Just doing my duty, Derek!

DEREK: And thanks Kritz, you two are quite a team!

(Kritz beamed.)

KRITZ: Well you know, beside every great knight is his great wife!

(Bonson looked to Mandika.)

BONSON: Hmm... does that mean you're a clumsy, incompetent wife?

(Lefiat was furious.)

LEFIAT: Hey, don't you talk to her like that!

BONSON: Relax old chap, it was *you* I was insulting!

LEFIAT: Eh?

BONSON: Are we off then?

(With that, he started to walk ahead. Not wishing to waste a second longer, Flaxley nodded then proceeded to pace forth at his side. Bonson couldn't help but grin from ear to ear at this point. He was delighted that he'd managed to put Lefiat down in such a way. It was second nature for him to put people down with sarcasm or corrections and he'd been on the verge of reminding Kritz that the phrase was "behind every great knight" and not "beside". A move that would have undoubtedly earned him a black eye. Somehow he'd managed to control himself, however, and insult Lefiat instead, thus saving him a black eye and leaving Lefiat utterly confounded. The perfect outcome. And so, as the party soldiered forth once again, Lefiat desperately tried to figure out how Bonson calling Mandika names was an insult to *him*. Flaxley's only concern at this time, on the other hand was the mission. He was determined to get to the bottom of what had happened to Croxton and set a good pace for his comrades.

After another 10 minutes or so of leaping from sunspot to sunspot at the back of the pack, Kritz stopped and looked about herself with a nervous glint in her eye.)

KRITZ: Phisele?

PHISELE: Yeah?

KRITZ: Get down, babe!

(She helped set her down then held her hand.)

PHISELE: Were you getting tired?

(Looking increasingly shifty, she turned her head from side to side.)

KRITZ: No, it's not that!

PHISELE: Only you're getting really old now!

KRITZ: I'm 25!!!

(She shook her head.)

KRITZ: That's not important! Stick with me!

(Making sure she had a good grip on Phisele's hand, she raced to catch up with her allies and projected her voice to Flaxley up ahead.)

KRITZ: Darling?

(He turned to look back over his shoulder.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, my love?

KRITZ: I've got an eerie feeling.

(He raised a stunned eyebrow and replied bluntly.)

FLAXLEY: I get horny too but it'll have to wait!

KRITZ: I said eerie!!!

FLAXLEY: Eerie? Oh, right! What's up?

(She looked about herself and bit her lip.)

KRITZ: I just... I've got this feeling we're being watched!

(Immediately, her words caused everyone to slow and look about themselves nervously. Very much wishing Kritz hadn't said anything, Flaxley rolled his eyes then stopped and turned to face them all, determined to perk them up again as soon as possible so they could get going at a decent pace.)

FLAXLEY: Listen chaps, this happens in woods sometimes...

(As they all bunched in a group, Bonson nodded whole-heartedly.)

BONSON: Indeed, Flaxley. The truth is, we *are* being watched!

(Unnerved, Mandika let go of Lefiat and clung onto Flaxley.)

LEFIAT: Thanks for showing so much faith in me, Mandika.

MANDIKA: No offence, I just don't want to die!

(He frowned.)

LEFIAT: None bloody taken!

PHISELE: Why did he say we're being watched? I'm scared now!

KRITZ: I can tell. You have phenomenal grip for a ten year old!

BONSON: Don't be scared young lady, it's just nature!

MANDIKA: Nature?

BONSON: Yes! We *are* being watched. The woodland creatures are watching us, you see!

DEREK: That makes sense!

BONSON: Well, of course it does!

FLAXLEY: Yes, so no panic chaps. It's just owls!

BONSON: Yes, Flaxley! Owls with insomnia!

FLAXLEY: What?

BONSON: Owls are nocturnal, you tit!

FLAXLEY: Well, so is your haircut!!!

PHISELE: What hair?

BONSON: Hey! And what?

FLAXLEY: Look! Let's just move on!

BONSON: Fine! I suppose we'd better, we're keeping the owls awake apparently!

FLAXLEY: Bonson...

(Before he could even begin to chastise him, a large net fell from the branches above their heads, smothering them all in one go. Amongst the pandemonium and screams, they all ended up panicking in a heap on the floor.)

FLAXLEY: Calm down so I can free my sword!

PHISELE: What's going on?

DEREK: It's an ambush!!!

BONSON: Ambush? Bloody well organised these owls or yours, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Shut up you! We need to...

(Just then, his words were cut short by the sight of a hoard of tribesman surrounding them with long, sharp spears poised and ready. Where they'd come from, they didn't know. All Flaxley knew was that he was powerless to stop their advance and protect his allies.)

FLAXLEY: Shit!

KRITZ: Now what?

FLAXLEY: We've no choice. Surrender now, escape later!

(With that, they all stared open mouthed as the men dressed in grass skirts and adorned with paint and body jewels, bared in on them. Helpless and unable to move, there was nothing they could do to evade the sudden capture.)

Maishu Village – Sanetza

(Having been so consummately humiliated into an instant surrender to the mysterious tribesman, Flaxley was not in the best of moods. Managing to remain focussed however, his mission objective switched from finding Croxton to saving himself and his allies from this strange, backward tribe. Experienced and very much competent in battle, Kritz and Derek also managed to remain calm. The same couldn't be said for the trembling foursome of Mandika, Bonson, Lefiat and Phisele.

Upon their capture, they'd all been disarmed, placed in irons and led through the woods to the tribal homestead of Maishu Village. Looking like something from a picture book, the village had a large wooden fence encompassing it and vast numbers of trees throughout. In every tree there was a hut and a series of walkways snaked between them. Down on the ground there were many large thatched buildings made from solid oak and a river flowed right through the centre. The magnificence of the place was lost on the allies, however. They were in deep trouble and they knew it. They weren't welcome in these lands and the tribesman who'd capture them made little secret of that fact.

As soon as they reached the village, their captors herded and pushed them into one of the largest wooden buildings where a large group of villagers had gathered. As if they were cattle, they then violently shunted them towards the front where they were awaited by an elderly looking gentleman wearing so many gold chains and bangles it was a miracle he could stand up. Flaxley's first reaction upon sighting him was to try to check for Croxton's chain, unfortunately he was wearing too many to tell.

As soon as they reached the front, they were cast to the ground by the warriors and the gold-clad elder immediately raised his hands above his head gloriously.)

ELDER: Moons of Maishu!

(The gathered ensemble all copied his words and actions precisely. As soon as they finished, the elder then looked down to his captives and smiled.)

ELDER: Warriors of the east, you came to destroy the might of Maishu but the might of Maishu cannot be destroyed!

(Flaxley looked across at his allies for a moment then furrowed his brow at the elder.)

FLAXLEY: With all due respect, we didn't come to destroy anything!

(The elder looked furious.)

ELDER: Lies!!!

FLAXLEY: Um... no! We came to find a missing man then go home!

(The elder nodded.)

ELDER: Home? This is not your home...

FLAXLEY: I never said it was...

ELDER: This is *our* home. You came to us and we befriended you and how did you repay us?

FLAXLEY: You befriended us?

(Clearly making a statement and having no intention of listening to a word Flaxley said, the elder continued.)

ELDER: You repaid us by killing our crops, hunting in our territories and destroying our land!

(Bonson looked baffled.)

BONSON: Wow, we've been quite busy when you think about it, we only got here an hour ago!

FLAXLEY: Yes Bonson, let's antagonise him, that's a masterful plan that is!

BONSON: Well, he's talking bollocks!

ELDER: These precious lands, destroyed and raped by the hands of these white devils!

(Derek frowned.)

DEREK: Why do I always get tied in with you white arse, chicken shit, honky mothers? I'm green, for fuck sake!

BONSON: Racist little alien, aren't you?

(In complete ignorance of them, the elder continued to reiterate his point to his audience.)

ELDER: Beasts raised to graze the land, slaughtered by these devils for food.

KRITZ: Does he mean the panther? They don't graze!

ELDER: The crops we planted trampled into the ground so these infidels could erect their base of evil.

FLAXLEY: Eh?

ELDER: And the sacred trees, so long our homes and our glory. The providers of life and shelter, the very gods that be these trees, slaughtered and burned by their evil hands.

(He shook his head.)

ELDER: The battles we have fought to rid the lands of this evil have cost us dear but tonight we shall celebrate!!!

(The gathered villagers celebrated wildly.)

ELDER: That is right my friends! Erect seven poles of justice! Tonight we shall burn their living flesh and feed the ashes to the forest!!!

(The allies all looked horrified and gaped at the elder as he snarled down on them.)

ELDER: You shall die so that the forest may live!!!

(Mandika was the first to go to pieces.)

MANDIKA: No!!!

(Kritz tried desperately to hug the crying Phisele but with the irons wrapped around her wrist, she could only fall flat on her face. Not about to leave it at that, Flaxley remonstrated angrily.)

FLAXLEY: Hey! You've got us mixed up with someone else! We didn't kill any trees!!!

ELDER: Do you think I'm a fool?

FLAXLEY: Actually, yes!

(The elder snarled.)

ELDER: I'm the elder of...

FLAXLEY: Well that fucking figures! You elders are all the bloody same! We had an elder in Tifaeris, he was a prick too!

(The elder looked to the warriors.)

ELDER: Take them away and shave them!

MANDIKA: Shave us???

(The elder smirked at her.)

ELDER: All part of the humiliation, my dear.

(Mandika gaped in horror.)

MANDIKA: My hair!!!

(Bonson growled.)

BONSON: Yes, ma'am, your hair. Just what we were all thinking. This is awful, whatever will become of your hair?

ELDER: Take them away!

(As the warriors raced in to grab them, Mandika tried to crawl away and Flaxley struggled to try to hit them. Unfortunately for him, the irons were too heavy and like the others, he was subdued in no time. Before the warriors could take them away to be shaved however, there was a blinding flash of white light beside the elder. In abject horror, the watching tribe's folk gasped and reeled back. The elder himself, stepped back looking terrified while the allies and the warriors froze to the spot and stared. As the white flashed dulled, a human figure could be made out beneath it.)

MANDIKA: Has god come to save us?

BONSON: Don't be fucking stupid.

(As the flash faded to nothing, the mystic wise man, Daman Siria was revealed standing aside the elder. Immediately, Bonson groaned in despair.)

BONSON: Like being shaved and burned to death isn't bad enough, now we have to listen to that old fart!

FLAXLEY: Wait, Bonson! He might have come to save us!

BONSON: Even so, he's still a complete git.

(As the elder gaped, a hoard of warriors charged for Daman. Almost dismissively, he waved his arm in their direction and they fell asleep.)

ELDER: W-who are you?

(Daman smiled.)

DAMAN: I am Daman Siria. Messenger of the council of the wise.

ELDER: W-wise?

DAMAN: Those who protect this world from evil!

(The elder could only gape and say nothing. Bonson on the other hand was very rarely lost for words.)

BONSON: What do you want, Daman?

(Daman nodded to him.)

DAMAN: I have come to save you!

BONSON: Excellent!

(He mumbled under his breath.)

BONSON: Now do that and piss off!

(Stunned into silence, the watching tribesmen gave Daman their full attention as he looked to the elder and bowed.)

DAMAN: Elder, great elder of Maishu...

ELDER: Y-yes?

DAMAN: These seven who stand before you are not your enemy. They have come to save this world, not to destroy it!

ELDER: They have?

DAMAN: They seek a man who dwells among your enemy. He holds the key to mankind's survival. If you kill *them* then you kill us all, including yourselves!

ELDER: I don't...

DAMAN: Then allow them to explain why they have come. Support them and they will support you. These should be your allies not your enemies. Burn them and you're no less murderers than those you accuse of being so!

(The elder looked to the allies then back to Daman.)

ELDER: How do I know this is true?

DAMAN: You don't. But trust me when I say, the world needs these people to live and if you decide that isn't so, then *you* will be the one to die!

ELDER: You mean...

DAMAN: You saw me arrive from nothing, you saw me send your warriors into a slumber with the flick of a wrist. You don't want to see me when I'm angry!

(The elder nodded rapidly.)

ELDER: Okay! Then I should free them?

DAMAN: Free them; let them explain then help them!

ELDER: Okay, you have my word. It will be done!

DAMAN: Thank you!

(Bonson shook his head and sighed.)

BONSON: This was all part of your plan, wasn't it, Daman? I knew you still had

control over us!

(Daman smiled to him.)

DAMAN: Bonson, there's no thrall here! You are all on a mission to do something important for the world at your own volition. I'm not forcing anything upon you. You did the right thing out of the good of your hearts... and because Mandika hit you with a carriage door!

(Bonson scowled.)

BONSON: You lie!

(His face was rigid with anger.)

BONSON: You *made* her hit me with the door, didn't you?

(Daman rolled his eyes.)

DAMAN: My work here is done. The elder will take care of you. Trust in him. And trust in this, whatever you do is your own choice. There is no control over your lives anymore except for your own.

(And with that, he vanished leaving behind a bewildered, trembling crowd of tribes people.)

BONSON: Right... can we go now then?

(Shaking like a leaf, the elder glanced to Bonson in bewilderment for a moment then ordered his waking warriors to take the "guests" to his quarters and offer them drinks. Feeling mightily relieved by the reprieve, the allies refused to argue and went along with the elder's every suggestion. At the back of Flaxley mind, however, the thought of Daman intervening rankled terribly. Were they free? Would they ever be free? As Bonson was swift to remind him, however, the most important thing at this moment in time was that they'd been spared. Now they'd be free to explain their mission to the elder and see if and how he could help them.

As soon as their irons were removed, Kritz was quick to hug Phisele before chastising herself for not leaving the child on the ship like Mandika had suggested. For whatever reason she'd made the suggestion, Mandika was right, this was no place for a little girl. Mandika for her part was mostly relieved about her hair. It seemed that even the threat of a slow and painful death was nothing compared to her fear of being shaved bald.

As the relieved party of seven were led away to the elder's quarters, hardly a word was spoken. Despite the reprieve, they were all extremely apprehensive. Bad things happened every time Daman Siria got involved in their lives, major cataclysmic events, and they couldn't help fearing that the worst was still to come.)

(Back out in the deep forest wilderness at this point, Heiner and his landing party of 30 black clad troops were just beginning their search for Croxton. In awe of the fact they were on the hitherto imaginary land of Sanetza, they could hardly be described as stealthy as they marched forth chatting excitedly.

Paying the men's lack of professionalism little heed as he paced forth at the front with Heiner, Morten looked about himself and beamed excitedly.)

MORTEN: This is magnificent, sir!

(Heiner nodded.)

HEINER: Indeed it is, Morten! And you know what else is pretty amazing?

MORTEN: What's that, sir?

(Heiner grabbed him by his collar and snarled.)

HEINER: The lengths I'm going to go to, to make sure you die in excruciating pain, squealing like a pig, if you don't calm down and make these pricks start acting like soldiers!

(As Heiner released his collar, Morten stood tall and saluted.)

MORTEN: Sir. Sorry, sir!

(With that, he about turned to face the troops and yelled out.)

MORTEN: Formation 4! Fall in, people!

(Immediately his men rushed into a 5 per row formation.)

MORTEN: And march!

(Upon his words, his men then started to march forth silently, heading straight for him.)

MORTEN: Oh shit!

(With that, he about turned again and rushed to Heiner's side.)

MORTEN: Better?

HEINER: It'll do!

(He smiled.)

HEINER: Still, this is a pretty cool place!

MORTEN: Yes, it'd make an excellent base don't you think?

(Heiner chuckled.)

HEINER: Morten, Morten, Morten... when I'm king of this world do you really think I'm going to need a hideout?

MORTEN: Well...

HEINER: I was thinking Guevina castle might make a nice home; or maybe the presidential palace in Leathrock. Probably both. I'm certainly not going to be hiding. We've lived like rats in caves for long enough; we're going to enjoy the fruits of our labours!

(Morten nodded and looked up. As he did so, he spotted something through the trees to his right.)

MORTEN: Sir?

HEINER: Silence, I'm talking!

MORTEN: But sir!

HEINER: Every bitch who ever turned me down and sneered at me when I asked them to dance is going to be rounded up and placed in my harem. And believe me, there's been a lot of them!

(Morten looked peeved.)

MORTEN: I get it, you're shit with the ladies! This is important!

(Heiner glared at him.)

HEINER: It had better be!!!

(Morten pointed to what he'd spotted with urgency in his eyes.)

MORTEN: Look!

(As Heiner glanced in that direction, his eyes lit up.)

HEINER: An encampment!

(Immediately, Morten turned and gave the troops the signal to halt in silence.)

MORTEN: Indeed. And more importantly, there's a Leathrock flag flying over it.

(Heiner beamed excitedly.)

HEINER: So there is. That means Croxton's in there then.

MORTEN: More than likely, sir.

(Heiner then frowned bitterly.)

HEINER: And no doubt that bloody Flaxley's in there too.

(Morten gave him a thoughtful glance.)

MORTEN: I don't think he would be, sir. The Colloskayak was quite some way away from us when we made landfall just now.

HEINER: So?

MORTEN: Well, judging by where the Colloskayak dropped anchor, at a guess I'd say *they* made landfall somewhere way over there!

(He gestured towards the thick woodland over the other side of the encampment.)

MORTEN: The odds of them rowing ashore way down there then heading this way and stumbling on this encampment are extremely slim, I'd say. I'd be willing to bet they set off in completely the wrong direction.

HEINER: That Flaxley didn't strike me as an idiot, Morten.

MORTEN: I didn't say he was. He just doesn't know these lands any more than we do. The odds of us stumbling on this camp ten minutes after making landfall are astronomical. We've been extraordinarily lucky.

(Heiner nodded.)

HEINER: I see. So *we've* found the place and that Flaxley could well be wandering for days, completely lost?

MORTEN: Indeed.

HEINER: Well, well. Things are going even better than I could ever have dared wish, Morten!

MORTEN: Quite so, sir. Now... what's the plan, if you don't mind me asking?

(Heiner nodded thoughtfully.)

HEINER: Of course I don't.

(He grinned menacingly.)

HEINER: We should invade right now, killing everyone inside.

MORTEN: Okay! And by right now you mean, wait for the cover of darkness then launch a surprise attack?

(Heiner glanced away uneasily.)

HEINER: Um... yes, that's precisely my thinking! The black armour will make superb camouflage!

MORTEN: An excellent plan, sir! Wish I could have thought of that!

HEINER: Don't be facetious, Morten! Right, let's tell the men.

(Unfortunately for him, however, when he turned to relate his orders to his troops, he found them all standing with their hands in the air, flanked on either side by well-armed soldiers from the Leathrock navy.)

HEINER: What is the meaning of this...

(The leader of the Leathrock soldiers, Enzi paced up to him.)

ENZI: I apologise for the inconvenience. Are you in charge of these men?

HEINER: What's it to you?

ENZI: I am vice-captain Enzi of the Leathrock navy. You are trespassing on Leathrock land and it's my duty to take you into our compound for questioning!

(Heiner looked mortified.)

HEINER: Never!!!

MORTEN: Um... he's joking, vice-captain. We'll come in peace!

HEINER: Morten???

MORTEN: Sorry sir, the least we can do is accompany them *inside* their compound!

(He gave him a knowing glance.)

HEINER: I'm the leader, Morten. I'll decide...

(Finally, he looked enlightened.)

HEINER: Ah, yes, I see! We'll be delighted to come!

ENZI: Thank you. Sorry, but we've had to disarm your men for security reasons.
(Heiner nodded.)

HEINER: Very well!

(And with a wry smile, he allowed vice-captain Enzi to lead he and his men inside the Leathrock compound. All the while, Morten was deep in thought about how they'd get their weapons back and ways he could convince their captors to treat them as guests, allowing them the chance to search around for Croxton. Unlike Flaxley and his allies, being captured so early into their journey was a tremendous blessing.)

(In Maishu Village at this time, Flaxley, Kritz, Bonson, Lefiat, Mandika, Derek and Phisele were all seated with the elder in his hut, high up in a tree. Flaxley had explaining their mission to find Croxton to him, to which the elder had offered them his full support. He'd also offered them an unreserved apology and had their weapons returned to them forthwith, plus gifting them the freedom of the entire settlement.

Bonson was slow to accept the elder's apology at first until he offered to back it up with ale, at which point he instantly became the elder's best friend. Feeling a deep sense of shame in his rash actions, the elder knew he'd now have to explain *his* actions to *them* in return. Having made sure they were comfortable, he then proceeded to do exactly that.)

ELDER: We, the Maishu people, live our lives with nature. We work together with this forest and it's gives us everything we need. It feeds us, it clothes us, it puts a roof over our heads...

(Lefiat looked uncertain.)

LEFIAT: You eat the trees and wear the leaves?

(The elder looked consummately baffled.)

ELDER: Are you stupid or something?

(Lefiat shrugged innocently.)

LEFIAT: Well there's no smoke without fire I guess!

(As Bonson spat his ale back into the jug and proceed to chuckle, the elder continued.)

ELDER: We eat what lives in the forest and we wear the skins!

(Lefiat nodded.)

LEFIAT: Yeah, that makes far more sense than what I said!

ELDER: Anyway, that's the way our existence is. The forest is what we are. Without it, we'd be nothing. It feeds the creatures that we depend on to sustain our existence. So we treasure it, we take care of it, we nurture it. We make sure nature thrives so that we too can thrive!

(He gave a deep sigh.)

ELDER: This has been our way for centuries and life was great until that day two years ago. This land was at peace. There was harmony.

(Flaxley rubbed his chin thoughtfully.)

FLAXLEY: Two years ago?

ELDER: Yes! The day *they* came!

(They all looked to one another.)

ELDER: There was a terrible storm that morning. I never knew rain or wind could punish the land with such ferocity. Trees were felled and the land was flooded, the gods themselves were angry.

(He paused as he recalled the hellish storm then shook his head.)

ELDER: Anyway, when the storm passed we worked hard to repair the damage to the forest. We felled the remains of half dead trees and burnt the remains to fertilise the soil.

(He then sighed ruefully.)

ELDER: It was whilst we were out near the beach that we saw them. They seemed so desperate. 50 men and women had floated ashore. They'd come to us in tiny boats, after their giant vessel had sunk beneath the waves.

(Kritz bit her lip nervously as the elder continued.)

ELDER: We couldn't allow them to suffer, so out of sympathy for our pale cousins, we fed them and offered them warmth and shelter. And a few days later, when they were all recovered from their torment, we even offered their leader land to build a settlement on.

(Kritz raised a nervous hand.)

KRITZ: Their leader?

ELDER: Yes, their leader! At first they accepted...

KRITZ: No, no, I mean, tell me about their leader!

(The elder shrugged.)

ELDER: Their leader was a woman, but we didn't hold that feebleness over them!

(Kritz immediately looked to Flaxley with puppy dog eyes. He offered her a warm smile and a nod in return.)

FLAXLEY: I know, darling!

(The elder looked peeved.)

ELDER: Did you just call me darling?

(Flaxley frowned.)

FLAXLEY: No!!!

(As the elder went to continue he noticed Bonson gesture towards Flaxley and make a floppy-wristed teapot gesture. The elder nodded with understanding before continuing his tale.)

ELDER: As I was saying, they accepted our offer of land and we helped them build a camp. Little did we know, however, while we were helping them settle there, they were building another, bigger camp elsewhere in the forest.

(He snarled angrily.)

ELDER: They built over sacred crops and destroyed a sacred part of the forest for the timber. They became our enemies that day. Ever since, they've hunted out of season and if they continue some species will be extinct within a few years.

(He then sighed sorrowfully.)

ELDER: Their weapons... and those shields, they're far in advance of our primitive weaponry. This is why they don't listen to us when we beg them to stop. Now, when we try to watch over the forest, if we get in their way, they don't even stop to think about killing our people.

(He beamed with pride.)

ELDER: But this will not stop us! We may not be able to fight them but we will continue to sabotage their hunts. Only today we foiled their attempts to kill wild deer. The deer must mate now, it's time to eat hog, but these pale devils refuse to accept this. It is to *us* to protect the deer until they're *ready* to be hunted.

(Flaxley looked thoughtful.)

FLAXLEY: So *you* 've never attacked *them*?

ELDER: The deer? Not when they're out of season, no.

FLAXLEY: Not the deer! Your enemies.

(The elder looked enlightened.)

ELDER: Right, I understand. No. Alas we're not strong enough. We can only try to sabotage them. Many good men have died but this is a small price to pay for saving this sacred forest from these... savages!

(He clenched his fist and sighed with frustration.)

ELDER: Such barbarity... these people have no humanity. After we ruined their hunt this very day, they threatened to destroy us. A threat we take very seriously. These people came from the sea to devour everything in their path. I have no doubt we will be a part of that!

FLAXLEY: Right... so to cut a long story short, two years ago, they arrived in your land and just took over without any respect for your way of life.

ELDER: In a nutshell, yes!

FLAXLEY: Right. Well, maybe *we'll* be able to put an end to your misery! Would you take us to their compound?

(The elder looked sceptical.)

ELDER: There's no point, these people don't listen to reason!

FLAXLEY: Well, we're going anyway! It's imperative we pay them a visit.

ELDER: Well... as you wish.

FLAXLEY: Thank you. Say, you didn't happen to notice if one of these "pale devils" was wearing a gold chain did you?

(The elder looked blank.)

FLAXLEY: It was worth a try!

KRITZ: Elder? Was their leader called Kassamandra?

(The elder shook his head.)

ELDER: No! That name means nothing to me!

(Kritz hung her head solemnly.)

KRITZ: Okay!

ELDER: Her name was Admiral Ballevontios!

(Immediately, Kritz placed her head in her hands.)

PHISELE: Hey, Ballevontios is *your* name, Kritz!

(She nodded from behind her hands.)

KRITZ: I know!

(She looked up.)

KRITZ: You have to take us there!

(The elder nodded.)

ELDER: I will do this! But first I must ask for your patience!

KRITZ: Patience?

ELDER: Yes! I will see to it you're escorted to their compound but first there's some sacred business I must attend to!

BONSON: Is anything you do *not* sacred?

(The elder looked baffled.)

ELDER: I ask the same of you! Do you not find your wise work, sacred?

BONSON: Hardly. Most of what I do is far from sacred! Sacrilegious in fact!

ELDER: I feel this is some kind of Caucasian humour that I don't understand. You are the wise elder of your tribe, are you not?

(Bonson looked around at his allies and sighed.)

BONSON: I'm the wisest no doubt but then there's not much in the way of competition to be fair!

KRITZ: Elder, how long you will be? My sister might be at their compound!

(The elder smiled to her kindly.)

ELDER: I cannot say. Was I to hazard a guess, I'd be lying. So, please, I ask for

your patience! My people will make you welcome. Go now and I will call you when I'm ready!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: We can't ask fairer than that! It looks like Croxton and Kassy are both still alive so waiting a little while longer won't do any harm!

(Ignorant to the fact that Heiner and his men were already in the Leathrock compound, he jumped to his feet.)

FLAXLEY: We'll leave you to it then, Elder!

(With that, he led his allies from the elders hut and onto the walkway outside. With a satisfied nod, he then headed around the tree on which the walkway rested and made his way to the stairs to return to the ground. Marvelling at the ingenuity of such a lofty creation, Lefiat remained in silent awe. Mandika however found the whole idea of building a hut in a tree completely ridiculous, let alone a whole town full of them.

As Kritz trudged forth behind Mandika, her heart felt heavy. She wanted desperately to be reunited with her sister as soon as possible, but having heard the elder's tales about her and her subordinates, she was beginning to fear she wouldn't like what she saw. Having always felt that a sister's love should be unconditional, her doubts made her feel guilty. Being a perceptive child, Phisele picked up on Kritz's turmoil and held her hand tight, opting not to say a word. Just over her shoulder, following as she made her way back to ground level, Derek read her thoughts and couldn't help but feel her pain.

Last to leave the elders hut, having waited to finish his ale, Bonson was just about to pass through the door when the elder spoke to him in a thoughtful tone.)

ELDER: Bonson, is it?

(He turned and nodded.)

BONSON: Yes, yes it is! Why?

ELDER: Sit with me, there's something I wish to discuss with you!

(Having already been left behind, he shrugged and took a seat.)

BONSON: Fine. What is it, elder?

(The elder seemed to hesitate for a moment.)

ELDER: Well...

(He rubbed his chin.)

ELDER: Is it the same for you, Bonson? Everyone comes to you for advice but when you need advice there's nobody to ask?

(Looking thoughtful, Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: I see what you mean but no. I never need anybody's advice and they rarely come to me these days.

ELDER: They don't? You mean you've helped them all to be self-sufficient already?

BONSON: No, not at all. When they tell me their troubles I tend to take the piss like there's no tomorrow. They think twice about coming to see me now!

(The elder frowned.)

ELDER: Well that's not a very fitting way for an elder to conduct himself!

BONSON: Conduct myself? I'm a man not an orchestra! And isn't it better to give no advice than bad advice?

ELDER: Well yes but I try not to *knowingly* give bad advice!

(Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: I see. We differ *there* too.

ELDER: I must say I'm surprised!

BONSON: You are?

ELDER: Yes! You seem so sophisticated and distinguished!

(If there was one way to befriend Bonson, massaging his ego was it.)

BONSON: Why thank you. And so do you! Your outfit might look silly, but you seem like a pretty good egg to me!

ELDER: My outfit?

BONSON: Yes, what's with all the gold? And put some trousers on, man. You're worse than Kritz!

(The elder raised an eyebrow and grinned knowingly.)

ELDER: Kritz... she was the one wearing a short skirt that gifted me a glorious view of her happy place. I liked her.

BONSON: Yes, well... you're just as bad. I can see through the grass, old chap... and anyway, skirts are for women!

(Elder looked most embarrassed.)

ELDER: I had no idea!

(He then crossed his legs and placed his hands in his lap.)

BONSON: Now you look like a poof!

ELDER: What?

BONSON: Cover yourself, but for the love of ale, do it in a manly way, will you?

(The elder blushed and uncrossed his legs before giving Bonson a stunned glance.)

ELDER: You're giving me advice!

BONSON: What?

(They both looked bemused.)

ELDER: You said you didn't give advice!

BONSON: Well... I didn't say *that* exactly...

ELDER: So what's the meaning of this advice, ultimately?

(Bonson mused to himself.)

BONSON: Dignity! Respect your personal jewels and others will learn to respect them...

(He sighed.)

BONSON: That sounded great in my head. Truth is, nobody wants to see your doodah!

(The elder smiled.)

ELDER: I'll take that under advisement!

BONSON: No, you'll take it as read or I'm out of here!

(Making extra effort to cover himself, the elder leant forward.)

ELDER: Listen, Bonson, I have to do something tomorrow. Something terrible.

That's why I hoped you'd give me your advice, elder to elder.

BONSON: I see... something terrible, you say?

ELDER: Yes! It's part of my duty as the tribal elder.

BONSON: Right. And what is it?

ELDER: I need to offer myself as a sacrifice!

(Bonson looked stunned.)

BONSON: You're going to die?

ELDER: Well... I hope not, but it's not impossible. I have to offer of myself for the good of the future generations.

(Bonson looked baffled.)

BONSON: Specifically meaning?

ELDER: I'd rather not say!

BONSON: Then how can I help?

(The elder sighed.)

ELDER: I just wondered what *you'd* do in my position!

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: Honestly?

ELDER: If you would!

BONSON: I wouldn't sacrifice myself for the good of anybody. I mean it seems rather silly to grow this old then throw it away!

(The elder nodded.)

ELDER: You and I are very different people, Bonson!

BONSON: Indeed we are! Now, do you have any more ale? That stuff's divine!

(Elder smiled.)

ELDER: I do love a good ale!

BONSON: Me too! I think you and I will become good friends!

ELDER: Well that would be wonderful!

BONSON: But seriously! Underpants, man! Good grief!

(Minutes later, Bonson finally emerged from the elder's hut to allow him to get on with the tasks he'd spoken of earlier. Standing up on the elevated walkway, looking down on the village, he felt a great sense of freedom. This peaceful village tribe really were a breath of fresh air compared to the hustling and bustling greedy folk of Guevina and other such towns. Seeing with his own eyes that fighting and killing was not what they were about, he sighed to himself. The elder was going to burn him at the stake had Daman not intervened but all Bonson could think about was how a peaceful tribe like this one could be driven to act in such a way. The invaders must have been pretty savage to evoke such a reaction from these peace loving, gentle folk. Having marvelled at that thought for several moments, he then shook his head and made his way down to re-join his comrades.

After a quick five minute search, Bonson finally spotted Flaxley, Derek, Kritz and Lefiat, quite some distance away, laughing and chatting with some locals in an open space beneath the cover of some tall trees. With a grin he approached them, looking forward to taunting Flaxley about how much better the elder's ales was compared to the one they make in Tifaeris. As he got close to them, however, he noticed Lefiat hadn't been laughing and was in fact tied to a pole. Horrified at the thought that Lefiat might have been getting a beating and he wasn't there to enjoy it, he charged over as fast as he could. The last thing he expected when he got near, however, was to see Mandika looking on and laughing.)

BONSON: What? Mandika? Lefiat's tied up!

(Mandika turned to him, a sword in each hand.)

MANDIKA: Oh hi, Bonson!

BONSON: Mandika, what's going on?

MANDIKA: It's a game! I'm holding Flaxley's and Lefiat's swords for them... Flaxley's is really heavy!

(She then glanced behind her to where Phisele was drawing a face in the dirt and shuddered.)

MANDIKA: It was either me or her and there's no way I was gonna let that psycho look after them.

(Bonson waved a dismissive hand at her.)

BONSON: Forget that, what about this game?

(Mandika quickly looked back to the game again and grinned.)

MANDIKA: Oh. Fishy Slaps!

(He looked more than a little peeved.)

BONSON: Hey, I only asked and anyway, you're a fine one to talk!

MANDIKA: Eh? No, it's the name of the game!

BONSON: Oh!

MANDIKA: And hey!!!

(Curious as to what the game entailed, Bonson looked closely and saw Flaxley, Kritz, Derek and three tribesmen standing in a rectangle. At the centre of both short ends of the rectangle was a pole with someone tied to it. Lefiat at one end and a tribesman at the other.)

BONSON: So what do they have to do?

(Mandika chuckled.)

MANDIKA: If you have the fish...

BONSON: Fish?

MANDIKA: Yeah, look, Derek has it!

(He nodded as he watched the game and listened to Mandika.)

BONSON: Oh right, I see it!

MANDIKA: Well, you can't be touched by a player of the other team if you have the fish or you have to give it to them. So you have to pass and throw it to each other to keep it!

BONSON: Okay, that sounds crap so far!

MANDIKA: And to score you have to slap the guy who's tied to the pole around the face with it!

BONSON: What?

(A wry smile then crept across his face.)

BONSON: You mean... they have to slap Lefiat's face with a fish?

MANDIKA: Yeah!

BONSON: I love this game already! Think I'll cheer the other team on!

MANDIKA: Oh that's mean!

BONSON: So whose idea was it to tie Lefiat to the post? I need to buy them an ale!

(Mandika turned to him and gave him a bewildered shrug.)

MANDIKA: He volunteered actually! He said he wanted to impress me with his sporty skills!

BONSON: What sporty skills? You catch better than he does and you're crap at it!

(She sighed.)

MANDIKA: I know, but he wanted to try and that's kind of impressive. Plus it's really funny when they hit him with the fish!

(Bonson chuckled.)

BONSON: You and I aren't so different, you know!

MANDIKA: Hey! You take that back!

(Not knowing what to expect as he turned to watch the game, Bonson was pleasantly surprised. His travelling friends were having a wonderful time, if not a successful one. Being extremely agile, Kritz caught the fish and with tremendous athleticism, spun in a circle to avoid a tribal opponent, before flicking the fish towards Flaxley.)

BONSON: Ooh clever!

(Looking determined Flaxley snatched at the fish and juggled it in the air before having it snatched off him by an opponent.)

FLAXLEY: Slippery bastard!!!

KRITZ: Take the bloody gauntlets off!

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: He can catch a cannonball at 100 miles per hour and yet if you throw him a fish he's hopeless!

(Mandika nodded solemnly.)

MANDIKA: Yup, that's the seventh time to my recollection!

(As the opponent who'd snatched the fish off of Flaxley raced towards his goal, Lefiat screamed out.)

LEFIAT: Not again!!! I hate you, Flaxley!!!

(As he stared wide eyed at the incoming tribesman, he noticed Derek racing back, his little green legs motoring for all he was worth.)

LEFIAT: Save me, Derek!

(Unfortunately for Lefiat, Flaxley decided he'd also help. Looking like a man possessed he charged forth to stop the tribesman reaching Lefiat. Unfortunately, he didn't notice the diminutive alien, Derek and trod on his heel, sending them both sprawling to the ground.)

BONSON: Oh my, Flaxley's terrible!

MANDIKA: I'm beginning to think he's doing it on purpose!

(With nobody left to help him, Lefiat braced himself and cringed. Showing no mercy the muscular tribesman pulled back his arm and thrashed him as hard as he could across the face with the sizeable halibut. He hit him so hard that he literally span around the pole he was tied to, three times. As Lefiat passed out and crumpled to the dirt, the games adjudicator raced onto the pitch and yelled out.)

ADJUDICATOR: Game! Visitors 2 Maishu 8!

(There followed a loud cheer from the watching tribes folk.)

BONSON: I say, that's an excellent game. We have to introduce that to Guevina!

(Mandika giggled.)

MANDIKA: I think so too!

(Standing on the pitch looking thoroughly exhausted, Flaxley bent and placed his hands on his knees to regain his breath. Having not even broken a sweat, Kritz paced over to him.)

KRITZ: You're shit!

(Flaxley looked up and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you, darling!

(She then paced over to Derek who was lying on his back and gasping for air.)

KRITZ: Are you dying?

DEREK: Uh?

KRITZ: Nothing! Well played, Derek. Sorry about my husband!

(With that, she paced over and untied a slowly reviving Lefiat.)

KRITZ: You okay?

(He gaped and said nothing.)

KRITZ: Lefiat?

LEFIAT: It bloody hurt!

KRITZ: Yeah I bet!

(As soon as Lefiat was free from the ropes, Kritz helped him up but he immediately collapsed to the floor again.)

LEFIAT: Ow! I'm all dazed!

(Kritz took pity on him and lifted him to her side.)

KRITZ: Come here!

LEFIAT: Thanks, Kritz!

(As she tried to walk him forth, however, he was so floppy that he slipped across her,

his face landing in her cleavage.)

KRITZ: Hey!!!

LEFIAT: I can't help it! My legs have gone!

(As she struggled to straighten him up, Lefiat exhaled merrily.)

LEFIAT: No panic, I'm fine where I am!

(Not about to leave him there, she rolled her eyes then lifted him up over her shoulders like a fireman before heading back to the others with him.)

LEFIAT: Wow, you're strong!

KRITZ: Well one of us has to be! Oh, and I apologise for my husband, I guess catching fish isn't his forte!

(Lefiat sighed.)

LEFIAT: Don't be silly, he did it on purpose!

KRITZ: Why do you say that?

LEFIAT: How else do you explain it? Flaxley's good at everything!

(Kritz laughed.)

KRITZ: Yeah, that's what he tells people! He isn't good at everything.

LEFIAT: Isn't he?

KRITZ: He's an expert swordsman, an expert lover and an expert battle tactician but that's about it. He isn't the god you think he is, he's just a human! He has things he's awful at just like anyone else!

(Lefiat was astonished.)

LEFIAT: Such as?

KRITZ: Well... he can't arrange honeymoons!

LEFIAT: That's true!

KRITZ: And he sucks at catching fish!

LEFIAT: Okay, but that was probably 'cause the fish was wet and he had those metal gloves on!

KRITZ: Gauntlets!

LEFIAT: Yeah! I always wondered what they were called!

(Kritz chuckled to herself.)

KRITZ: Says the royal knight of Guevina!

LEFIAT: So, what else is Flaxley bad at?

KRITZ: I dunno, he's not good with small knives! Great with a sword, incredible even but with a dagger he's bloody useless.

LEFIAT: Is that so?

KRITZ: Yeah, he uses a sword to gut the food we catch 'cause he can't get used to the tiny blade!

LEFIAT: I never knew that!

KRITZ: Well, if you ever have a duel with him, chose daggers as the weapon 'cause his stabbing skills are seriously lacking!

LEFIAT: Thanks for the tip!

KRITZ: You're welcome!

LEFIAT: Um... Kritz?

KRITZ: What?

LEFIAT: Where we going?

KRITZ: What do you...

(She stopped and looked bewildered. She'd been so engrossed in conversation she'd walked straight past the others, leaving them staring at her in dismay.)

KRITZ: What am I doing?

(With that, she about turned and walked back to them, blushing like a blossoming

rose.)

KRITZ: Um... hi guys!

(Phisele looked up from the dirt nervously and immediately shielded what she'd been scrawling.)

PHISELE: Um... hi, Kritz!

(At once, a suspicious glint appeared in Kritz's eye. Much to Phisele's relief, however, before Kritz could investigate her work, Bonson stole her attention away.)

BONSON: What's going on, Kritz? First we catch you and Lefiat in that compromising position on the boat and now you're trying to abscond with him, caveman style. Flaxley not doing it for you?

KRITZ: Shut up, Bonson!

FLAXLEY: Yeah, or I'll shut you up permanently. I've never had *any* problems in *that* department, I can assure you!

(Kritz beamed lustfully.)

KRITZ: He really, really hasn't.

BONSON: Fine. Whatever. It was only a joke, damn it.

(Just then, Lefiat's voice piped up from over Kritz's shoulder.)

LEFIAT: Can you put me down now please, Kritz?

KRITZ: Oh, right... of course.

(With that, she stooped and allowed him to climb off of her.)

LEFIAT: Thanks.

(With that, he promptly fell on his backside.)

LEFIAT: Nope, my legs still don't work!

(Mandika eyed the large red patches and bruises on his face and sucked her teeth.)

MANDIKA: Wow, you took quite a beating!

(He pouted.)

LEFIAT: I know!

KRITZ: Don't be down, Lefiat. Your pain was a small price to pay, I enjoyed that game!

(Flaxley rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Stupid game. I'm not taking my gauntlets off for anyone!

KRITZ: Nonsense. You always take them off to fondle my... I mean, before bed.

BONSON: You were going to reference your boobies.

KRITZ: Shut up!

BONSON: Hey, I wasn't complaining. I could talk about those two lovely ladies all day. Jacquit and Suzbit I call them.

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

(Bonson shrugged.)

BONSON: Well... they're bewitching, you see?

FLAXLEY: I'm going to slap you in a minute.

(He shook his head then looked down at his gauntlets.)

FLAXLEY: I really didn't like that game. I've been left looking like a fish fumbling halfwit.

DEREK: I liked it!

BONSON: Me too. It was a joy to watch.

(He then beamed enthusiastically.)

BONSON: I have to say, I love this place. These people look funny I know, but I really like it here. I hope we manage to help them, I really do!

(Kritz then gasped in distress.)

KRITZ: Hey, where's Phisele?

(They all looked about themselves and gaped.)
FLAXLEY: She was just behind us a minute ago!
MANDIKA: She was, I saw her!
(Kritz immediately started to panic.)
KRITZ: Oh my god, oh my god!
(Just then, Phisele appeared from nowhere and leapt onto Lefiat as he lay on the ground.)
PHISELE: Surprise!!!
KRITZ: Thank god!
LEFIAT: Help!!!
(As Phisele pinned him to the ground, Mandika raged.)
MANDIKA: Hey!!!
(Phisele got to her feet and shrugged.)
PHISELE: What? I was only wrestling him!
(Lefiat swiftly sat up.)
LEFIAT: She tried to kill me!
KRITZ: Yeah, whatever. Look, let's not squabble, okay? This is a lovely place, so let's not embarrass our hosts!
FLAXLEY: Hear, hear!
BONSON: I say we take a look around or something; the elder might be a while yet!
DEREK: Sounds like an idea!
FLAXLEY: Let's do that then!
(Lefiat finally staggered to his feet and nodded.)
LEFIAT: Let's go then!
(As they headed away, Mandika looked sympathetically at Lefiat then glanced to one side. As she did so, she caught sight of what Phisele had drawn in the dirt and her nostrils flared furiously.)
MANDIKA: Mandika only has one 'N' in it, Phisele, and a girl your age shouldn't know words like *that*!!!
(Swiftly rushing to kick the dirt away and destroy her handiwork, Phisele glanced at her innocently.)
PHISELE: I don't know what you mean, poop face.
(Desperate to keep the peace, Kritz rolled her eyes then took Phisele's hand.)
KRITZ: Come on, you. Leave Mandika alone.
PHISELE: Fine. For now.
(As they headed away, Mandika shook her head solemnly then followed on.)

And so, as they waited for the elder to show them the way to the Leathrock base, they looked all around Maishu village, meeting villagers and taking in the sights of this warm and trusting settlement. It was safe to say that Bonson in particular was falling in love with the place. The more they spoke with the locals and got to know small details about their customs, the harder it was to believe that it was the same tribe who were only too willing to burn them alive a short time ago. Everybody in the village seemed far too peace loving to ever do such a thing.)

(As the sun began to fall that evening, the elder still hadn't sent for them. Becoming slightly restless and fearing he'd forgotten, Bonson was tempted to seek him out and remind him. The last thing the allies wanted was to be stuck for somewhere to camp at night if the elder decided to wait until morning. They felt pretty confident the nice

townsfolk would offer them somewhere to stay but they'd rather get their mission over with as soon as possible.

As he looked towards the sickening sun, an orange glow washed over Flaxley's face. With a shake of the head he looked to his allies, all seated on a fallen log in the middle of the village. Seeing them looking back at him as if awaiting his decision, Flaxley mused to himself and puffed out.)

FLAXLEY: I don't know! It'll be dark within the hour I reckon!

(They all looked towards the sun then quickly shied away.)

FLAXLEY: It all depends on how far away their base is and how long that elder is going to be!

(Mandika sighed.)

MANDIKA: We're going to get stuck here for the night aren't we?

(Flaxley shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: I wouldn't rule it out, Mandika!

(Kritz threw her hands in the air.)

KRITZ: I don't want to wait until tomorrow!

(She looked to Flaxley with a haunted look in her eye.)

KRITZ: Kassy, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: I know, darling! What can we do though? We need the elder and he isn't ready!

BONSON: Well, I say we relax. I mean, I can think of far worse places to be on a fine evening like this! Come tomorrow we'll have the gold chain back, we'll find Kritz's sister and all will be well again!

(Derek was stunned.)

DEREK: It's not like you to be confident or optimistic, Bonson!

BONSON: Well, this place has a relaxing effect on me!

(Mandika looked to Kritz.)

MANDIKA: He's been smoking the weed again; you can smell it a mile away!

KRITZ: Probably!

BONSON: Hey, I haven't been smoking anything! *Ever* in fact, never mind "again"!
(He looked stumped.)

BONSON: Though now you mention it, I can definitely smell something burning!
(Just then, Phisele screamed and pointed towards the main gates of the settlement in a panic.)

PHISELE: Fire!!!

(Immediately they all spun to face the gates to the settlement and sure enough, they were completely engulfed in flames.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck monkey! That can't be good!

KRITZ: Fuck monkey?

FLAXLEY: Never mind that! Lefiat, protect the princess!

MANDIKA: Queen!

FLAXLEY: Her too!

LEFIAT: I can't protect both!!!

MANDIKA: Protect me, Lefiat! Me!!!

LEFIAT: Oh... right. Why?

FLAXLEY: Just do it!!!

(Slipping his sword from his sheath with a menacing glint in his eye, Flaxley looked to Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Look after Phisele, my love. My sword and I have work to do!

KRITZ: I've got it covered!

(Bonson looked baffled.)

BONSON: What are you panicking for, Flaxley? It's just a fire. They happen all in the time in hot, forested areas. A few buckets of water and all will be well again.

(Flaxley scoffed.)

FLAXLEY: Shows what you know, Bonson. Burning the gates is a well-known way to bust into a compound if you don't have a battering ram.

BONSON: Is that so?

(Just then, the burning gates splintered into tiny fragments and a large group of twenty or so armour clad Leathrock soldiers raced through the blaze, their shields before them to protect themselves from flames and enemy spears.)

BONSON: Right, you win. I'll be somewhere the trouble isn't!

(As Bonson raced away to hide from the battle, Flaxley gritted his teeth and charged for the invading soldiers. All over the village, mothers grabbed their children and ran for cover, while the men of the village rushed to gather their spears and throwing knives. Not about to wait for their assistance, however, Flaxley charged for the invaders alone. Powerless to stop them spreading out and heading in all directions about the village, he concentrated on the two left in the centre.)

FLAXLEY: You picked the wrong time to invade *this* village, chummy!!!

(As one of the soldiers raised his shield towards him, Flaxley leapt at it and flattened him like a steamroller, lopping the other one's head clean off of his shoulders as he did so. As he landed, he spun and kicked the severed head out of the gates with amazing power then plunged his sword into the soldier he'd flattened. As the soldier's eyes bulged and life drained from his body, Flaxley yanked back his sword and snarled.)

FLAXLEY: Now, let's see how many of your friends want to go home dead!!!

(As he raced away, relieved that he seemed to be cured of his addiction to poor quality puns, he started to look somewhat peeved.)

FLAXLEY: Damn it! Where'd they go?

(With so few soldiers racing through such a large area, he soon realised that victory wasn't going to be as easy as he thought it'd be. Being no stranger to battle tactics, it seemed obvious to Flaxley that the Leathrock soldiers were on a chaos mission. Their plan was to simply break in, commit as much mayhem and murder as possible then leave again before the Maishu even knew what hit them. It was a blunt message to the Maishu people never to sabotage their hunts ever again.

With random violence, acts of arson and killing as their goal, the invaders, went about their business quickly and efficiently. Unfortunately for them, however, they hadn't counted on Flaxley, or indeed Derek. With the invaders intent on burning down as many buildings as possible, Derek had been racing about the village, extinguishing all the fires with his H2O magic. Naturally, this didn't sit well with the invaders.

Determined to put an end to the tiny green man's interference, two soldiers raced towards him, snarling through their teeth, their sole intention to strike him down.)

SOLDIER 1: You've doused your last fire, frog boy!!!

SOLDIER 2: Prepare to...

(Not the slightest bit daunted by their advance, Derek casually pointed his hand at the first soldier and flashed 10,000 volts of electricity through his body with a powerful blast of his lightning magic. As the shrivelled remains of the soldier thudded to earth, the second soldier stopped dead in his tracks. With a coldness in his voice to freeze the sun, Derek raised his eyebrow at him.)

DEREK: Prepare to what?

(The soldier gaped and paced backwards.)

DEREK: Well?

(Looking terrified, the soldier dropped his shield and ran away.)

DEREK: Right...

(He then rolled his eyes and charged after him.)

Lefiat, so far, had been lucky not to encounter any Leathrock invaders. Not about to make any assumptions about being safe where they were, however, he paced around the trembling Mandika with his eyes wide open for danger. In complete contrast to his normally incompetent demeanour, he was in full knight mode. Ready for anything. How he could do this when it came to protecting Mandika, she didn't know. She was just glad that he could.

Bonson had also managed to remain out of harm's way. He'd fled to the back of village and hid behind some trees. Far from ashamed of his cowardice, he sat down and sighed to himself.)

BONSON: Hurry up and beat them, I'm hungry!

(With no other thought other than protecting Phisele, Kritz had forced her young protégé to stand in a corner of the compound, where she could pace about 10 feet in front of her, defying anybody to dare come within ten feet of her. Despite the fact that no invaders had come her way, she bounced on the spot with her fists at the ready.)

As she held her ground in perfect readiness to fight, she spotted one of the enemy soldiers racing across the muddy path about fifty feet in front of her. Immediately, she clenched her fists and watched on intently, ready to pound the soldier into the ground should she feel Phisele was in any way threatened. As smoke, from a burning hut, washed across the land between her and the offended soldier, Kritz contorted her head to get a better view and snarled.)

KRITZ: Don't even think of coming this way!!!

(As the smoke wafted past on the breeze, she watched on as the soldier grabbed a Maishu warrior and threw him to the ground. Her first instinct was to charge over there and help him but she knew she couldn't leave Phisele unguarded. All she could do was watch and pray the Maishu warrior would be okay.)

KRITZ: Damn it!!!

(As she continued to look on helplessly, the Maishu warrior placed praying hands together as if begging for his life. Showing no mercy, the soldier pushed him down and pointed a sword at his neck before walking around him in a mocking manner. In that moment, Kritz's mouth dropped wide open and her heart raced. For the first time, she had a clear view of the Leathrock soldier's face. Looking tortured, she dropped her arms to her side and lost her will to fight. She was frozen with disbelief and shock. This soldier was no ordinary enemy. She'd seen this soldier before in flashbacks from her memory as a child. This soldier was Kassamandra.)

Feeling like the world had floated away from her, Kritz's heart was flooded with a thousand conflicting emotions and her mind swamped by million questions she couldn't answer. What is she doing? How can she be torturing that guy? How does someone so familiar to her mind feel so estranged from her heart? What? Why?

How? Kritz was emotionally lost. She could only gape in horror, a horror multiplied a hundred times when Kassamandra plunged her sword through the begging man's neck and laughed at him while he died.

Feeling extremely disturbed, Kritz felt her hair and shook her head. The world just didn't make sense at this point. She was so detached from everything in her world, in fact, she didn't even hear Phisele screaming out from behind her.)

PHISELE: Kritz! Help! Kritz!!!

(Consumed by emptiness, Kritz just watched on blankly as the soldier who'd run away from Derek, raced up to Kassamandra and remonstrated with her, gesturing behind him in a panic. Feeling numb, she watched as they both nodded and charged for the gates, yelling for a retreat. She then watched on as the remaining invaders made a dash for the gate, barely flinching as Flaxley slashed one of them in half on his way out.

As the last invader raced from the compound, her world came back into focus but still she could only gape and shake her head. Finally, moments later, her catatonia came to an abrupt end when a small voice piped up from behind her.)

PHISELE: Did I do well?

(She turned to see Phisele standing behind her, holding a dead invader by his hair. Feeling ashamed of her lack of self-control, Kritz slapped her cheeks and gasped.)

KRITZ: Phisele, I'm so sorry!

(Phisele beamed.)

PHISELE: It's okay, he was kinda gay!

(Feeling quite emotionally drained, she rushed up to Phisele to kneel and hug her for all she was worth; but not before taking the soldier's sword off of her. Unable to control herself, she then proceeded to cry on her young protégé's shoulder, determined to release her pent up hurt and anger before deciding what action to take. She knew that the events she'd just witnessed would change her life and all her perceptions forever.)

(At the main gate in the meantime, Flaxley was standing in the entrance looking peeved to say the least. With a face of fury, he watched the last few invaders disappear from view then turned to face those gathered there with him; Derek, several warriors and a group of frightened villagers.)

FLAXLEY: Bastards! This is what we're going to do. We're going to go to their base, burn it down then take them back to Leathrock where we'll report them to their president for being a bunch of wankers!

WARRIOR: Bunch of wankers?

DEREK: Now that's a conversation I'd like to hear!

FLAXLEY: I won't tolerate this! They can't be allowed to go around massacring the innocent and destroying lives! They need to be held to account and that's precisely what I'm going to do!

(Just then, a middle aged woman approached him with a baby in her arms.)

WOMAN: Can you really do that? Can you really rid us of their evil?

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: I can and I bloody well will!

(She swooned and raised her free hand aloft.)

WOMAN: Thank you, great forest!

(With that, she and every other villager, including the warriors, bowed down before him.)

FLAXLEY: Um...

(Derek chuckled.)

DEREK: They think you're a god, Flaxley!

(Flaxley gave him his best conceited grin.)

FLAXLEY: Only in the bedroom, Derek!

(Derek frowned.)

DEREK: Save it for Kritz! This might surprise you but I have no interest whatsoever in what you do in the bedroom!

(Flaxley waved a dismissive hand at him, convinced that he was only jealous.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah, so you say! Anyway...

(He looked to the woman who was bowing at his feet.)

FLAXLEY: Please get up now! This isn't over.

(Upon his word, the Maishu folk all climbed to their feet.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you. Now, I suggest everybody gets re-armed. We're going to attack them at first light and rid you of them forever!

(A warrior bowed and spoke up.)

WARRIOR: With all due respect, great one, why wait until first light? I, for one, would like to attack now!

(Flaxley looked up at the fading sun and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: Without familiarity of terrain, only a fool would attack in the dark!

WARRIOR: We *have* familiarity of terrain.

FLAXLEY: Yes, *you* do, but *I* don't. And *I'll* be the one doing most of the work. No offence, but your weapons are a joke. So, if we're doing this, we'll be doing it *my* way.

WARRIOR: As you wish, great one.

FLAXLEY: Great one? I might get Kritz to start calling me that!

(Derek mused and thought back to the summer before when they attacked the unfamiliar township of Malk in the dark and mused to himself.)

DEREK: Flaxley? We attacked Malk in the dark, only last year...

FLAXLEY: Derek, that was different. We weren't entirely blind to the terrain for one. Malk had an open square to fight in. I checked in the night *before* we attacked.

DEREK: Well, why don't we take a sneaky peek at the Leathrock base before we attack too?

FLAXLEY: It's a military installation, Derek, it'll be fortified and guarded, you can't just take a sneaky peek at a place like that.

DEREK: Well, okay. Fair comment.

FLAXLEY: Any *more* stupid questions, Derek? I mean, it could be risky leaving all the decisions to me. I'm merely a knight with several years' worth of experience in battle tactics, what would *I* know?

DEREK: Yeah, okay... there's no need to be sarcastic, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: There was no need for your stupid questions either.

DEREK: Touché.

FLAXLEY: Right, now...

(His words were then interrupted by the elder rushing over, waving his hand in the air.)

ELDER: Is everybody okay? Who's hurt? How many died?

(He paused.)

ELDER: Did we win?

(With a determined look in his eye, Flaxley paced up to the elder and placed a hand on his shoulder.)

FLAXLEY: Elder, it isn't over yet. But mark my words, you will win and you'll be rid of those infidels once and for all! For now, we need food, water and a place to spend the night, we attack at sunrise!

(The elder nodded proudly.)

ELDER: Then, my friend, that is exactly what you shall have!

(True to his word, that evening, the elder set Flaxley and his party up with accommodation, liquid refreshment and a hearty meal. Such was his confidence in their ability to end the Leathrock menace and his gratitude for helping stave off the earlier attack, he allowed them to stay in his luxury guest quarters, normally reserved for visiting chiefs from other tribes. As soon as they'd settled in, he then sent them several bottles of wine and a veritable banquet of hog meat and vegetables. Bonson, however, opted out of staying in the luxury quarters for the time being, opting instead to spend the evening with the elder himself as he had a healthy supply of ale on tap.

Having feasted on the hearty meal, supplied with the elder's grace, Derek, Mandika, Lefiat and Phisele all tried to rest up for the evening. Having seen the ashen-faced Kritz barely even touch her food, however, relaxing wasn't even an option for Flaxley. He wouldn't be able to settle until he'd at least tried to put his wife's mind at ease. Anxious to do just that, he took her outside to talk.

Left in the quarters with strict instructions not to go near Lefiat, Phisele settled for staring across the room at him with a loving look emblazoned across her face, which of course, didn't sit well with Mandika. Knowing this, however, only made Phisele do it even more. She didn't like Mandika and it was safe to say the feeling was mutual. Knowing Derek was ready to leap in should tempers get frayed, however, Flaxley felt okay about leaving them behind and led his wife to the riverbank to get to the bottom of her obvious sadness.

As they sat down on the moonlit riverbank to talk, Kritz proved to be a much tougher nut to crack than Flaxley had thought she'd be. For a full five minutes all she would say is that she was "okay" in a miserable voice. It was only his persistence that led her to finally spit out her woes. Looking crestfallen, she fought back tears as she explained what she'd seen.)

KRITZ: I saw her. Kassy. My sister. She was one of the invaders.

(She shook her head and sighed emptily as Flaxley placed his arm around her.)

KRITZ: She killed a man, Flaxley. Not just killed him, she taunted him first. He was begging for his life. He was unarmed and begging her... it was so callous.

(Somewhat stunned by the revelation, Flaxley puffed out.)

FLAXLEY: Damn! And you saw the whole thing?

KRITZ: I did. And she laughed about it, that's what gets me!

(She laid back and puffed out sorrowfully.)

KRITZ: She butchered an unarmed man and she laughed!

(Letting the revelation sink in, Flaxley mused to himself, determined not to say anything stupid.)

FLAXLEY: Well, they do say that all's fair in love and war!

(Sometimes determination isn't enough. Kritz sat back up and stared at him in

disbelief.)

KRITZ: You can dismiss it just like that?

(Although he was confident that essentially he was right, Flaxley bit his lip. He knew better than anyone that being right meant nothing when the words were delivered in such a callous manner. Rather than convincing her of anything, he'd just made himself look as cold as the killer in question.)

FLAXLEY: I'm not dismissing it, my love!

KRITZ: Yeah, but you did!

FLAXLEY: Well... I suppose I did!

(He rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: Where are the words when you need them?

KRITZ: Flaxley, did you not hear me right? My sister coldly struck down an unarmed man who was begging for his life! That's not fair in any way shape or form! (Flaxley looked enlightened.)

FLAXLEY: No actually, you're right! That phrase "all's fair in love and war" was created by cowards with no honour whatsoever.

KRITZ: Then what? What are you telling me?

FLAXLEY: Hmm... Kritz, I just wanted to help, truth is I don't know what to say! (Kritz laid back down again.)

FLAXLEY: From what you saw, Kassy didn't fight with honour at all. In fact that's exactly the barbarity we knights deplore. That's why we have the knight's code in the first place.

(As she stared at the stars between the tree tops above her, Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: What really gets me is, she reminded me of a Trepe. You know, back when Jazzu was in charge. Her policy was to mercilessly slaughter everything, no honour there!

(Flaxley nodded then looked down at her saddened face.)

FLAXLEY: You know, it might not be as straight forward as it looked!

(She looked to him with empty eyes.)

KRITZ: Oh?

FLAXLEY: He might have just looked like he was begging her. Maybe he was threatening her!

KRITZ: Doubtful!

FLAXLEY: Well, maybe the two of them had a history!

KRITZ: A history?

FLAXLEY: Yeah! I mean, let's not go judging her just yet. Not until we hear her side of the story!

(Kritz sat up and sidled up next to him.)

KRITZ: You really think there's anything she can say to condone her behaviour?

(Flaxley shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: I don't know, darling. Maybe after being shipwrecked here for two years she's gone a little insane!

(As Kritz looked to her feet, Flaxley cringed.)

FLAXLEY: I bet that was reassuring!

(Kritz gave a stifled laugh.)

KRITZ: No, not really. I see your point though. I mean we don't know what's happened to her since we last saw her. I barely remember seeing her at all, I certainly can't claim to know her!

FLAXLEY: Exactly. I can say that I *used* to know her though, and she certainly wasn't the sort of person to ever do that!

KRITZ: No?

FLAXLEY: No! She was prim and proper, you see?

(He smiled.)

FLAXLEY: I don't think I've ever told you this before, but your dad was raising you both to marry well. He certainly didn't envisage either of you battling.

KRITZ: No, you hadn't told me that before.

(She shook her head.)

KRITZ: So, I was being raised to be a good wife, you mean?

FLAXLEY: Well yeah, or no... he was raising you to be an obedient wife anyway!

You know; a cook and a cleaner!

KRITZ: Wow! That's so not me! Why would he do that?

(She then bit her lip uneasily.)

KRITZ: And why didn't you tell me that before? You said you'd told me everything you remembered.

(Flaxley grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Well, to be honest, we kind used to take the piss out of your dad. A lot!

I make no apology for keeping *that* a secret.

KRITZ: But why? Why would you do that?

(Flaxley sighed, not sure whether the truth would go down too well.)

FLAXLEY: Well... he was a tad delusional if I'm honest!

KRITZ: Delusional?

FLAXLEY: Yeah, pretentious too!

KRITZ: In what way?

FLAXLEY: Well... according to my father, your dad's name when he first came to Tifaeris was Albert Ball. Six months later, however, he was passing himself off as Alvarez Ricardo Balleventios. He dubbed you and your sister with these long, magnificent sounding names and used to pass himself off as a "Produce Merchant". Basically he ran a fruit stall.

KRITZ: Really? That's kinda sad!

FLAXLEY: It's extremely lame. So we... took the piss.

KRITZ: I can't berate you for that; in your shoes I'd have done the same.

(Relieved not to have talked his way into her bad books, Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: He wasn't stupid though. It was all part of his plan. He wanted to overstate his own importance and marry you girls off to rich landowners.

KRITZ: I see!

FLAXLEY: And woe betide any man who tried to date Kassy. It would have been the same when you were older. If a guy didn't own a mansion and 100 acres of land, he had no chance.

(Kritz frowned.)

KRITZ: You fucked her though!

FLAXLEY: Yeah well, Kassy definitely wasn't in favour of his policy. She didn't like the upper class guys he tried to set her up with; she was young and wanted to have fun!

KRITZ: Yeah?

(She placed her head on his upper arm.)

KRITZ: Now she butchers people for amusement!

FLAXLEY: Well, that can be fun too sometimes!

(She forced a laugh, lifted by the fact that he was trying to cheer her up.)

KRITZ: Even at my worst as a Trepe, I'd never have done what she did today!

FLAXLEY: I know, but if you were still a Trepe now and Jazzu was in charge who

knows how brainwashed and psychotic you might have become!

(He rolled his eyes.)

FLAXLEY: I'm not the most comforting man in the world, am I?

KRITZ: Honestly? Yes you are. Just having you at my side makes the world of difference, my love.

(Flaxley grinned at her playfully.)

FLAXLEY: Well, obviously. I make you look good. As husbands go, I'm quite the trophy.

(Kritz chuckled and laid on her back again.)

KRITZ: You said that with a playful smile but you believed every word of that, didn't you?

FLAXLEY: Every syllable, my love.

(Kritz laughed out loud then exhaled softly.)

KRITZ: Thanks for helping me talk, darling!

FLAXLEY: You're welcome!

(As she looked up at him and tried to push her woes to the back of her mind, she thought back to the first time Flaxley had taken her in his arms. Remembering how much strength she gained from being in his embrace, she sighed softly.)

KRITZ: Make love to me, Flaxley!

(Flaxley shuddered all over then sat back looking stunned.)

KRITZ: You okay?

(Flaxley grimaced.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry about that, sudden rush of blood to the... you know?

(She looked down at the bulge in his trousers and grinned.)

KRITZ: Wow, that *was* sudden.

(She beamed.)

KRITZ: I take it that's a yes.

FLAXLEY: Damn right it is! Get comfortable, my love, you're about to be impaled.

KRITZ: Yay!

(And with that, they contorted into a moonlit version of the beast with two backs, forgetting all their worries for a while and reaffirming their deep love for each other.)

(In the elder's hut at this time, Bonson was reaffirming his deepest affection for the elder's home brewed ale. With his shoes and socks, nowhere to be seen, he relaxed on a rug and chatted merrily to his new friend about the plethora of different ales he'd sampled during his lifetime.)

BONSON: Though on the downside, there's Tifaeris.

ELDER: Is that where Flaxley hails from?

BONSON: That's right! Their ale is abysmal!

ELDER: Really?

BONSON: Really! I've pissed better ale!

ELDER: Wow!

BONSON: They don't use enough barley and hops don't grow properly in that sort of climate. It's a bit like here with the heat but *you* have shade from the sun.

(Elder nodded.)

ELDER: Oh my, I've tasted beer from hops exposed to too much sun. It tastes like licking toenails!

(Bonson looked shocked.)

BONSON: That's exactly the taste!

ELDER: Oh my. I made my batch by mistake, but you say that's how they actually make their ale? Deliberately???

BONSON: Afraid so! They clearly have no idea what they're doing.

ELDER: How awful!

(The elder shook his head.)

ELDER: Oh well, it's been nice Bonson but I have to sleep now!

BONSON: Really? It's not that late!

ELDER: Well you have to be up for the battle before sunrise and I've got my sacrifice to make!

(He sighed.)

ELDER: I'm not looking forward to it!

BONSON: No, I don't suppose you are! I just wish there was some way I could help out!

(The elder paused and mused to himself.)

ELDER: Actually, there is!

(Bonson looked terrified.)

BONSON: What?

ELDER: You could share my burden. You are the wise man of your tribe after all!

BONSON: Eh? No, I'm just the oldest; Flaxley is much wiser than me!

(As Bonson climbed to his feet to beat a hasty retreat, the elder looked a little unsure.)

ELDER: What are you saying?

BONSON: Um... look, when I said I wanted to help, I was under the impression that I couldn't. I don't want to help!

(The elder frowned.)

ELDER: Oh, I see!

BONSON: No, don't be annoyed, I do have my reasons for saying no, you know!

ELDER: Such as?

(Not wanting to hurt his friend's feelings and possibly alienate himself from the beer supply, Bonson thought on his feet and lied through his teeth.)

BONSON: Well, as elder of my people, I take my obligations seriously and so should you. *You're* the elder of this village so it's something *you* have to do. I'd love to help, I really would, but if I did then I'd be sullyng the responsible name of elders everywhere. It's our obligation to fulfil our duties and if I helped you shirk yours... well that'd be wrong. Besides, my wisdom is going to be needed elsewhere tomorrow when we attack the Leathrock lot.

(The elder looked impressed.)

ELDER: I'm shocked, what can I say? You pretend not to take your role as elder seriously but now I see, you've only been playing it down. You actually take it very seriously. How wonderfully modest. Refreshing, in fact. I admire your attitude, Bonson, I really do.

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: Well, you know how it is.

ELDER: Indeed!

BONSON: Night then! Good luck with the sacrifice!

ELDER: Thank you. Goodnight, Bonson!

(With that, he stepped from the elder's hut and leant over the balcony to draw a sigh of relief. He didn't want to offend the elder but nor did he want to sacrifice himself; somehow he'd got away with not doing both. Wiping sweat from brow, delighted with the outcome, he then scanned the moonlit village below with his eyes. Catching sight of Kritz riding her husband like a pony, he chuckled to himself then headed back

to their quarters for the night.)

(It was to be the longest night of Kritz's life. Having returned from the river bank, she'd joined her allies in settling down to get a good night's sleep before the battle on the morrow. More than used to conflict and without a single worry about it being his last, Flaxley slept soundly. Kritz on the other hand, did not. Unable to stop worrying about what the morning would bring, or that her sister would have no answers, she huddled up to her husband and stared wide awake over his shoulder.

Lefiat had no problems whatsoever in getting a good night's sleep. Recalling Kritz's comments that he was hopeless with a dagger, he'd asked Flaxley if it was true that he was a "shit stabber". Needless to say, a few seconds later he was away for the night, Flaxley's fist proving quite the cure for insomnia. For Mandika and Bonson, the problem of sleep was negated by Derek's highly effective sleep magic. Not needing sleep more than once in every eight days, Derek sat up in readiness to wake them in time for their march to the Leathrock compound in the morning. Unaware that Kritz was also in no danger of sleeping any time soon, he sat himself down on a chair to read and wait for the hour to come.

In various huts and shelters all over the village, warriors had laid down their heads, apprehensive about what the following day would bring. They knew success could very well guarantee their survival for the immediate future and not for a moment did any of them even consider backing out. These were brave warriors, men of peace but in no way cowards. The job of securing their futures was not something they'd even begin to shy away from.

The tension that night would be worse on their wives and their children. Watching on helplessly as their loved ones went off to battle was more than some of them could stand. Not knowing whether their next walk through the gates would be their last would be chilling, and waiting to see if they came back alive or not would be almost unbearable. A lot of love was made that night. With the possibility of death looming over them, every kiss was a thinly veiled kiss goodbye.)

One hour before sunrise – Maishu Village – Sanetza

(Darkness prevailed. The sun was coming but still remained some distance from casting its magnificent light on this part of the earth. The silence of the early hours. It was time.

As he sat reading a tale about a cobbler and his quest to make shoes for a vengeful god, Derek rolled his eyes and peered through the window. Reading the stars and the moon, he nodded to himself and cast the book to the ground.)

DEREK: Stupid bloody story anyway!

(With that, he paced over to the bed upon which Kritz was cuddled up to Flaxley's back. Careful not to shout too loud and give anybody a heart attack, he leant towards Flaxley's face.)

DEREK: Oi! Flaxley!

(As Kritz popped her head up from behind him, Derek smiled.)

DEREK: Morning, Kritz!

KRITZ: I only fell asleep a minute ago! Damn!

(As she sat up, Flaxley opened his eyes and spoke in a romantic voice.)

FLAXLEY: Well...

(Upon sighting Derek staring back at him, he sat bolt upright.)

FLAXLEY: Derek? That had better not have been you that touched my arse!

(Derek frowned.)

DEREK: Is your arse at the front, Flaxley?

KRITZ: Calm down, that was me!

(She used his legs as leverage and jumped to her feet.)

KRITZ: Is there any water to wash with, Derek?

(Derek pointed to the corner.)

KRITZ: Thanks!

(With that, she yanked her top off and headed over there, hoisting her skirt as she did so. Inexplicably, her nakedness somehow woke Bonson. A rare sixth sense if ever there was one. Having sensed naked perfection in the room, his eyes had opened wide and he'd swiftly sat up to watch her with a big smile on his face.)

BONSON: Marvellous!

(Much to his dismay, however, Flaxley quickly paced over and stood between himself and the glorious sight of Kritz's naked, tanned flesh.)

FLAXLEY: Look away, pervert!

(He then glanced over his shoulder at Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: We talked about you and your public nudity remember?

(She nodded.)

KRITZ: Yeah, we agreed that if you're ashamed of my body then you don't have to look at it!

FLAXLEY: Eh?

KRITZ: I'm washing myself and then I'll get dressed again, okay? If people see me then good for them.

(Feeling peeved, Flaxley turned back to see Bonson had shifted along the bed to continue ogling her.)

FLAXLEY: Bonson! I told you to look away!

(Bonson looked a little surprised.)

BONSON: Oh, I thought you were talking to Lefiat!

(He gestured to where Lefiat was staring at Kritz with his tongue out and his eyes bulging excitedly.)

FLAXLEY: Oh I give up! You might as well abandon clothes forever, Kritz!

(Kritz frowned.)

KRITZ: I was going to but you told me I couldn't!

(Looking like he was about to explode, Flaxley growled.)

FLAXLEY: I'll be outside if you need me!

(And with that, he hastened out of the door. Much to his surprise, he was greeted by the sight of nearly a hundred warriors armed with spears and blades. With their faces painted ready for action, they stood in a disciplined formation and stared at him silently.)

FLAXLEY: What the?

(Just then, a voice popped up from his left.)

MOCHO: Allow me to introduce myself, I'm Mocho Cog and these are my troops! We've come to help!

(Flaxley bowed to acknowledge him.)

FLAXLEY: It's a pleasure!

MOCHO: And for me it is an honour! You are a mighty warrior.

(Flaxley looked to the stars and nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Well yes, I do have a certain *je ne sais quoi*!

MOCHO: I look forward to helping you kill them all, every last one. Grounding them into the dirt like snails and ripping off their limbs. This will be a great day for Maishu!

(Hardly believing how over eager he was, Flaxley leant back.)

FLAXLEY: Whoa, calm down. We're not going there to slaughter them like pigs. We're going to destroy their base and I'm going to take them back where they came from to face justice for their crimes!

(Mochu looked from side to side in a shifty manner.)

MOCHO: Can't we dismember one or two, you know, just as token gesture?

FLAXLEY: No, we can't. I'm in charge of the mission and we'll do things *my* way.

MOCHO: Well okay, I think that'd be best. Last time *I* took a unit out, I was the only survivor. We only went to fetch water and the rest of my men fell down the well!

(Fearing he was another Lefiat-like silly person, Flaxley gently ushered him aside with his forearm.)

FLAXLEY: Right... don't stand so close!

(He then projected his voice to the waiting ears of all those assembled before him.)

FLAXLEY: Right, my companions will be here in a couple of minutes, and when they are I'll give you your briefing!

(Remembering Mandika, he then mused to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Make that ten minutes!

(Fifteen minutes later, having dragged Mandika, kicking and screaming into line, Flaxley was finally in a position to give his speech. Ignoring Mandika's icy glare as she angrily brushed her hair, he stepped forth and looked to the patient eyes before him. Knowing the importance of morale at a time like this, he started with a dramatic statement.)

FLAXLEY: People of Maishu, allies, friends. Today we shall rid you of the invaders who have blighted your lives for far too long!

(Much to his amazement the warriors all looked at one another before miming a hand clap. Looking baffled, he leant to Mochu.)

FLAXLEY: What's with the miming?

MOCHO: What should they do, cheer and wake up the entire village?

(Flaxley frowned.)

FLAXLEY: Good grief!

(He looked to the warriors once more and raised his voice.)

FLAXLEY: Warriors! We are about to do battle, this is no time to worry about the neighbours. We need aggression. For the next few hours I need to see passion, I need to...

MOCHO: Keep your voice down, Flaxley.

(A warrior in the front line nodded.)

WARRIOR: Aye, if you wake my mother, she'll be wanting a piece of you!

(Flaxley snarled.)

FLAXLEY: I'll have a piece of *you* in a minute!

WARRIOR: Hey, that's not very leader like!

(The warrior next to him agreed.)

WARRIOR 2: Aye, he's not very leader like at all is he?

WARRIOR: No, that's what I'm saying!

(Just then, another voice piped up from behind them.)

WARRIOR 3: I liked Anjou, now he was a good leader!

WARRIOR: Aye!

(The warrior looked to Flaxley.)

WARRIOR: Hey, you want to be more like Anjou!

(Flaxley spanned his forehead in disbelief.)

FLAXLEY: This can't be happening!

(He was distraught. For all their war paint and weaponry, they were exactly like the hopeless bunch of rag tag part time soldiers he was trying to train in Tifaeris. They were up for the fight but had no concept of military discipline or protocol.)

FLAXLEY: I think this calls for a change of tactics!

(With that, he cleared his throat and opted for a far less complicated speech.)

FLAXLEY: Look, we're going to go to their compound, burn it down and arrest them. That's all. Defend yourselves well but make sure their compound is destroyed. I gather there were only fifty of them and I know we killed a good seven or so yesterday, so we have the advantage of numbers...

(He was tempted to make his usual speech about how he counted for at least twenty men but decided against it for fear of back talk from the warriors.)

FLAXLEY: Now, make sure you don't kill anyone. There are two people there we specifically need to find. Once they've been identified then you can rough the others up a bit but wait until I give the signal. So, any questions?

(Immediately all their hands went up.)

FLAXLEY: Sheesh!

WARRIOR: What is the signal?

FLAXLEY: You'll know it when I make it, trust me!

WARRIOR 2: That's a bit vague!

WARRIOR: Aye, it's very vague!

WARRIOR 3: Anjou was never that vague!

(Realising he was getting nowhere fast, Flaxley turned to Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Darling...

KRITZ: Protect Phisele, I know!

LEFIAT: And I won't touch anything! I'll just protect, Mandika!

MANDIKA: You'd better! I'm annoyed with you for making me rush getting ready!

LEFIAT: Eh? That was Flaxley!

MANDIKA: Even so!

(Realising his own allies were no better than the warriors before him, Flaxley threw up his arms and groaned.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck this for a game of soldiers! Let's go!!!

(With that, he started to walk. He got approximately two feet, however, before he had to stop.)

FLAXLEY: What part of "let's go" didn't you get?

WARRIOR: Oh, you meant us?

WARRIOR 2: You should have been more specific!

FLAXLEY: Yes, Anjou would have been more specific. Fuck sake! Who did you think I meant?

(He frowned.)

FLAXLEY: Go then!!!

(Eventually, after much more confusion, he managed to lead the warriors out of the gate to begin their march to the Leathrock base. With Mocho as their guide, however, he feared ending up lost in some remote part of the woods forever. Unfortunately, he

had no option but to trust his guidance and could only pray they'd arrive in the right place.)

(With Mocho, Bonson, Derek, Kritz, Lefiat, Mandika and Phisele at his side and the Maishu warriors behind, Flaxley paced purposefully ahead. Surrounded by giant trees as they proceeded through the thick woodland, he was well aware that they might not be able to see the compound until they were almost upon it. Feeling certain that the Leathrock soldiers would probably have lookouts posted, he kept a sharp eye open all the way. While Flaxley remained in knight mode, however, Bonson couldn't have been more relaxed. He'd spent much of the previous night contemplating Daman's Siria involvement in the mission and had convinced himself that the mystic wise man was most definitely controlling them again. Therefore, they'd be protected from death by his mysterious magic and had absolutely nothing to worry about.)

BONSON: These woods are really quite something aren't they? You have to love the greenery!

(He received no reply from a nervous Kritz, an oblivious Lefiat, an angry Mandika or a battle ready Flaxley. The only returns came from a shy Phisele and an unimpressed Derek.)

PHISELE: Really quite what, Mr Bonson?

DEREK: Just what I was thinking! I'm green and nobody says *I'm* a spectacular view!

(Bonson grinned.)

BONSON: Not even Zanne?

DEREK: Especially not Zanne! She spends all her time lately reminding me she could have married Lermite, the smarmy git from her laser class at school!

(Bonson nodded sympathetically.)

BONSON: My wife used to do that! She reckoned she could have married Charles, our local shop keep and lived with some dignity. I told her, I earn way more than he does; besides flash chaps like him don't go for ugly women!

(He sighed.)

BONSON: I got no sex for a month!

DEREK: Been there my friend!

PHISELE: Ew, gross!

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: Yes, he looks that way at first but you get used to him, just remember he's an alien and we probably look strange to him too!

DEREK: Piss off, Bonson!

(Bonson chuckled.)

BONSON: I'm joking.

DEREK: Anyway, it's not like you to be so cheery on the way to battle!

BONSON: Well, there's nothing to be worried about. I'm sure Daman will see to it that we win. And besides, this beats sacrificing myself!

DEREK: What?

BONSON: Oh, don't pretend you haven't realised it too. Daman is behind this, he's manipulating us again. It's infuriating, but at least we're protected from death.

DEREK: I've got my suspicions, yes. We can't be certain of it though.

BONSON: *You* can't, you mean. *I* am.

DEREK: Well, I guess we'll see about that. I was actually asking what you meant about sacrificing yourself.

BONSON: Oh, right. Well... the Maishu elder has to sacrifice himself today. He asked me to join in but I managed to wriggle out of it.

DEREK: Really?

BONSON: Wasn't easy letting him down gently either. He seemed so keen for me to join him! When he thought I was going to assist him, his face lit up like Guevina Castle five minutes after Lefiat wakes up.

DEREK: I don't get it, what do you mean he has to sacrifice himself?

(Bonson shrugged.)

BONSON: I really didn't want to hang around and find out actually. Whatever it is, I'm not sacrificing myself for anyone!

(Fed up with listening to the old man and the alien discussing something that made absolutely no sense to her, Phisele squeezed Kritz's hand.)

PHISELE: Will you talk to me, those two are creepy?

(Kritz forced a smile. She wasn't in the mood for talking. Her heart was racing. All she could think of was how Kassamandra might react to seeing her and whether or not she really wanted to know how she became so callous. Biting her lip, she looked down to Phisele.)

KRITZ: Do you want to walk with Flaxley for a bit, sweetheart? I'm a bit pre-occupied!

(Phisele nodded.)

PHISELE: Okay!

(She had no idea what pre-occupied meant but did as she was told nevertheless. As she made her way slowly towards him, however, she couldn't resist kicking Mandika.)

MANDIKA: Ow!

PHISELE: Sorry, it was an accident!

MANDIKA: No, it wasn't!

PHISELE: It was, look!

(She did it again.)

PHISELE: See?

MANDIKA: Hey!

(She glared at Lefiat.)

MANDIKA: Protect me!

LEFIAT: From her?

MANDIKA; Yes!!!

PHISELE: Don't worry!

(With that, she raced over to Flaxley.)

PHISELE: I've got to walk with you!

(Averting his gaze from the route ahead for a moment, Flaxley nodded and lifted her up.)

PHISELE: This isn't walking!

(Flaxley said nothing and stared ahead.)

PHISELE: Why is nobody talking to me? Except Luffy-lops and poop face?

(Mocho smiled.)

MOCHO: Your daughter is very pretty, Flaxley!

(Flaxley glared at him.)

FLAXLEY: She's not my daughter, how dare you?

(Mocho reeled back.)

MOCHO: I apologise!

(Taken aback by Flaxley's apparent revulsion at the idea of her being his daughter,

Phisele pouted.)

PHISELE: Hey, I'm not that bad, am I? Why do you hate me?

FLAXLEY: I don't hate you!

PHISELE: Then why did you get so mean to that man?

FLAXLEY: I'm not your dad!

(She looked away shyly and spoke in a small voice.)

PHISELE: You're the nearest thing I've got!

(Noticing her saddened pout, Flaxley couldn't help but take pity on her.)

FLAXLEY: Listen Phisele, you're a great kid. Kritz loves you to bits and well... so do I!

(She smiled.)

FLAXLEY: But I'm not your dad!

PHISELE: Okay!

FLAXLEY: Do you remember your dad?

(She looked sad.)

PHISELE: Um... not really...

FLAXLEY: I do. Your dad was a great man. A fantastic man even. That man was...

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: There is no word for how great he was. They should use his name to create one.

PHISELE: What?

FLAXLEY: Listen, Phisele, a few years back your dad went to battle at my side to fight for the future of Tifaeris. I came back alive, but your dad like so many others, never made it home again. They were killed.

(As Phisele's bottom lip drooped, Mocho looked on, amazed that he was telling her this.)

PHISELE: Dad was killed?

FLAXLEY: Yes, and you know why?

(Like children tend to do, she instantly assumed it was her fault.)

PHISELE: Was it 'cause of me?

(Flaxley mused.)

FLAXLEY: Yes actually!

(As her faced descended into tears, Flaxley realised what he'd said and how Kritz would make his life a misery if he didn't put things right.)

FLAXLEY: No, Phisele, don't cry! Listen!

(She looked at him wearing the saddest pouting face any child has ever pulled.)

FLAXLEY: Oh please, now I feel awful!

(He sighed and started to set things straight.)

FLAXLEY: When I say it was because of you, I mean he did it *for* you!

PHISELE: What?

FLAXLEY: We went into battle to stop the people who wanted to kill everyone in Tifaeris. Your dad went because he wanted to stop them too. Get it?

PHISELE: Um...

FLAXLEY: He knew that if we stopped them then you'd have somewhere peaceful to grow up. All he wanted was to know that *you'd* be safe. So he fought, we all fought. A lot of men died and your dad was one of them. *All* of them must be remembered as the heroes who gave their lives to save us all!

(Her little face lit up.)

PHISELE: My dad was a hero?

FLAXLEY: Yes! He was a true hero, they *all* were. That's why I don't want people

to think I'm your dad!

PHISELE: You mean...

FLAXLEY: Because I want people to *remember* your dad and I want *you* to know he was a hero. Most of all, Phisele, and listen well...

PHISELE: Okay...

FLAXLEY: You'd have been killed if it wasn't for people like your dad fighting back. He gave his life to save yours. Make sure you're always proud of him, kid. And if he's watching from heaven or wherever we go, make sure he's proud of his little girl!

(Phisele beamed and cast her arms around his neck.)

PHISELE: Okay!

FLAXLEY: Good girl!

PHISELE: What was my dad's name anyway? I don't even remember!

FLAXLEY: Um... never mind that. It's dad to you, anyway. Now, you ought to go back and see Kritz!

(And with that, he immediately returned to full knight mode, placing Phisele back down as he did so. Immediately forgetting about being a good girl, she ran back to Kritz, kicking Mandika on her way past. Upon reaching her, she took her hand again.)

PHISELE: Hi, Kritz!

(Kritz looked down to her, still somewhat disorientated by her own thoughts.)

KRITZ: Hey, sweetheart! Where'd you go?

PHISELE: To Flaxley like you told me to. He was telling me how it was my fault my dad died!

KRITZ: What?

PHISELE: He's a hero, my dad. He is! Flaxley said.

(Kritz gave her a warm smile.)

KRITZ: I know.

PHISELE: Kritz?

KRITZ: Babe?

PHISELE: You're scared, aren't you?

(Kritz just lifted her up and smiled at her.)

PHISELE: Why is everyone picking me up today?

KRITZ: Oh, sorry!

PHISELE: No, it's good! I can give you a hug and make you feel better!

(With that, she threw her arms around her. Kritz smiled and held her close as she walked on. The hug felt extremely comforting and slightly took her mind off the worries that plagued her mind.)

(As the morning sun broke through the tree tops to illuminate the forest around them, Flaxley marched onwards wearing a thoughtful expression. Squinting in the bright morning sun, he was wondering what it'd be like to see his old friend Croxton again. Would he recognise him? Would he be willing to fight to the death to prevent Flaxley from taking him into custody? Would he give up the gold chain without a fight? Ever mindful of the elder's words that only fifty or so Leathrock sailors had washed up on the shore, however, he had no worries about losing the battle whatsoever. He knew at least seven of the Leathrock contingent were dead and as far as he was concerned, it'd take twice their remaining number to bring him down. It may have been arrogance or an over inflated ego that made him think in such a way but

nevertheless, those were his feelings.

Flaxley's confidence sadly wasn't shared by the Maishu warriors. They'd been on the receiving end of Leathrock hostility before and knew their wooden spears were no match for the iron weapons of their enemies. As a result, there was much tension in the ranks.

As they finally started their approach to the camp on Mocho's advice that it was nearby, that tension rose. Looking terrified, the warriors crept forth behind Flaxley and his crew, fearing for their lives.

Determined to find Croxton, destroy the camp and take the Leathrock folk home on the Colloskayak as soon as possible, Flaxley slipped his sword from his sheath and turned to Mocho.)

FLAXLEY: Just let me know *where* exactly. And how far?

(Mocho rubbed his chin.)

MOCHO: It's only...

(Just then, a loud scream filled the air from the direction of the Leathrock camp.

Looking determined, Flaxley grinned from ear to ear.)

FLAXLEY: Thanks, I think I can find my own way from here!

(With that, he raced forth through the trees. Taking it as a signal, his allies and the accompanying warriors leapt into action and charged after him. As they raced through the trees, however, they froze to the spot and joined Flaxley in staring in horror at what they saw. The Leathrock base was already on fire and chaos loomed large inside. As he stared through the gap where the gates ought to have been, Flaxley sneered.)

FLAXLEY: I'm going in!!!

(As he charged inside like a man possessed, the allies all looked to one another then followed suit. Inside the base, buildings raged like towering infernos, the flames shooting high into the sky. The Leathrock soldiers raced in and out of the burning huts, desperately trying to salvage what they could from the doomed constructions. Horses were rearing up in panic and screams of burning men filled the air. It was total chaos. Just then, as a man raced from one of the smaller huts, his body engulfed by fire, Flaxley was amazed to see a Maishu warrior race over to him and thrust him to the ground, before smothering the blaze with his shawl.)

FLAXLEY: Now that's class!

(Incredibly, *all* the Maishu warriors, so long taunted and threatened by these Leathrock refugees, immediately rushed to their aid. Flaxley and the rest of his companions could only watch in awe as they assisted with everything from salvaging supplies to first aid. The animosity completely put to side for the sake of helping their fellow man.)

BONSON: Well, well. I almost feel humble.

(He looked baffled.)

BONSON: That's not like me at all!

FLAXLEY: No, Bonson. You're right to feel humble. These people are a class act!

DEREK: Indeed they are!

MANDIKA: Maybe we should help! And by "we" I mean you!

(They all gave her a sideways glance.)

MANDIKA: What? I'm on my honeymoon!

LEFIAT: Even so, let's see what we can do!

MANDIKA: Yeah, go on then!

KRITZ: I've got H2O, I think I can help the burn victims! C'mon Phisele!

(As she rushed to what looked like a makeshift medical area, Flaxley stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: Come. We've got work to do!

(Spurred on by his words, Lefiat and Derek followed Flaxley to a burning hut, leaving Mandika and Bonson behind.)

BONSON: Well, it'd be the classy thing to help!

MANDIKA: Yeah, but I don't want to!

BONSON: Nor do I! Let's go and sit down!

MANDIKA: Okay!

(And so, while Bonson and Mandika found a place to sit and watch, the others joined in the rescue and salvage attempt. Looking like a man possessed, Flaxley burst into one of the buildings and came racing out moments later with large boxes on either shoulder.)

FLAXLEY: Look lively chaps!

LEFIAT: Okay!

(With that, he and Derek rushed through the smoky doorway. Moments later, Derek re-emerged with a box over one shoulder and the unconscious Lefiat over the other.)

DEREK: He fell over!

FLAXLEY: He would! Dump him down somewhere and come back. We're far from finished.

(More than a little concerned by the state of the creaking building, Derek looked uncertain.)

DEREK: Are you sure, Flaxley? It doesn't look too safe to me!

FLAXLEY: Derek. It's on fire. Of course it doesn't look safe!

(With that, he rolled his eyes and rushed back into the building. Anxious to get back and help him out, Derek rushed Lefiat over to where Mandika and Bonson were chatting.)

DEREK: Mandika! Look after this!

(He plonked Lefiat down and turned to face the burning building.)

DEREK: Right...

(Before he could even begin to charge back to Flaxley, however, Mandika piped up.)

MANDIKA: What happened to him?

DEREK: I don't know. Maybe his mother dropped him on his head as a baby!

(As Bonson laughed out loud, Mandika scowled.)

MANDIKA: Don't be facetious!!! I meant why is he unconscious?

(Resenting Mandika's tone, Derek snarled and hammered home his point.)

DEREK: He fell over. He always falls over. He's useless. Probably as a result of aforementioned being dropped on his head. Now do you get it? Anyway, if you don't mind, I've got a building to...

(Much to his horror, as he prepared to race back to Flaxley's aid, the building Flaxley was in made a deafening creak and caved in on itself. The roofing collapsed into the top floor and the whole thing gave way, crashing down onto the ground floor. Smoke and dust gushed out across the surrounding area and wooden shrapnel rained down. The entire building descending to a pile of timber rubble in a matter of seconds with Flaxley inside it. Derek thrust his head into his hands and bellowed.)

DEREK: Flaxley!!!

(Looking tortured, he raced through the dust and smoke, batting it away from his face as he tried to reach his stricken friend. Fearing the worst, he reached the assortment of shattered beams and debris and looked about himself in a panic; no idea where to

start looking for him.)

DEREK: Damn it, Flaxley. Give me a sign!!!

(Just then, there was a creaking sound in the rubble in front of him. Before he could investigate it, however, the rubble creaked again then slipped aside as Flaxley pushed his way upwards through the debris and climbed to his feet.)

FLAXLEY: They don't build these things like they used to!

(Derek gaped as Flaxley clambered out of the rubble and paced up to him.)

DEREK: You just got crushed by a tonne of wood!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: I know. Good thing I had my helmet on really!

DEREK: But... a tonne of wood!

FLAXLEY: Yes, well... never mind that. This building's well and truly fucked I'd say. Let's find another!

(With that, he paced away unscathed, dusting himself down as he went. Watching on in amazement, Derek just shook his head.)

DEREK: I've seen it all now.

(The compound was by now in such a devastated mess, and so many of their number were down, the Leathrock soldiers who remained capable welcomed the strangers and Maishu warriors with open arms. Needing and appreciating every pair of hands they could get, nobody was about to question them. They accepted the help without hesitation or argument.

As everyone continued to work together in harmony, over at the temporary first aid area, Phisele watched Kritz dull the pain of some of the burn victims with her water magic. With 6 people in her temporary care, she took the job extremely seriously, even using her magic to fill buckets with water so others could help. Eager to be just like her, Phisele grabbed a sponge and mopped the wounded men's heads, much to Kritz's delight.)

KRITZ: Good job, nurse Phisele!

(Phisele giggled.)

PHISELE: Thank you, nurse Kritz!

(With a smile on her face, Kritz then proceeded to wipe the dirt from around a soldier's leg wound. Watching as she carefully mopped the affected area, the soldier raised an impressed eyebrow and sat up.)

SOLDIER: Thank you, ma'am! I don't know who you are, but thank you!

KRITZ: You're welcome!

SOLDIER: Say, I'd sure like the chance to repay you sometime!

(Before Kritz could explain she was married and therefore not interested, Phisele paced level with the soldier's head and wagged an angry finger at him.)

PHISELE: Simmer down, soldier boy! She's a married woman!

(As the grinning soldier laid himself back down, Kritz chuckled to herself. She remembered using that exact phrase once before.)

KRITZ: Priceless.

(With that, she resumed focussing on carefully cleaning every last bit of dirt from the soldier's wound. Such was her concentration, she didn't ever hear a set of footsteps approaching from behind her. As a result she got quite a start when a female voice enquired about the well-being of the men in her care.)

VOICE: How are the patients?

(Holding her chest, Kritz spun around looking startled.)

KRITZ: Hey, you almost gave me a...

(As her eyes caught sight of the woman who'd spoke to her, her mouth immediately fell open and her words disappeared. Looking like she'd seen a ghost she stared into her eyes and started to gape. There she was, Kassamandra, her long lost sister, two feet in front of her. Staring back at her, Kassamandra, known formally as Kassy, looked baffled and shrugged.)

KASSY: You okay there?

(Kritz just continued to gape.)

KASSY: Maybe you'd better lay down!

KRITZ: I...

(Once again she couldn't find any words. Her heart was racing and her brain couldn't keep up with it. Phisele, on the other hand, had no such trouble.)

PHISELE: Hey, you look like each other! Except Kritz is prettier!

(She grinned at Kritz.)

PHISELE: Is this the sister you were looking for?

(Immediately, Kassy's jaw dropped.)

KASSY: Kritz? Kritzveltia?

(Finally, Kritz managed to force out a word.)

KRITZ: Kassy!

(Filling up with tears, Kassy stepped forward to throw her arms around her. Repulsed by what she'd witnessed the day before, Kritz leant back with disgust and barked at her in a tearful voice.)

KRITZ: You killed a man! For nothing!

(Kassy gaped, unable to accept the rejection.)

KASSY: Kritz... you're my sister. My sister!

(Kritz screwed her face up.)

KRITZ: No I'm not!

KASSY: Kritz?

(With her emotions racing wildly in every direction imaginable, Kritz then threw her arms around her sister. Feeling warmth and emotion that she'd never felt before, Kassy held her tight and closed her eyes. Reunited in each other's arms, they said nothing and allowed the hug to speak volumes on their behalf.)

Finally pulling back from the hug a few moments later, Kritz wiped a tear then looked into Kassy's eyes.)

KRITZ: Why did you kill that guy?

(Lost in her own confusion, Kritz's words went over Kassy's head to be replaced with questions of her own.)

KASSY: You died. You died in Tifaeris. Why didn't you die? How can you be here?

(Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: I thought *you* died!

(They then stared at each other in a silent state of shock for what seemed like an eternity.)

PHISELE: Um... Kritz? Say something, you're scaring me.

(Retaining her stunned focus on her sister's eyes, Kritz held her hand out to Phisele. Needing no second invitation, she grabbed the outstretched hand and used it to run behind her and peek around her back at Kassy. Catching sight of Phisele in the corner of her eye, Kassy averted her gaze for a moment and looked down at the nervous child peering back at her.)

KASSY: Is she... is she yours?

KRITZ: What? No, she's... you killed a guy for the sick pleasure of it!

(Kassy looked into Kritz's eyes once more.)

KASSY: I didn't. I wouldn't!

KRITZ: I saw you, you psycho!!!

(Kassy shook her head and took a step back.)

KASSY: No!

(She twisted and pulled her top up to reveal a deep scar running up her back.)

KASSY: I killed the sick fuck who couldn't take no for an answer and did this to me!

(Sickened by the vile scar, Phisele turned away and Kritz contorted her head back.)

KRITZ: Shit!

(Pulling her top back down, Kassy whimpered.)

KASSY: I wouldn't give him what he wanted so he attacked me and tried to take it. I don't care if it seems wrong, I'm glad I killed him! One less rapist in the world.

(Kritz may have mellowed over the last few years but she hadn't changed *that* much.)

KRITZ: Holy crap, Kassy, you should have sliced his dick off!

(Kassy smiled.)

KASSY: Now who's the psycho?

(Immediately letting go of all her resentment, Kritz laughed.)

KRITZ: I guess we really are sisters, huh?

KASSY: I guess so!

KRITZ: So... what now? I mean, where do we go from here? I've got so much I want to tell you!

KASSY: Yeah, damn, me too. Like how the hell did you end up here?

(Obviously the last thing Kassy had expected to see while shipwrecked on this unfamiliar land was her long lost sister. She'd thought the world she once knew in Leathrock was long gone, let alone the life she had back when she was a teenager. Seeing Kritz before her very eyes was more than a little overwhelming.)

KASSY: You are real, aren't you? I haven't started to go mad and hallucinate have I?

KRITZ: No. No, I'm real. We heard from a mystic source that a guy called Croxton was alive and he was last seen heading out here. So we came!

KASSY: We?

KRITZ: Yeah! I didn't come on my own!

(Kassy hung her head and sighed.)

KASSY: Croxton.

KRITZ: Yeah, he has a...

KASSY: He was the first one they killed!

(Kritz looked horrified.)

KRITZ: Killed? Who did?

(Kassy threw her hands up in the air and looked to the heavens.)

KASSY: How could I have been so dumb? They said the president of Leathrock had sent them to rescue us...

(She shook her head sorrowfully.)

KASSY: Then just before dawn this morning they killed Croxton, robbed him of his jewellery and set this entire place ablaze!

(Fearing the worst, Kritz bit her lip.)

KRITZ: It wasn't a guy called Heiner was it?

(Kassy gave her an astounded glance.)

KASSY: How could you possibly know that?

KRITZ: Bastards must have followed us.

(Kassy looked lost.)

KASSY: What?

(Before Kritz could elaborate, Flaxley appeared on the scene with a determined glint in his eye. Little did he know, however, he was walking into a mine field.)

FLAXLEY: We've done all we can here, my love! We just need to find Croxton then we should get off back to the ship.

(At the very sight of Flaxley, Kassy's mouth fell open and she almost fainted. As she swayed and took a step back to steady herself, she gaped and rubbed her eyes.)

KRITZ: Flaxley, it's bad news!

FLAXLEY: What is?

KRITZ: Heiner and his men started this fire. They killed Croxton and took his jewellery... the gold chain!

(Flaxley's hair almost stood on end.)

FLAXLEY: Damn it!!!

(Immediately forcing himself to refocus, he then puffed out in frustration.)

FLAXLEY: Still, it's a perfect tactic to burn the place down. That way everyone will be too busy fighting fires to chase them! Crap!

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: How did they follow us? We underestimated them, Kritz! I broke my own golden rule!

(As he stood there looking dejected, he threw a glance in Kassy's direction and once again his hair almost stood on end. Sounding like a man in the middle of being tortured, he released a string of high-pitched, panicked words.)

FLAXLEY: Kassy??? Great gangly gods of the mountainous seas!!!

(Looking like a condemned man, he stared between Kritz and Kassy and gaped like a carp on speed before cringing and hunching his shoulders.)

FLAXLEY: Ooh... this isn't going to be pleasant!

(Kritz furrowed her brow angrily, amazed at his unwelcoming attitude towards Kassy. To compound her confusion, she also couldn't understand why Kassy was staring back at Flaxley like a love struck teenager.)

KRITZ: Um... what's going on?

(Kassy slowly turned her head to face Kritz.)

KASSY: You... you found him?

KRITZ: What?

(Kassy turned and looked lovingly to Flaxley.)

KASSY: My fiancé!

(For a big man, Flaxley proved himself to be one hell of a fast runner at this point. As he raced from the compound and out into the woods like a rocket powered gazelle, Kassy was left staring into the eyes of a charged and dangerous Kritzeveltia.)

KASSY: Why did he... he's fast, isn't he?

(Looking like she was about to explode, Kritz barked back at her furiously.)

KRITZ: You were engaged to Flaxley?

KASSY: Huh? Calm down! What's it to you?

(As Phisele backed away nervously, Kritz stood akimbo and sneered.)

KRITZ: What's it to me? What's it to me?

KASSY: Um? Why are you acting like this?

KRITZ: Why? 'Cause that guy you think is your fiancé is my husband!!!

(Kassy's mouth fell open.)

KASSY: What?

KRITZ: You heard me!

KASSY: Oh!

(She scratched her head and looked lost.)

KASSY: But... we were engaged!

KRITZ: Yeah, funny how he neglected to mention that!

KASSY: Wow!

(As they glared at each other coldly, Phisele crept away.)

KASSY: Well... this is uncomfortable!

KRITZ: It will be in a minute!

(Hearing Kassy refer to Flaxley as her fiancé had sent alarm bells ringing in Kritz's head. Suddenly, she saw her as a threat. Fearing Kassy may be just a more mature version of herself and that Flaxley would be attracted to her, Kritz's started to growl. Unable to fathom why she was receiving such hostile looks, Kassy frowned.)

KASSY: What? What you looking at me like that for?

KRITZ: Why, what are you gonna do about it?

(Sensing Kritz was itching for a fight, Kassy scoffed.)

KASSY: Come off it, Kritz. You can't fight!

(It was never wise to suggest Kritz couldn't do something, especially when it involved the violence she loved so much. And even less wise to do so when you've just revealed you used to be engaged to her husband. Kassy had barely finished her sentence before Kritz punched her full in the face and launched into her with a full on assault. Having trained and worked with the Leathrock navy for so long, however, Kassy wasn't the pushover Kritz thought she'd be. Naturally, as they ripped and tore at each other's clothes in the furious brawl that followed, a crowd of excited spectators gathered around them. As they placed bets on who'd end up topless first, however, Flaxley returned and barged through the middle of them, breaking them up before they could even really get started. As he yanked them apart and restrained them, he stared from side to side at their snarling faces.)

FLAXLEY: Enough! Now this is going to have to wait! You can kill each other some other time!

(He looked to the faces of the disappointed gathering as he continued to hold the Balleventios sisters apart.)

FLAXLEY: If we're quick we can catch Heiner and get that chain back. Then we're going to take you back to Leathrock on the Colloskayak! Now, I know you Maishu folk can track, so we need you track down the men who escaped this place a short while ago. Lead us there and we'll do the rest, then you'll be free of these people forever!

(A huge cheer went up from the Maishu as Flaxley once again, looked between the warring siblings.)

FLAXLEY: Save it! We have to go *now*!

(Kritz nodded and relented her attempts to batter her sister.)

KRITZ: Fine! But then you've got some serious explaining to do, mister!!!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Yes, I'm looking forward to that!

(He then looked to the gathered crowd.)

FLAXLEY: First things first, grab everything you need to take. Somebody help the injured, we need to get after Heiner, and I mean now! Go!!!

(Upon his word, the crowd dispersed about the area, gathering all the valuables and supplies they could muster. Within minutes, the injured were lifted onto stretchers or onto the tougher men's backs and the party of Maishu warriors, surviving Leathrock soldiers and Flaxley and his crew raced out of the compound. No argument, no fuss.

Remaining true to their warrior codes and naval pledges, they followed without hesitation. The settlement would now be abandoned forever.)

(As the exodus continued and the last few stragglers exited the compound, Flaxley raced forth just behind the Maishu tracker, with a determined glint in his eye. He desperately wanted to catch Heiner as soon as possible and put an end to his reign of tyranny before it could even begin. As always, his dedication to the mission was absolute. Still lying face down in the compound where Derek had left him, the same could not be said for Lefiat. Luckily for him, however, he came to just in time to see the last man trying to sneak quietly out of the compound without waking him.)

LEFIAT: Bonson?

BONSON: Damn it!!!

(As Lefiat scrambled to his feet, Bonson clenched his fist and cursed to the heavens.)

BONSON: So close. Why do you tease me so???

(He then paused and stared into space.)

BONSON: I bet that bloody Daman Siria woke him up.

(As he raced up to Bonson, Lefiat looked utterly confused.)

LEFIAT: Where is everyone?

BONSON: Everyone's evacuated!

(Lefiat looked horrified.)

LEFIAT: What???

BONSON: You heard me. I stopped for a pee first though, so I've got some catching up to do.

(He looked extremely peeved at himself.)

BONSON: If only I'd been quicker about it.

(As Bonson cursed then proceeded to race out of the compound, Lefiat looked horrified and raced after him.

LEFIAT: Wait!!! And you weren't even gonna tell me???

(Ignoring him, Bonson charged away for all he was worth in pursuit of the rest of his party. Feeling very much hard done by, Lefiat followed suit, pouting all the way.)

LEFIAT: It's always the bloody same whenever we go anywhere. Nobody cares about me. Not even Mandika. Bastards.

(After a brief sprint, Bonson and Lefiat caught up with the others then slowed to a jog.)

LEFIAT: Bonson! You were just gonna leave me there!!!

BONSON: So?

LEFIAT: That's mean!

BONSON: Why is it? It's not like anyone would miss you.

LEFIAT: Yeah... thanks! I hate you, Bonson!

(Mandika's timing at this point proved immaculate. Having dropped back to check if Bonson had indeed fetched Lefiat like she asked him to, she saw them running together and smiled to herself before charging ahead to run with Flaxley. The unsettling atmosphere being created by those racing forth around her was making her feel somewhat uncomfortable, so naturally she went where she felt safest.

The unsettling atmosphere Mandika was picking up on was caused by the bewildering circumstances many of the party had found themselves in. For the Leathrock soldiers it was all a little difficult to take in. They'd been told they were going home with Heiner and his men only for those men to kill an officer and burn down their

settlement. Now they were going home on a different ship but not until they'd pursued the ones who'd deceived and attacked them previously. Most bizarre of all, only twenty four hours previously, they'd thought themselves shipwrecked forever. The Maishu warriors on the other hand, had set out to destroy the Leathrock base with Flaxley and his crew and were now somewhat perplexed to find themselves pursuing different enemies, ready to fight alongside their long-time adversary. It all made for a very strange emotional experience and their unease was very much apparent.

As he raced alongside Mandika, following the lead tracker closely, Flaxley sighed to himself.)

FLAXLEY: Damn them.

MANDIKA: Yeah!

(Flaxley swiftly swung his head in Mandika's direction.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika? How long have *you* been there?

MANDIKA: Not long.

FLAXLEY: Sorry, I didn't see you.

MANDIKA: It's okay.

FLAXLEY: They killed Croxton, Mandika!

(She gave him a reassuring smile.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, I heard!

FLAXLEY: If only we'd been here earlier we could have stopped them!

MANDIKA: Maybe!

FLAXLEY: I hadn't seen that guy in... well... a damned long time. And I finally get here moments after he's been killed!

(Mandika sighed.)

MANDIKA: I'm sorry to hear about your friend, Flaxley!

(Flaxley nodded, accepting her sincerity.)

FLAXLEY: Thank you, ma'am!

MANDIKA: But at least Kritz found Kassy!

(Flaxley shuddered as he bounded forth.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah... let's not talk about that!

MANDIKA: Okay. Anyway, Flaxley... I think I might have to drop back, my legs are getting tired. Keeping up with *you* is too much for me.

(Flaxley smiled and gave her a friendly wink.)

FLAXLEY: Hey, why not... for old time sake!

(With that, he scooped her up in his arms and charged on with her clinging to his neck.)

MANDIKA: Whoa!!! Don't drop me!

(Flaxley frowned.)

FLAXLEY: Is that what you're used to from your knight? Being dropped?

(She sighed.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, or having stuff dropped on me. Poor Lefiat tries his best but he's really crap, isn't he?

FLAXLEY: To put it mildly, yes.

(As he charged onward with Mandika draped around his neck, all Flaxley could think of was Croxton's murder. Knowing that Heiner had the sceptre of the gods and all three chains, he was determined to use his grief as motivation when it came to striking him down. Like any great warrior, he drew strength from his emotions and focussed on channelling them to his advantage. Should Heiner get away, he could create any key for any purpose and Flaxley was determined that he wasn't going to let that

happen. Confident in his ability, Mandika just clung to him and said nothing.

As the rest of the party charged forth behind them, Kassy and Kritz sneered at one another. They understood the importance of stopping Heiner and didn't even think twice about slowing everybody down by fighting each other there and then. They both knew that as soon as Heiner was stopped, however, they were going to go at it. Luckily for Phisele, with Kritz being pre-occupied, she'd found someone to look after her. That unfortunate babysitter was Derek. Determined not to be left behind, she held his hand tight as she raced along, constantly reminding him he was shorter than her and that green was a stupid colour. Bringing up the rear, Lefiat and Bonson both looked like they were about to have heart attacks. Each determined not to be outdone by the other one, however, they both soldiered on without complaint. Their distaste for each other, the driving force behind their run.)

(Worryingly for the chasing pack, Heiner and his men had had quite a large head start. Even with the tracker following their route to perfection, they were well aware that he might be long gone by now. With so much at stake, however, giving up the pursuit was never going to be an option.

After a further five minutes of solid running, their efforts finally bore fruit. Through the branches at the end of a thin dirt track, the sea came into view. A little way out on the light blue water, they could see a ship with four rowing boats heading towards it. Looking determined, Flaxley picked up the pace and threw a glance over his shoulder.)

FLAXLEY: It's them! Come on. We must stop them reaching the ship!!!

(Much to his horror, rather than pick up the pace, the Maishu warriors all stopped and froze in terror. Utterly bewildered, Flaxley looked to the tracker and furrowed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: What's wrong with them???

(Looking tortured, the tracker also came to a standstill and pointed towards the beach with a trembling arm.)

TRACKER: Beach angry!

(Turning to run backwards, Flaxley stared at him emptily.)

FLAXLEY: What?

TRACKER: Beach angry, sand gods... they kill.

FLAXLEY: Don't be bloody silly!

(Rolling his eyes with disdain, Flaxley then about turned and charged onwards.

Having spent the last few moments running backwards, thus slowing down immensely, his party and the Leathrock soldiers had now caught up with him and raced for the beach at his side. Not about to join them any time soon, the tracker, Mocho and one other Maishu warrior crouched and prayed to the skies while the rest of them screamed and fled back into the forest.)

BONSON: Brave bunch aren't they?

FLAXLEY: Never mind that, we've got work to do!!!

(Bonson rolled his eyes.)

BONSON: Don't you just love that royal "we"?

(With extreme urgency, he glared at Lefiat.)

BONSON: And I don't mean Mandika's piss!

(As Lefiat went on to enquire what exactly he *did* mean, Flaxley led the determined

group onto the beach and raced up to the shoreline. With the rowing boats a good distance out to sea, he clicked his fingers in frustration.)

FLAXLEY: Damn it... I wanted so much to cull them by hand but I guess magic will have to do!

(He twisted to face behind him.)

FLAXLEY: Derek?

(As Derek slowly emerged to the front, Flaxley gave him a knowing smile.)

FLAXLEY: Fry us up some oarsmen, old chap!

(Derek nodded.)

DEREK: Okay, just a give me a moment to focus, they're quite some way out!

FLAXLEY: In your own time!

(The Leathrock soldiers looked on curiously as Derek raised his arm towards the outgoing rowing boats. With absolute focus written all over his determined brow, he adjusted his aim by stared down his arm, using his tiny green thumb as a sight. Satisfied he'd locked onto his target, he raised an eyebrow and muttered to himself quietly.)

DEREK: Say goodnight, arseholes!

(With that, he released a blinding bolt of lightning from his fingertips. With a ferocious crack that echoed across the cliffs it zoomed at incredible speed just above the surface of the sea. So bright was the lightning, the watching allies could only squint as they watched it blow one of the tiny rowing boats apart almost as soon as it was fired.)

SOLDIER: Whoa!!!

(From his vantage point in the woods, Mocho gaped uncontrollably. He'd never seen anything like it in all his life and quite frankly didn't want to see it ever again. As far as he was concerned, the sooner these pale faces left, the better.

As he lowered his hand, Derek nodded to himself.)

DEREK: One down...

(Before he could proclaim "three to go", however, a deafening roar filled the air. From some distance away, Mocho covered his head, knowing exactly what was coming. Just as he'd feared, the entire beach started to vibrate, throwing the allies onto the sand.)

FLAXLEY: What the fuck???

(Looking terrified, Lefiat tried to scramble to his feet.)

LEFIAT: Beach angry!!!

(Not about to let the panicking lad strike fear into everybody, Flaxley leapt up.)

FLAXLEY: The beach isn't angry it was just a tremor everyone!

(Phisele then raised an interesting point as she crawled towards Kritz.)

PHISELE: Tremors don't roar!!!

(As his eyes bulged, Lefiat pointed into the sand to their left.)

LEFIAT: They don't do that either!!!

(They all spun around and looked on in horror as sand started to rise up to form a twenty foot mound.)

FLAXLEY: What the hell is that?

DEREK: I don't know, but whatever it is, I bet it isn't friendly!

(Immediately, they all drew their weapons in readiness to battle whatever should emerge from the sand.)

FLAXLEY: Lefiat!

LEFIAT: I'm on it!!!

(As Lefiat jumped to Mandika's side, she frowned bitterly.)

MANDIKA: It?

LEFIAT: Oh, don't start. You know what I meant!

(Naturally Kritz stepped in front of Phisele.)

KRITZ: Stay behind me, babe!

(As she peered from behind her, Phisele nodded.)

PHISELE: Okay!

FLAXLEY: Battle stations, everyone, whatever comes out of that sand...

(Much to his dismay, the swelling mound then fired off a jet of sand in his direction, burying him from head to toe. Immediately, Derek raced to his aid, thrashing the sand from around him while the others watched the pile continue to swell in size. As he finally wriggled free, Flaxley looked peeved.)

FLAXLEY: That was bloody...

(Much to his annoyance, the rapidly growing pile of sand then did exactly the same thing again.)

KRITZ: Leave it to me, my love!!!

(Taking precautions to keep herself between Phisele and the sandy mound, Kritz rushed over to her stricken husband and pointed her hand at the sand pile that covered his body.)

KRITZ: This ought to be quicker!

(With that, she tried to wash the sand off with her H2O magic. Unfortunately, her actions only served to make the sand thick and moist.)

KRITZ: What???

(Immediately, Derek leapt into action to make sure Flaxley's head was free and he could breathe before the wet sand solidified. As he spat out a mouthful of golden granules, Flaxley frowned.)

FLAXLEY: What the bloody hell???

(Just then, the huge lump started to fire random jets of sand all about the beach. It was all the allies could do to run around erratically and avoid being buried. Stuck in a cement like mound, up to his neck, Flaxley could only bark out warnings and pray he didn't get buried again.)

FLAXLEY: Careful, Lefiat!

LEFIAT: I am being careful!!!

(With that, he fell flat on his face.)

LEFIAT: Hey!!!

(He leapt to his feet and glared at Mandika.)

LEFIAT: You tripped me!

(Mandika could only offer him an apologetic grin. Like everyone else, sometimes she just couldn't resist doing these things. Normally, Bonson would have applauded her but with chaos erupting all around him, he'd been too busy protecting himself to notice. Sand was flying everywhere and twice he'd come within inches of being buried. Started to get extremely flustered, he looked to Flaxley and bellowed.)

BONSON: Flaxley, don't just stand there!!! Do something!

(Encased in his solid, hardened-sand tomb, Flaxley raised an eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: Like what? Spit at it?

(As everyone continued to race around, desperate not to get buried, Bonson raced closer to Flaxley.)

BONSON: Flaxley, you're the knight, we need you to think of something!

FLAXLEY: Bonson, stop panicking and find a way to break this mound will you?

BONSON: How?

FLAXLEY: I don't...

(Bonson looked enlightened.)

BONSON: I know!

(With that, he leapt back and fired his inferno magic into the mound.)

BONSON: Soon have you out of there, Flaxley!

(Such was the intense heat of his fireball however, it merely served to harden the sand into china as if he'd just fired it in a kiln.)

BONSON: Whoops!

(Flaxley frowned furiously.)

FLAXLEY: Excellent, now all we need is for little Phisele to paint me!

BONSON: Sorry, old chap!

(Feeling quite the fool, he raced away.)

FLAXLEY: Um, somebody? Can somebody smash this thing?

(Unfortunately for him, everyone was a little bit too preoccupied with the thirty foot tall, dried sand beast that had formed from the huge enemy mound. Looking like a giant clay gorilla, it beat its chest before attempting to stamp on the allies as if they were ants. Taking charge of her troops, Kassy slipped to the back to bark out orders rather than join in the fighting, a common tactic of the Leathrock military. Flaxley, on the other hand, had no choice but to remain in the thick of things.)

FLAXLEY: This isn't good!

(He wasn't wrong. Intent of squashing the humans, the beast kicked out, lashing up an enormous pile of sand which knocked two of the Leathrock soldiers down and buried them. The merciless killer then squished them into the ground with its colossal foot. As the blood of the flattened bodies, oozed through the top of the sand, Kritz frowned ferociously.)

KRITZ: Magic? Do we try magic? You saw what happened to Flaxley when we fired magic at the sand! What do we do?

(Derek nodded determinedly.)

DEREK: It has to be worth a try! Let's hit it with all we've got!!!

LEFIAT: I'm in!

MANDIKA: And me!

BONSON: Me too!

(With that, the five of them proceeded to pummel the beast with fire, ice, water and electricity. Standing firm, they thrust the magic concoction into it with prolonged determination, confident one of the magic elements would provide the answer. Alas they were wrong. The giant beast merely absorbed it as if it was nothing. As a result they couldn't help but feel a little bit daunted.)

DEREK: Fuck! Bonson, any ideas?

BONSON: Yes! We should run for it.

DEREK: No, I mean you're the wise one, what can we do? How do you defeat a sand monster?

(Bonson wracked his brains and nodded.)

BONSON: Well, speaking scientifically such a thing as this beast isn't even possible, sand has no life force!

DEREK: Science is stupid then. If it isn't possible then how come it exists?

BONSON: I don't bloody know, do I?

DEREK: Then why bring it up???

BONSON: Because you asked me!!!

DEREK: I asked you how to kill it!!!

(As they stood arguing, the giant sandy primate kicked one of the Leathrock soldiers

fifty feet down the beach and roared its vile roar, clearly enjoying itself.)

MANDIKA: Maybe legging it is the right thing to do!

BONSON: I wouldn't have suggested it otherwise!

MANDIKA: That's settled then!

(As Derek, Mandika, Bonson and Lefiat started to flee, Kritz stood her ground looking mortified.)

KRITZ: But what about Flaxley? We can't just leave him here!!!

(Having overheard them from where he was encased in his porcelain tomb, Flaxley frowned.)

FLAXLEY: Oh don't worry about me, you just run along! I always wanted to get in touch with my inner dinner service anyway!

KRITZ: But...

(Her eyes bulged.)

KRITZ: Flaxley!!!

(With a snarl on its chiselled brow, the beast swooped at Flaxley.)

KRITZ: No!!!

FLAXLEY: Fuck!!!

(Kritz could only look on in horror as the beast grabbed a hold of Flaxley and yanked him from the sand by his head. As he rose from the ground, the sand inside the china coating that hadn't solidified fell to the beach, leaving Flaxley's legs dangling in his china skirt.)

FLAXLEY: Tell the kids I...

(Just then, his metal shin guard hit the side of the china around his legs and his words were drowned out by a high-pitched ringing noise. As everyone covered their ears from the deafening bong, the sand beast grinned from ear to ear.)

FLAXLEY: Oh shit!

(Just as Flaxley had feared, the beast then proceeded to dance around the beach, giggling and ringing him like a hand bell. He was quickly becoming sick, dizzy and deaf. Watching on in dismay, his allies were utterly powerless to help him.)

BONSON: I can safely say, I've never seen *anything* like that before!

DEREK: No, me either!

(Looking insane with worry, Kritz then raced up to them, dragging Phisele behind her.)

KRITZ: What are we going to do?

(Lefiat shrugged.)

LEFIAT: I don't know, I'm just glad it isn't attacking *us* anymore!

(He beamed.)

LEFIAT: That's always a good thing!

(Mandika glared at him furiously.)

MANDIKA: We have to save Flaxley.

LEFIAT: Oh, right... yeah, good point.

MANDIKA: You're supposed to be a knight, Lefiat, I shouldn't have to point these things out to you!!!

LEFIAT: But...

KRITZ: Look, never mind arguing, we have to do something!

(Much to her amazement, Phisele then charged away from her and raced towards the dancing monster.)

KRITZ: Phisele!!!

(Looking terrified, she raced after her. Before she could catch her and take her away from danger, however, Phisele snarled and threw a large rock at the beast.)

PHISELE: Leave him alone, you big bully!

(As the beast danced around chuckling like a retarded redneck, the rock flew straight towards Flaxley instead.)

PHISELE: Oops!

(Having expected the rock to hit him and get her in a whole heap of trouble, much to her delight, the rock whacked into Flaxley's china skirting, smashing it to pieces.

Having been given quite a start by the sudden smashing, the creature screeched and threw Flaxley into the sea.)

PHISELE: Yay!!!

(Luckily, Kritz was an especially fast runner. Having lost its toy, the beast was furious. She just managed to scoop Phisele up and charge away with her in time.

Looking terrified as she charged from the beach and back into the woods with Phisele screaming on her shoulder, Kritz was most bewildered to find the entire Leathrock contingent, Bonson, Derek, Mandika and Lefiat standing on the dirt path with the three remaining Maishu warriors. Racing up to them, she remonstrated desperately.)

KRITZ: Don't just stand there, run!!!

BONSON: No need, Kritz.

(Kritz bounced on the balls of her feet and furrowed her brow.)

KRITZ: No need???

BONSON: Nope.

(He gestured to Mocho.)

BONSON: Chappy-me-lad here says the beast never leaves the beach. We're perfectly safe here.

MOCHO: The beach isn't angry when nobody's standing on it.

(Looking slightly relieved, Kritz set Phisele down then turned and stared back at the beach in horror.)

KRITZ: Flaxley's in trouble! Take care of Phisele; I'm going back out there.

BONSON: Don't be a fool. You can't defeat that thing! All you can do is wait here and hope Flaxley gets back okay.

(Knowing he was right, Kritz bit her nails and trembled.)

KRITZ: He'd *better* be okay!

BONSON: Why, what are you going to do? Call the beast names and get yourself killed? That'll show it.

(Mandika snarled at him.)

MANDIKA: There's a time and place for sarcasm, Bonson.

(Bonson looked away indignantly as Mandika stepped up the anxious Kritz.)

BONSON: Indeed. All the time and everywhere.

(Ignoring Bonson's rudeness, Mandika placed an arm around Kritz.)

MANDIKA: He'll be okay, you'll see.

KRITZ: Will he?

MANDIKA: Well... yeah. And if he isn't...

(Stuck for what to say, she bit her lip.)

MANDIKA: You'll still have beautiful hair.

(As everyone cringed, Kritz amazingly looked to Mandika and smiled.)

KRITZ: Oh, that's so sweet, thank you.

(Derek rolled his eyes.)

DEREK: Women!

KRITZ: Excuse me?

DEREK: Look, relax. Flaxley will be fine. If anyone can survive being hurled fifty

feet out to sea by his head, he can. Trust me.

MANDIKA: Yeah...

(She bounced excitedly then pointed towards the sea.)

MANDIKA: See? There he is!

(Sure enough, the inordinately resilient Flaxley had indeed survived and had just swum his way back to shore. Looking peeved to say the least, he stepped through the shallow water with an unconscious man over one shoulder and drew his sword.)

FLAXLEY: Right! I'm sick of this. It's you and me, beast!

(Much to his horror, the beast sighed and started to sink into the sand. With no enemies on the beach, it had clearly declared the battle to be over.)

FLAXLEY: What? No!!!

(Looking furious, he raced out of the sea just as the beast's head sunk beneath the sand. Burning red with rage as he continued to bear the weight of the stranger on his shoulder, Flaxley paced around, stamping on the ground.)

FLAXLEY: Hey!!! I'm back. Come on!!!

(He threw his hands in the air.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, come on!!!

(With a sigh, he then hung his head.)

FLAXLEY: Fine!

(Looking dejected, he then turned and glanced out to sea.)

FLAXLEY: Coward!

(His face dropped and a snarl crossed his brow.)

FLAXLEY: Shit!!!

(The rowing boats had gone and Heiner's ship was becoming a small brown spec in the distance.)

FLAXLEY: No you fucking don't, pal!

(With that, he raced back across the beach towards his comrades, not even slowed for a moment by the weight of the unconscious man. As soon as he reached them, Kritz threw her arms around him.)

KRITZ: Thank fuck!

FLAXLEY: We can fuck later, my love. Heiner's getting away!

(He gestured to the man on his shoulder and turned to face Kassy.)

FLAXLEY: I found this chap in the sea. He isn't dead. Is he one of yours?

(Kassy looked amazed.)

KASSY: No! That's one of those bandits. He's the second in command I think, his name's Mildew.

SOLDIER: It's Morten, ma'am.

KASSY: Right... yeah.

(Kritz scowled at her. She even seemed to share her husband's terrible habit of forgetting names.)

FLAXLEY: So, he's one of them is he? He must have been in the boat that Derek blew out of the water!

(Derek rubbed his chest arrogantly.)

DEREK: Well, you know!

FLAXLEY: Anyway, if that's the case, he's coming back with us where he can face justice!

(He then turned to face Mocho.)

FLAXLEY: Mocho? Can you take us back to where you captured us? We need to find our way back to our ship!

(Mocho nodded.)

MOCHO: We tracked you from your ship the minute you landed. I can take you straight there.

FLAXLEY: Then let's do that!

MOCHO: We're going via the woods though!

FLAXLEY: Fine!

(He looked about his allies and the Leathrock soldiers before him.)

FLAXLEY: Get your stuff together, we've got to catch up with that ship or the world as we know it will be...

(He mused to find the right word.)

BONSON: Shit, sir?

FLAXLEY: No, thank you, Bonson! The word I'm looking for is devastated!

(As Bonson rolled his eyes with disdain for Flaxley's quip, Flaxley turned to Mocho.)

FLAXLEY: Mocho, let's go!

(With extreme urgency, Mocho headed away through the trees, keeping the beach in view but never daring to venture onto it. Along the way he explained that those who waited motionless upon the beach were always being attacked by the foul sand beast in that particular part of the land. As a result, when Maishu fisherman took to the sea, they'd run across the sand to the safety of the ocean as soon as possible. Nobody knew what the creature was or why it attacked those who dwelt a tad too long on the sand, they just knew that to disrespect the beast was fatal.

As they headed swiftly through the trees, Flaxley only had one thought on his mind. There was no time to waste. They had to get back to the Colloskayak and chase Heiner down immediately. Failure to capture him would be a disaster of epic proportions. He already felt a sense of guilt about having lost his chain and the failure to get to Croxton in time. His friend had been slain and the world was now in danger, due in part to his own failures. His thoughts would have seemed harsh to many, but one of the most common traits of the best knights was being overly self-critical. It was this readiness to accept blame that added to their determination to make amends. Past failings, the perfect fuel for the fire inside the belly of a knight.

In stark contrast to Flaxley's dedicated stride and urgent expression, Bonson couldn't have been more relaxed. He was convinced that Daman Siria was involved and was happy to go along with whatever happened, safe in the knowledge that he'd protect them and everything would work out perfectly as always. Daman's constant claims that they were no longer under his control had well and truly fallen on deaf ears with Bonson. As a result, he trotted along at the back of the pack, watching Kritz and Kassy's pert behinds as they charged through the woodland.

Quite unaware that they were providing Bonson with his twisted entertainment for the run, Kritz and Kassy retained angry glares in each other's directions, only looking away now and again to see where they were going. They both understood the urgent need to return to the ship as soon as possible and neither could wait to get there and be free to bash the living daylights out of the other one. Derek also couldn't wait to get there and be rid of Phisele, once again his running partner.

In Lefiat's case, he wasn't quite sure what was going on. All the talk of sceptres and chains had lost him some time ago. All he knew was that there was danger and as a knight, albeit it a hopeless one, it was his will and duty to do his best for the cause. As ever, his heart was in the right place even if his brain wasn't. His beloved

Mandika, true to form, didn't share Lefiat's enthusiasm for doing the right thing. She just wanted to go home and forget this honeymoon ever happened.

For the Leathrock soldiers, their bewilderment at the day's events had just doubled. They knew they were going to be leaving the island on a ship, only now they'd be in pursuit of another vessel. The thought that the ship would take them home eventually was a major inspiration to them naturally, but having lost yet more comrades and friends to the beach monster, their emotions were somewhat conflicted. Not knowing whether to celebrate or grieve, they focussed solely on getting back to the ship.

After a full thirty minute run down the coastal edge of the woodland, they eventually spotted the Colloskayak, anchored majestically out to sea. The sight of the ship, a joy for the Leathrock refugees to behold. Their hell here on Sanetza was at an end. This would not be a place they'd wish to return to any time soon. The glory of their leaving and never coming back was a sentiment most certainly shared by the natives.)

(With extreme urgency, as soon as he reached the tiny rowing boat they'd arrived on, Flaxley made short work of thrusting it back into the sea and sending the first group back to the Colloskayak. The chosen oarsman, one of the larger Leathrock soldiers, was given strict instructions to return with two more boats on tow for the rest of them. Naturally, Mandika insisted on being in that first boat. Getting off this primitive land and going home was the only thing on her mind.

During the brief five minutes in which the others had to wait for their boat back to the Colloskayak, tensions deepened greatly. With every passing second, Flaxley could picture Heiner and his crew getting further and further away, laughing joyously at their victory. It irritated him immensely and his scowl couldn't have been more pronounced. His scowl, however, was far from the angriest. Just over his shoulder, his beloved wife and her long estranged sister were almost foaming at the mouth. They were chomping at the bit to batter the living daylights out of one another and couldn't wait to get on the Colloskayak where they'd be free to slap each other senseless for as long as it took to knock the other one out. As far as they were concerned, the five minutes or so they'd be waiting for the rowing boats to return wasn't long enough for a fight and they were happy to wait.

When the other boats finally arrived on shore after a five minute wait that felt more like an hour to Flaxley, he immediately set about distributing the weight evenly by choosing who went on which craft. As soon as he was finished, two of the boats then rowed away. Much to Flaxley's annoyance, however, the last one had to wait for Bonson to finish saying a farewell that he could have said at any time during the last five minutes while they were waiting.

As Flaxley tapped his knee and scowled, Bonson stood at the top of the beach giving Mocho a prolonged handshake.)

BONSON: Mocho, best of luck and please, say farewell to the elder for me!

MOCHO: It will be done. And thank you for ridding us of those infidels, my friend! (Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: It's my pleasure. Just erect a statue or name a building after me, that'll be sufficient reward.

(He sighed.)

BONSON: That was it really, tell the elder to keep making the wonderful ale and if he's ever in Guevina, he should look me up!

MOCHO: Okay, I'll tell him in a few days. He can *not* be interrupted during his sacrifice!

BONSON: Oh okay, well tell him I hope it went okay!

(Mochó sighed.)

MOCHO: I hope he'll be okay too. To procreate with so many women is a terrific strain on the heart!

(Bonson's mouth fell open.)

BONSON: What?

MOCHO: To continue the wisest bloodline, every year he must procreate with every eighteen year old girl in the village. This year there are forty three. I worry for him! (Looking like he was about to cry, Bonson could only gape.)

MOCHO: It is a shame you declined when he asked for help. I fear for his health!

(As tears ran down the face of the broken Bonson, Mochó offered him a smile.)

MOCHO: I apologise. I didn't mean to make you feel guilty. It is the elders job and though he practically begged you to help him procreate with all those young woman, we respect your decision! Farewell my friend.

(As Mochó turned away and ran into the woods, eager to get back to his village and spread the fantastic news about the departing infidels, Bonson fell into the sand and cried like he hadn't cried since he was an infant. In the end, Flaxley had to carry his inconsolable friend to the boat. As they rowed to the ship he ended up having to restrain Bonson from thumping the side in frustration and rocking the boat. Then, as they reached the Colloskayak, Flaxley had to physically knock Bonson out to end his attempts at jumping in the deep water and drowning himself.)

Ocean - Colloskayak

(As soon as everyone was safely aboard the Colloskayak, Flaxley immediately gave the captain orders to head back towards Leathrock at full speed on the lookout for another ship. Without question, the captain saluted and did exactly as he ordered. Being an Admiral in the navy to which the ship was a part of, Kassy felt a little bit uncertain about the crew being under Flaxley's command but once she was informed that the order came directly from the president however, she accepted it without question.

And so, the Colloskayak started to cut through the waves once more. Flaxley felt confident that if she retained her full speed they should catch up with Heiner and his men in no time. He felt a little concerned by the head start they'd had but the crew had reassured him that with the speed of the Colloskayak being what it was, no ship would get too far away. No matter what course Heiner's ship had taken, they were in little doubt they'd catch it. The crew's word on that was good enough for Flaxley.

With nothing to do but wait until Heiner's ship came into view, the soldiers and allies allowed themselves the chance to rest up. Most of the Leathrock soldiers availed themselves of a place on deck to watch Sanetza, their adopted home for the past two years, slowly shrink on the horizon. For them it was joy to see. They were back on the ocean again and bar one forthcoming battle, they were finally going home.

Making the most of the rest time, Derek headed for the galley to avail himself of some rum while he tried to talk the waking Bonson out of jumping ship. Lefiat and Mandika took the rare chance to be alone and headed for their quarters. Mandika was determined to at least get *something* from this disastrous honeymoon. While she enjoyed the fruits of her marriage, Flaxley was also reaping his. On advice from the ship's first mate, Kritz and Kassy had agreed to discuss their grievances like adults rather than settling them like cave dwellers, thus saving the crew the trouble of cleaning blood off the deck. In that moment, if looks could have killed, Flaxley would have taken the first mate's life then savaged him with his blade just to make sure. As far as Flaxley was concerned this was not good advice. Kassy knew things that he'd always thought Kritz would never find out and the two of them talking was like all his nightmares being realised at once.

With Kritz and Kassy standing, snarling at each other in the main dining room of the ship, it was hard to figure out who was most uncomfortable, Flaxley or Phisele. As soon as the snarling siblings started to air their opinions, however, it quickly became no contest.)

KRITZ: So, you want my man, do ya?

KASSY: No! Been there, seen that and done it. Me and Flaxley were shagging while you were still in nappies!

(Flaxley thrust his head in his hands.)

FLAXLEY: Hardly!

(At this point he received two icy glares to remind him of his place in all this. They were talking *about* him, not *to* him.)

KASSY: Anyway, what makes you think I'm after him?

KRITZ: I saw the lusting look you gave him!!!

(Kassy shrugged.)

KASSY: So? I like looking at hot guys! And Flaxley's a hotty!

(Kritz snarled and Kassy flexed her eyebrows at her knowingly.)

KASSY: And he's hung like a...

KRITZ: I know he is!!!

(Trying to calm herself, Kritz sighed and shook her head.)

KRITZ: Just back off, okay?

(Kassy shrugged.)

KASSY: Whatever! I don't want him now anyway!

(Flaxley scoffed, finding her rejection of him utterly ridiculous.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah, right!

(Immediately, he clammed up and looked away, fearing the worst. Phisele just shook her head at him in utter contempt.)

PHISELE: You're dumb, aren't you?

(Flaxley offered her a solemn nod.)

FLAXLEY: Yup!

KRITZ: You're a liar, Kassy. It's obvious you want him! Or are you gonna tell me you could do better?

(Kassy shrugged and gave her a discourteous smirk.)

KASSY: Do better, do worse... do Flaxley! Already been there, love!

(Kritz clenched her fists and snarled.)

KASSY: Frequently!

(Infuriated by Kassy's behaviour, Flaxley then jumped into the conversation, just as Kritz was about to get medieval on her smarmy sibling.)

FLAXLEY: Kassy, why are you acting like this? You know what we had ended a damn long time ago!!!

(Kassy just hung her shoulders and took a seat. Baffled by her change of attitude, Kritz lowered her fists and placed her hands on her hips.)

KRITZ: What's the matter with you all of a sudden?

(Kassy sighed and looked up with a tear in her eyes.)

KASSY: Why are we fighting, Kritz? Fuck sake!

(As she looked away and pouted sorrowfully, Kritz's bottom lip drooped.)

KRITZ: I don't know. It's not like you're really a threat. Flaxley loves *me*, not you!

(Flaxley looked between them then nodded sternly.)

FLAXLEY: Right, that's sorted then. You two should talk, I'll be...

KRITZ: You stay right there!

KASSY: Yeah!

(Just as he feared, there were the beginnings of an air of agreement between the two of them and that could only mean awful things for the poor guy caught in the middle. With a defeated sigh, he also took a seat.)

FLAXLEY: Go ahead, crucify me!

KASSY: It's not about crucifixion. We were engaged and then you just disappeared. Now you're here... married to my little sister! I just think I deserve an explanation!

(Kritz took a seat and joined Kassy in staring at him.)

KRITZ: We've been together for years, Flaxley. We have two kids together, we're supposed to be solid. How come you didn't tell me the truth about you and Kassy? First you told me you knew *of* her, then you admitted you knew her *well*, then you confessed you knew her intimately and *now* I find out you were engaged! What's next? I'm half expecting you to say you two had a baby together!

KASSY: Oh my god, really? Is that how it's been?

KRITZ: Yeah. I've been getting the truth in instalments.

KASSY: In that case he definitely owes *you* an explanation!

(The thousand yard stare can be a chilling sight on a man. Not knowing where to begin or even having the remotest sense of wanting to, Flaxley stared straight ahead wishing he was dead. Unfortunately, he wasn't about to be getting out of it any time soon. Knowing he was damned, he slowly turned his neck to face Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: Okay...

(Knowing he'd be better off just to come clean, he sighed and cast his mind back to many years before.)

FLAXLEY: I'll start from the very beginning then. Back then I used to be known as Tree Boy. My father was grooming me to take over his timber business someday. I used to deliver wood to the neighbouring villages by day and...

(Trying not to look shifty, he gulped.)

FLAXLEY: By night I'd meet Kassy down at the beach.

(As Kritz shuffled uneasily in her seat, Phisele climbed up on her lap to aid her in glaring angrily at Flaxley.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah okay, so we made love... a lot... we were young and in love!

(He then paused to read her expression and get a sense of the depth of trouble his words were getting him into. Her furrowed brow suggested it was very deep indeed.)

FLAXLEY: We had to meet on the beach and places like that 'cause your dad didn't approve. I already told you about that, Kritz!

(Kritz just raised an eyebrow in suggestion for him to continue.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, we got sick of hiding, you see. We thought about running away together.

(He shrugged and looked to his feet.)

FLAXLEY: Running away sounds like a pretty good idea right now too!

KRITZ: Carry on!!!

FLAXLEY: What? Oh... yeah, we didn't run away! We decided we'd get married instead. I proposed through the bedroom window and she said yes!

(Kassy nodded with starry eyes.)

KASSY: I remember!

(As Kritz started to growl, Flaxley was quick to hasten.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, we agreed to talk about it after I got back from an overnight timber delivery. Unfortunately, we never did!

(Kritz raised a furious eyebrow.)

KRITZ: Unfortunately?

PHISELE: Unfortunately?

(Sick of the accusing eyes, Flaxley scowled back.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah, unfortunately! When I got back the following day, Tifaeris was... well, to be frank it was gone. There were just the burned out shells of homes. I jumped off my horse and cart and ran into what was left of our house and found my parent's bodies mutilated. Then I ran to see if Kassy was okay and...

(He looked to Kassy.)

FLAXLEY: I didn't even find bodies! Just a burned out house!

(He sighed to himself, finding the memories all a little too unpleasant.)

FLAXLEY: There were a few survivors, those who were lucky enough to flee before the Trepe caught them. This one guy, he was huge. Built like... well, me! Of course, I didn't have this amazing body back then. I wished I did.

(In that moment, Kritz's mood changed. Listening to tales of the devastation had put everything into perspective.)

FLAXLEY: He rallied the survivors together and got everyone to gather the bodies before disease could set in. My horse and cart came in handy for that. They were all I had left. Our home had gone, I had nothing. So I tried to help out...

(His voice started to sound more and more disheartened.)

FLAXLEY: I was far from a hero that day. I was too scared to touch any dead bodies and in the end, I didn't really help at all.

KRITZ: Well... you were grieving, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: No excuse, Kritz. So was everyone else!

(He shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: My parents were gone, my girlfriend was gone... I asked around and they said you hadn't been found, Kassy! We all assumed you accounted for one of the many maimed and unidentifiable burnt bodies. It tore me apart to imagine the pain you must have died in!

(Kritz bit her lip, she hated him referring to Kassy as his girlfriend but seeing him in pain hurt her.)

FLAXLEY: Anyway, I slept on the beach that night, quite a few of us did. We had nowhere to go. In the morning they all went back to help out again but not me. I'd seen too many burnt bodies and babies impaled, I couldn't do it. I was weak.

(He looked to Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: So I left. I just walked along the coast wishing I could be a man. I left my horse and cart behind; I figured they needed it more than this pathetic loser.

(He nodded thoughtfully.)

FLAXLEY: I walked miles, not going anywhere in particular. I must have walked for days, I was hungry and tired but I just couldn't stop walking. I left the beach and

headed through this meadow hoping I might find an apple tree, I remember that much.
(He sat up a bit and offered them half a smile.)

FLAXLEY: I was attacked by a cuddyfinkle shortly after. I thought I was a goner but this guy just appeared from nowhere and killed it. I couldn't believe it, why would someone save me? Anyway, he told me I was a fool for going into the wilderness unarmed and he and his wife took me in. I lived with them for about a year in all. By day I helped with chores and in the evenings he'd teach me how to use my sword and survive in the wild. Then one day, out of the blue, he kicked me out!

KASSY: What?

KRITZ: Why?

FLAXLEY: He told me to take what I'd learnt and make something of myself. He said it was time I became someone. He gave me a dog-eared copy of the knights code to study and sent me on my way. I studied the code and learned to survive like he told me to but it wasn't enough. I missed people. So I went to Guevina and joined the army. That's how I became who I am today. I forgot all about my old life in Tifaeris and sorry Kassy...

(He offered her a sincere smile.)

FLAXLEY: The Flaxley you knew died a long time ago. I barely remember that wimp.

(He looked to Kritz.)

FLAXLEY: And the Flaxley you see before you now loves this woman very much!

(He reached over Phisele and stroked Kritz's cheek with his outstretched hand.)

PHISELE: Do you want me to bite his hand?

(Kritz smiled.)

KRITZ: That's sweet but no need, babe!

(With that, Kritz bit his hand instead.)

FLAXLEY: Ow!!!

KRITZ: That's for not telling me before!!!

(As Flaxley sat there shaking his painful fingers, Phisele chuckled.)

PHISELE: Hehe, you got bitten!

(Ignoring Flaxley's pain, Kritz looked to Kassy.)

KRITZ: So if you weren't one of the dead bodies, where were you?

(Kassy sighed.)

KASSY: My turn is it?

KRITZ: Uh-huh!

(Flaxley nodded, too busy sucking on his hand to speak.)

KASSY: Well... as you heard, he proposed through our bedroom window. We shared a room.

KRITZ: Actually, skip this bit and tell us where you were!

KASSY: Actually, this is relevant to that!

(Flaxley looked curious.)

KASSY: He proposed and I said yes! What I didn't know was that my bratty little sister had overheard. You told dad everything, Kritz!

(Kritz grimaced.)

KRITZ: Um... whoops?

KASSY: I really hated you for that. Dad went mental. He said he was going to beat the crap out of Flaxley when he got back from his delivery and sent me away.

FLAXLEY: Sent you away?

KASSY: Yeah. Without a bye or leave he sent me to our Aunt's place in Wendigo that same night.

(Kritz nodded solemnly.)

KRITZ: Thus saving your life!

(Kassy shook her head.)

KASSY: I didn't see it that way. I cursed your name, Kritzeveltia, I really did. I hated you. I decided that night that I had no sister. I even wished you dead.

KRITZ: But I was just a kid!

KASSY: I know, but I was angry! Anyway, word arrived in Wendigo three days later that there'd been a massacre in Tifaeris. I came back as soon as I could. Our aunt forbade me to go but I had to. I burnt bridges with her and got back to Tifaeris as soon as possible...

(She bit her lip.)

KASSY: First thing I saw was your horse and cart, Flaxley! They told me you'd gone but nobody knew where.

FLAXLEY: So you knew I was alive?

(Kassy nodded.)

KASSY: Yes. That made it a hundred times worse.

(She looked to Kritz.)

KASSY: I saw our home. Devastated. It was just a black, charred mess. They told me that you, mum and dad had all been butchered and that your bodies had been cremated already. You can't imagine what it felt like, I wished you dead and you were.

(She paused.)

KASSY: Where were you anyway?

(Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: The Trepe took me to their village and made me one of them!

(Kassy shook her head coldly.)

KASSY: You're a Trepe?

KRITZ: No, I'm a Flaxley!

(She smiled at her husband who in return, showed her his throbbing, swollen fingers and pouted.)

KRITZ: Enough about me, I'm not a Trepe, I was but I'm not now! Where have you been all this time?

(Kassy shrugged.)

KASSY: Getting by as best I could! I tried to stay in Tifaeris but there was nothing left. People were going hungry, I mean surviving was hard!

(She sighed.)

KASSY: Of course, the club owners in Azagotse knew this. They never miss an opportunity, those guys. They came in droves to try to recruit the young women to work in their sordid clubs. They offered food, shelter, money... a life rather than an existence. In the end, things got so desperate I went.

(She looked to Flaxley.)

KASSY: All the time I was degrading myself I kept this fantasy that you'd one day come and rescue me from it all. I had this sorry idea in my head that if only you knew where to find me you'd come and get me.

(Fearing Kritz's reaction, Flaxley offered her a cheesy grin. Much to his astonishment, Kritz looked sad for Kassy.)

FLAXLEY: Phew!

KASSY: In those clubs we had to do awful things. I mean, I was surviving but I'd really hit rock bottom; I was a glorified prostitute.

(She sighed.)

KASSY: Not really glorified though is it? I was a club whore, no more no less. Men used to pay top money to watch me have lesbian sex with their wife.

(She looked sickened.)

KASSY: And you know what? I did it. I hated myself and I felt dirty but I did it!

(Rather than looking mortified, Kritz looked completely and utterly stumped.)

KRITZ: What? Eh? People used to pay you to make whoop with their wife while they watch?

(Kassy sighed and nodded.)

KRITZ: I don't get it. Men hate seeing their wives be unfaithful with other women!

(Realising where this conversation was going, Flaxley's eyes bulged.)

FLAXLEY: Rampant fires of hell come ravage me now!!!

KASSY: Kritz, men love nothing more than watching two women go for it!

(Kritz gave her a scoffing glance.)

KRITZ: No they don't! The Trepe use it as a punishment for an unfaithful male!

Guys hate it!

(Kassy chuckled.)

KASSY: I don't know who told you that, Kritz but you've been seriously mislead!

(Immediately, Kritz glared at a grinning Flaxley.)

KRITZ: Is this true?

(Casting his mind back to the time he sat joyfully watching Kritz have sex with the Trepe guard, Suma, he'd also slept with, Flaxley shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: It's the Trepe way, Kritz, you insisted!

KRITZ: I don't believe this!

FLAXLEY: You wanted revenge, so I let you have it. We both got what we wanted.

Besides, I only slept with Suma to trick her into releasing you. You did it out of spite.

KRITZ: But...

FLAXLEY: So let's hear no more about it!

(With that, he folded his arms nonchalantly and prayed he'd said enough. Fortunately for him, the Suma incident had occurred at a very traumatic time for Kritz and her memory of it was more than a little hazy. Unable to argue she just shrugged and looked to Kassy.)

KRITZ: So what next, what happened after that?

KASSY: Well... I was sick of degrading myself and when I heard that the Leathrock army recruited women as well as men, I made my mind up. I left Azagotse and became somebody. About six years ago I finally got over my lost love.

(She looked to Flaxley.)

KASSY: I had heard tales of this mighty knight Sir Flaxley but I didn't think it was you! I just thought the name was a co-incidence and moved on with my life.

(Kritz nodded.)

KRITZ: Wow! The Trepe really did a number on us, didn't they?

(They all nodded.)

KRITZ: Ah well, c'mon Phisele, let's find some food!

PHISELE: Yay!

(As Phisele leapt from her lap, Kritz climbed to her feet and kissed Flaxley on the cheek. With a smile and a wink to her sister she then headed out of the door leaving Flaxley and Kassy in a reflective mood.)

KASSY: Wow, huh?

FLAXLEY: Yup!

KASSY: Bizarre world!

FLAXLEY: It sure is!

(Having intended to head for the galley, Kritz stepped outside the room then whimpered nervously. Leaving the two of them alone together just didn't feel right for some reason. Wearing a deeply distrusting pout, she sighed to herself then sent Phisele off on her own and stood by the doorway, listening to every word.)

KASSY: Back in Tifaeris, huh?

FLAXLEY: Yup. Joined the army then?

KASSY: Yeah, then transferred to the navy!

(They both nodded, clearly uncomfortable to be alone together. As Flaxley tapped his thigh and looked nervously about the room, however, Kassy looked his way with a demanding glint in her eye.)

KASSY: So what first attracted you to my baby sister with the massive boobies?

(Horried by her choice of phrase, Flaxley did a double take in her direction.)

FLAXLEY: Excuse me?

KASSY: You heard!

(Flaxley looked peeved and raised an eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: You think I only like her for her enormous tits?

(Kassy said nothing and raised her eyebrows, imploring him to answer his own question.)

FLAXLEY: Hey, look, your sister is a sex siren, sure...

KASSY: *Baby* sister!

(Flaxley frowned coldly.)

FLAXLEY: Stop that! She's no baby! And yeah, she's probably the absolute epitome the female body beautiful, but that's not all it is!

KASSY: I see, pretty face then!

(Flaxley shook his head and gave her a disgusted look.)

FLAXLEY: Hey! Yeah, she's pretty, she beautiful in fact but you still don't get it!

KASSY: Don't I?

FLAXLEY: Clearly not. I can't deny I found her aesthetically delightful at first but you don't think we've been together all this time on the back of that do you?

KASSY: I dunno. Have you?

FLAXLEY: No! I wake up every morning next to her beautiful face and I feel alive. When I'm not with her, I feel like half a man. She's a part of me and I love her more than you could ever understand!

KASSY: What's that supposed to mean?

FLAXLEY: Well come on, let's be honest. We were young and hot for each other. What I have with Kritz, it's the real deal!

(Feeling vindicated, he climbed to his feet and headed for the door. Before he passed through it, however, he stopped and gave Kassy a cold glance.)

FLAXLEY: And if you were wondering, which I really think you were, I didn't get with her 'cause she reminded me of you. She didn't remind me of you one bit.

(Kassy looked more than a little peeved.)

KASSY: Hey, I never said she did!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: No, but you thought it! Didn't you?

(All Kassy could do was nod and bite her lip.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah, I thought so!

(With that, he headed out of the door hammering one final nail in Kassy's heart as he left.)

FLAXLEY: You're a great lady, Kassy but you'll never be a patch on Kritz!

(As he headed into the corridor outside, Kritz immediately leapt from where she'd

stood listening and thrust him against the wall. With a sexy drool in her voice, she ran her hands up his thigh and stared into his eyes.)

KRITZ: You are *so* getting some, right now!!!

(Flaxley beamed.)

FLAXLEY: I like that idea!

(With that, he scooped her up and rushed her to their quarters where they performed acts on each other that went beyond where any man dares to narrate. As she sat in the dining room all alone, pondering the previous conversation, Kassy couldn't help but smile. She'd known all along that Flaxley was lost to her and to see her sister alive and happily married meant so much more. Feeling quite a relief she sat back and rested her hands behind her head. At least now she had closure with Flaxley and someone in her life she could genuinely call family.)

(Having enjoyed the thrills of unrestrained passion since they'd boarded the ship, Mandika had dozed off with a happy smile on her face. Desperate not to wake her and destroy her obvious contentment, her ever loving husband, the hapless, well-meaning Lefiat, then dressed himself and went for a stroll.

Feeling extremely content with his afternoon's love-making, he strutted out onto the deck and took a deep breath of the fresh sea air. He felt like quite the man of the world. Raising his head in a Flaxley-like display of self-adoration, he walked tall towards the side of the ship with least people on so he could pose against the rail. Unfortunately, he never made it. While he was still a good few feet from the rail, Phisele suddenly appeared out of nowhere and threw her arms around his mid-riff.)

PHISELE: Hiya, Luffy-lops!!!

(Given quite a start, he reverted to form and fell over. As she crashed on top of him, Phisele chuckled.)

PHISELE: You're silly!

(Feeling quite peeved at having his feet taken away from him, not to mention his dignity, Lefiat leapt to his feet and waved his fist at her.)

LEFIAT: Why won't you just leave me alone?

(Phisele climbed to her feet and shrugged.)

PHISELE: Kritz says when you love a man you have to fight for him!

(She beamed.)

PHISELE: I'm going to fight poop face!

LEFIAT: Poop face has a name you know!

PHISELE: Yeah! Poop face!

(With that, she sprung forth and thrust her arms around his midriff once more.)

LEFIAT: Stop it! Get off!

PHISELE: No!

LEFIAT: I'm a married man!

PHISELE: Not for long!

(Beginning to get sick to the back teeth of the little pest, he flapped wildly like a Bonson deprived of ale.)

LEFIAT: Stop it will you? Get off!

(He writhed around until she eventually let him go.)

PHISELE: Hey!

LEFIAT: Don't hey me!!!

(In that moment, Lefiat allowed his anger to get the better of him and proceeded to

raise his voice.)

LEFIAT: You've been nothing but a pain in the arse since we arrived in Tifaeris!!!
Why won't you just leave me alone...

(At once, Phisele's bottom lip protruded.)

PHISELE: But...

LEFIAT: You're a kid! A child. I'm not interested, okay???

PHISELE: But Luffy-lops...

LEFIAT: I'm not interested, for pity's sake! You're small and annoying, now get lost!!!

(As her heart started to break, Phisele pouted.)

PHISELE: If you didn't like me then why didn't you just say so?

LEFIAT: Eh?

PHISELE: That's just mean!

(She hunched her shoulders and started to cry.)

LEFIAT: Oh, great! Now I'm gonna look bad!

(Phisele looked up with tearful eyes.)

PHISELE: I can't believe you led me on!

LEFIAT: Eh? No I didn't!

PHISELE: I'm only ten! That's a horrible thing to do!

(As a peeved look filled his face, Lefiat stood tall and held his palm towards her.)

LEFIAT: Talk to the face 'cause the hand aint listening!

PHISELE: You made me think I had a chance!

(As she cried openly, Lefiat rolled his eyes.)

LEFIAT: I did nothing of the sort!

PHISELE: Did!

LEFIAT: Didn't!

(Being the more mature of the two, Phisele stopped contradicting him and pouted.)

PHISELE: You're gay!

LEFIAT: Eh? No, I'm not!

PHISELE: Yes you are, you'd rather be with poop face than get with me. And she has a beard! You must be gay!

LEFIAT: Stop saying that!

(Phisele started to dance around and sing.)

PHISELE: Luffy-lops is a gay man, Luffy-lops is a gay man!

(Looking panicked, Lefiat ran to and fro gaping like a fish, desperate to stop her singing. Encouraged by his panic, Phisele just sung louder and louder.)

LEFIAT: No I'm not! Stop it! She's lying!

(Having chased her around for a good few minutes, Lefiat then snapped. She'd been getting on his nerves since day one and this was the final straw. Looking furious, he stopped chasing her and bellowed so loud, Phisele was struck dumb.)

LEFIAT: Listen you annoying little twerp. I'm not gay, I'm just not interested in a short, stumpy, annoying little cow like you. You don't have to be gay to not want to be with you, Phisele. No boy on this earth is ever going to give you a second glance, you infuriating little brat!!!

(He paused to draw breath then pointed towards the cabins.)

LEFIAT: Now go on... get lost!!!

(Two hours later, when Lefiat slowly regained consciousness the first thing he saw was Mandika's upside down head. As his eyes came into focus he could see her standing next to a baffled, upside down Flaxley, shaking her head with distain.)

MANDIKA: You're back then?

(Not quite back to full lucidity, he squinted at her.)

LEFIAT: Why are you two upside down?

MANDIKA: We're not!

LEFIAT: Well somebody is!

(He gave a saddened sigh and pouted.)

LEFIAT: It's me, isn't it?

(Sure enough, he was tangled upside down in the rigging with two black eyes, a bloody nose and bruises all over his body.)

MANDIKA: Can you get him down for me, Flaxley?

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Sure!

(As he untangled Lefiat from the ropes, Mandika shook her head.)

MANDIKA: We looked everywhere for you! How did you end up here? And in such a state?

(As soon as Flaxley had freed him from the rigging and set him on his feet, the dazed Lefiat staggered and grabbed a rope to support himself.)

LEFIAT: Um... I don't remember!

(Not believing that for a moment, Mandika folded her arms impatiently.)

MANDIKA: Lefiat?

LEFIAT: Okay! There was about 10 of them. I managed to floor six or seven...

(Spotting the unimpressed look on Mandika's brow, he relented.)

LEFIAT: Fine!

(Feeling quite dejected, he hung his head.)

LEFIAT: She's an animal!

(Flaxley spammed himself on the forehead.)

FLAXLEY: She? You mean Phisele?

LEFIAT: Yeah!

(He looked imploringly into Mandika's eyes.)

LEFIAT: I did it for us! I told her to leave me alone 'cause I love you!

(He hung his head.)

LEFIAT: So she...

MANDIKA: Hey it's okay. Don't feel bad, Lefiat!

(Flaxley begged to differ.)

FLAXLEY: No, no. *Do* feel bad! You're the royal knight of Guevina! The last hope and protector of one the biggest cities on the planet!

LEFIAT: Yeah but...

FLAXLEY: But nothing, you got beaten to a pulp by a ten year old girl!

MANDIKA: Flaxley, Phisele is no ordinary girl! You saw what she did to Shaka!

(Flaxley shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Shaka was rubbish!

MANDIKA: Even so, Phisele is like a mini Kritz when it comes to violence. Doesn't that worry you?

LEFIAT: It worries me!

FLAXLEY: No. Should it?

MANDIKA: Yes! With Kritz as their role model, aren't you worried *your* two kids will turn out just like Phisele?

(Flaxley mused for a moment.)

FLAXLEY: You mean resilient, obedient and able to take care of themselves?

MANDIKA: No I mean violent, psychotic and likely to cause bar brawls!

LEFIAT: Anyone mind if I sit down?

(As Lefiat slumped to the ground, Flaxley and Mandika continued their discussion oblivious to him.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika, Phisele is a bit rough around the edges I grant you but compared with the only other kid her age I was ever close to, she's a little angel!

MANDIKA: Yeah? And who was...

(She gasped in exasperation.)

MANDIKA: You mean me?

FLAXLEY: Yeah. You were far worse!

MANDIKA: You take that back!

FLAXLEY: You were, you used to kick people and allsorts, just for the fun of it. If anyone tried to stop you, you'd pull rank!

MANDIKA: I never pulled rank on anyone!

FLAXLEY: No? Does this sound familiar?

(He spoke in a high pitched voice, his best impression of a female.)

FLAXLEY: You can't tell me what to do, I'm a princess!

MANDIKA: I never said that!

(From his seat on the ground, Lefiat looked up.)

LEFIAT: You used to say that all the time! You've only stopped now 'cause you're the queen! Now you remind everyone of *that* instead!

(Furious at what she considered his unhelpful contribution, Mandika stamped on his hand.)

MANDIKA: Who asked you?

LEFIAT: Ow!

FLAXLEY: See, Phisele is a good kid at heart. She's just acting weird like girls do when they're in love!

MANDIKA: Yeah but she's...

(Much to Mandika's annoyance, her words were interrupted by the captain rushing over to them looking flustered. Immediately standing tall, Flaxley faced him expecting bad news.)

CAPTAIN: Sir Flaxley, are you sure the ship we're chasing went in this direction? Judging by our calculations, any ship should have at least been in range by now!

Unless they had a ship as fast as this one!

FLAXLEY: Hmm... did *you* do the calculations?

CAPTAIN: No!

FLAXLEY: Then I'm worried!

(He rubbed his chin.)

FLAXLEY: What are you saying? Their ship can't just have disappeared!

(The captain shrugged.)

CAPTAIN: No, but it could have hugged the Sanetza coast then sailed off in a completely different direction!

FLAXLEY: Crap!

(Mandika bit her lip and trembled.)

MANDIKA: Are you saying that Heiner got away?

(The captain nodded.)

CAPTAIN: Aye! Well, he certainly didn't come this way!

FLAXLEY: You told me this ship would catch them no matter which way they went!

(The captain frowned.)

CAPTAIN: How many times do I have to tell you this? I'm not a very good captain!

FLAXLEY: Damn!

(Using all his training just to remain calm, Flaxley thought hard. They had to find a

way to locate that ship. Should Heiner get away, the consequences would be catastrophic and he knew it. For several moments, his face bore a look of deep concentration when finally, he glanced up with an enlightened expression on his brow.)

FLAXLEY: That might work! Where's that prisoner?

CAPTAIN: Morten? He's on deck 2, room 4!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Okay!

(Looking menacing, he raised an eyebrow and sneered.)

FLAXLEY: Wait here, captain! I'll tell you where we're going in just one minute!

(With that, he bounded across the deck and disappeared inside the cabin doors.)

(With a sneer etched into his face, Flaxley paced menacingly through the corridors of the ship, walking with a deliberate intensity. Like a man on a mission, he bounded forth, scaring people into moving out of his way without even having to say a word. With nothing on his mind other than the task in hand, he strode purposefully into the corridor where Morten was being held and bashed the first door he saw off of its hinges. Having apologised profusely to the unfortunate sailor who was in there and explained that he had no idea it was a toilet, he then about turned and kicked the door opposite off of its hinges. As the door thudded into the wall opposite, Flaxley strode in and grabbed the prisoner, lifting him by his throat.)

FLAXLEY: You've got ten seconds to tell me where Heiner's ship is heading!

Starting from now!

(Terrified by the giant man, Morten stammered embarrassingly as his feet dangled from his suspended body.)

MORTEN: I d-d-d-d-d...

FLAXLEY: Is that some sort of code?

MORTEN: N-n-n-n-n...

(Looking furious, Flaxley threw him to the ground.)

FLAXLEY: Don't piss me about!

(As he edged away into the corner, Morten trembled.)

MORTEN: I'm n-not. I have a st-st-st-st...

FLAXLEY: It's called a stammer! What's the point of having one if you can't even say it?

(As Morten stared at him in horror, Flaxley cracked his knuckles.)

FLAXLEY: Right. I'm going to torture you now, okay?

MORTEN: T-t-torture?

FLAXLEY: No, torture! With just one T. Close enough. I'm going to start by crushing your head in my armpit!

(Morten shook his head and gaped.)

MORTEN: P-p-p...

FLAXLEY: Are you telling me to piss off?

MORTEN: P-p-please? D-don't!

(Flaxley faked a thoughtful look.)

FLAXLEY: Sorry... bloke... but I want to!

(With that, he leapt forth and grabbed Morten in a powerful headlock.)

MORTEN: Ow!!! That hurts!!! Ow!!!

(Flaxley grinned.)

FLAXLEY: It's meant to! Nice to see your stammer has cleared up!

(With that, he threw him violently to the floor.)

MORTEN: Hey!!!

(Holding his painful head, Morten struggled to his feet.)

MORTEN: Sorry about that, old chap, I thought I could buy some time with the stammering act. You won't stop Heiner, you know? And he'll make you suffer for what you just did to me!

FLAXLEY: Crap! If he gave two shits about you he wouldn't have left you for dead in the sea!

(Morten rubbed his chin thoughtfully.)

MORTEN: Even so! You won't get anything out of me.

(He folded his arms and stood tall.)

MORTEN: Do your worst!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: My worst? Okay!

(With that, he whipped his crotch plate off and freed his sizable manhood. Morten's eyes bulged with horror.)

FLAXLEY: Bend over!!!

(Averting his terrified stare from Flaxley's gargantuan love sausage, Morten looked him in the eye with terror etched on his face.)

MORTEN: Marlboro caves! They're going to head for the Marlboro caves, our base is there!

(He trembled and backed away.)

MORTEN: For the love of all things ever, please put that thing away!

(Allowing himself a chuckle, Flaxley did exactly that.)

FLAXLEY: Thanks! You know, there was no way I was going to go through with it. The torture is supposed to be for you, not for me!

(His face turned extremely angry.)

FLAXLEY: If I find out you're lying though, I'll come back and cut yours off!

(With that, he about turned and raced back to the deck to alert the captain of their new destination.

The news that the trip would take 3 days longer than expected at full speed wasn't exactly greeted with champagne and a knees up. The fact that they'd wasted half a day by heading in the wrong direction didn't exactly help the mood either. The journey would be a long one, and for most of them being at sea would make it *feel* even longer still.

For the some of them, however, sailing into battle over a lengthy period of time didn't seem so bad. It certainly beat *marching* to potential bloodbaths. As always, the worst factor was fear of the unknown. What would be awaiting them when they reached the Marlboro caves? Would they find Heiner before then? Would they be too late? For the Leathrock soldiers it was just an extension of the weirdness they'd already been experiencing. They were heading off to fight an unknown quantity. This voyage could well be their last but even that beat the living death that was life marooned in a strange land.)

(Safe in the knowledge that the battle would still be days away, the Leathrock folk decided to spend that afternoon celebrating being off of Sanetza with unhealthy amounts of rum, much to Bonson's displeasure. He saw the ever shrinking rum

supply and his heart sunk.

Having got to know each other a little better after their chat earlier, Kritz and Kassy spent the day conversing and before long they started to feel much more at ease with one another. There was one thing, however, that Kritz couldn't get off her mind. Before she could truly move on and try to build any kind of relationship with her sister, she had to know the answer. And so, that very evening as the sun began to set, Kritz decided the time to find that answer had come. Having called her out to the deck, she offered her a warm smile then stood at her side, looking over the side of the ship. Wearing a thoughtful expression, she then looked to her sister and watched her hair blow in the breeze before speaking up in a calm voice.)

KRITZ: Kassy?

(Kassy looked to her and smiled.)

KASSY: What's up?

KRITZ: The Maishu people!

(Kassy shrugged.)

KASSY: What about them?

KRITZ: How come you built on their sacred crop, hunted their game out of season and then attacked them?

(Kassy looked lost.)

KASSY: We did what?

KRITZ: You heard me; you built on their sacred crop, hunted their game and attacked them! I just don't understand why!

(She looked to the ocean solemnly.)

KRITZ: You seem too nice a person to do that kind of thing!

(Kassy looked bemused.)

KASSY: Sacred crop? What was their sacred crop?

KRITZ: Your base was on their sacred land apparently!

(Kassy scratched her head in bewilderment.)

KASSY: They never said!

KRITZ: They reckon they did!

KASSY: And as for hunting *their* game out of season, we didn't hunt their game at all. We hunted game. We needed food, so we hunted for it. Who wouldn't?

KRITZ: But...

KASSY: And we attacked them as a warning to stop trying to sabotage our hunts. Every time they did that, people went hungry. What were we supposed to do, sit there and do nothing while we starve?

(Kritz nodded with understanding.)

KRITZ: I get that, Kassy. But they weren't trying to stop you eating, they were trying to stop you hunting things in the mating season and wiping out the entire species!

(Kassy looked stunned.)

KASSY: Really?

KRITZ: Yeah!

KASSY: Again, they never said!

(She gave Kritz a reassuring smile.)

KASSY: If we'd known it was their sacred land... or that we were endangering a species, we'd have worked something out with them. But we didn't know!

KRITZ: Really?

KASSY: I swear!

KRITZ: And, they never told you?

(Much to Kritz's surprise, Kassy sighed and gave her a very honest answer.)

KASSY: They might have tried to, Kritz. To be honest, we didn't pay their requests much heed. Their ways seemed silly to us and I guess we didn't want to listen.

(She shook her head.)

KASSY: And yet, after all we did to them they still wanted to help out when our settlement was burning.

(Kritz nodded.)

KRITZ: Pretty special weren't they?

(With a sigh, Kassy shrugged it off.)

KASSY: We missed out on something by not getting to know them, I can see that now. But, it's too late to start worrying about that.

KRITZ: Yeah, I guess. It's all behind you now, huh?

KASSY: Thank fuck!

(Kritz nodded thoughtfully.)

KRITZ: You've had it rough, haven't you?

(Kassy grinned.)

KASSY: Yeah, frequently! Flaxley liked it rough!

(At first Kritz gave her a threatening scowl but upon seeing Kassy's grin, started to chuckle.)

KRITZ: I guess he *must* have liked things rough or he'd never have dated you!

KASSY: Hey!

(They both chuckled.)

KASSY: Bitch!

KRITZ: Must run in the family!

(Finally accepting her unreservedly, Kritz reached her hand out to her.)

KRITZ: I'm glad I found you, babe!

(Kassy took her hand and smiled.)

KASSY: Me too, sister face. Me too.

(Watching them from across the deck, enjoying yet more rum in the evening breeze, Bonson and Derek looked completely at peace with the world. There was something about a setting sun on the ocean that was as calming as it was easy on the eye.

Leaning his arm casually on the ship's railing, Bonson sighed then spoke up in an impressed voice.)

BONSON: Flaxley's a lucky man!

(Derek nodded and took a swig of his drink.)

DEREK: Why's that then?

(Bonson looked down at him then gestured to Kritz and Kassy.)

BONSON: He's had *both* those two and he's *still* banging the better looking one!

DEREK: Jealous?

(Bonson was outraged by the question.)

BONSON: Of course I bloody well am! You'd have to be gay not to be!

DEREK: Or an alien! I prefer my women horned and green!

(Bonson nodded.)

BONSON: Well, we all love a horny woman, old chap!

(Realising his joke had been about as funny as charging into battle then realising you've left your sword at home, Bonson held his head in his hands.)

BONSON: Good grief!

DEREK: Ah, don't fret, Bonson. I bet in all your years on the planet you've had more than your fair share of the ladies!

(Bonson gave him a sideways glance.)

BONSON: Is that a dig about the elder's sacrifice, only I won't stand for it!

(Derek shook his head.)

DEREK: No, I'm serious. You must have had a few!

(Bonson looked at his rum and furrowed his brow.)

BONSON: I'm not drunk though if that's what you're thinking! And I'm getting a little fed up with you lot insinuating that I'm some sort of...

DEREK: I was talking about women!

(Bonson looked lost for a moment then chuckled to himself.)

BONSON: Right, fair enough. My mistake. Oh and yeah, I did okay as a young man. I was never quite a Flaxley though!

DEREK: Yeah, I'll bet!

BONSON: I did date a...

(He flinched.)

BONSON: Hey! Fuck you! Bloody alien!

(As Derek chuckled to himself, Bonson continued what he was saying.)

BONSON: Anyway, when I was 17 or so I dated a girl who looked a bit like Kritz, actually!

DEREK: Really?

BONSON: Obviously not as pretty!

DEREK: Okay!

BONSON: And she had smaller tits of course!

DEREK: Right...

BONSON: Didn't quite have Kritz's smoking body either!

(He sighed.)

BONSON: Who am I kidding? She looked more like Lefiat than Kritz!

(As Derek choked on his rum, Bonson sighed.)

BONSON: Except she *could* grow facial hair! Good god she was a state!

DEREK: Well, we've all banged a few rough ones in our time, Bonson!

(Bonson nodded as he pondered Derek's words.)

BONSON: Yes, I mean look at your Zanne!

DEREK: Hey!!!

BONSON: I'm kidding. I'd do her myself if was 3 foot tall, green and had no chance with a *pretty* woman!

(As Bonson revelled in his own joke, Derek sneered at him coldly.)

DEREK: You *do* have no chance with a pretty woman!

(Cut down to size, Bonson retorted.)

BONSON: You're green!

DEREK: I'd rather be green than all wrinkled like...

(As Derek paused to think of something mean to say, Bonson started to laugh.)

BONSON: Not much good at this are you?

(As Bonson's words seeped into his brain, Derek looked as if the weight of the world had been lifted from his shoulders.)

DEREK: Thank heavens for that!

(Bonson was completely baffled.)

BONSON: Thank what for who?

(Looking happy to be alive, Derek threw his rum overboard and strolled on high towards the cabins, raising his voice for Bonson to hear him as he walked away.)

DEREK: I just realised, Bonson! It was a false alarm. I'm nothing like you!

(He stopped and turned to face him.)

DEREK: And thank the stars, I never will be!

(As Derek wandered into the cabins and away, Bonson shrugged nonchalantly.)

BONSON: Well of course you're nothing like me. You're fucking green for a start!

(By the time the small hours came around, not a soul on the ship was awake except for the captain and three of his crew. Earlier, Flaxley had tried to create a jovial atmosphere on the ship and promote bonding between the crew and the passengers. He knew that if and when battle commenced, camaraderie would play a vital role in the outcome. Urging them to relax and make the most of the time before they were called into action, he promoted card playing, drinking and games. Despite Kritz being banned from playing cards for mysteriously always having incredible hands, he felt the exercise went well. Confident that he could mould them into a team by the time they arrived in Marlboro, still many days away, he went to bed that night feeling satisfied with his work. Little did he know, the end was about to come sooner than he thought.

As the sun emerged softly over the horizon to cast a bright, elongated yellow streak upon the sea, the allies remained sleeping soundly in their beds. With the warm early morning sun gently filtering through the windows, lifting the darkness, not a one of them stirred. All was peaceful.

Just then, an alarming cry rang out down the messenger pipes from the bridge of the ship. With extreme urgency the captain bellowed "battle stations" over and over, his words echoing through every corridor and into every room. In a matter of moments the silent, sleepy corridors came alive with the sound of rowdy passengers. The Leathrock soldiers weren't expecting battle so soon but after what Heiner had done to their base and many of their men, they were ready and eager to fight. As everyone assembled in the corridor, putting the finishing touches to their armour, Flaxley emerged from his quarters looking mean and menacing. He needed them to know he was in charge and stood tall to impose his daunting aura upon them. Following him out, Kritz demanded Phisele to stay in the room until told otherwise and slammed the door behind her. With no need for words, Flaxley nodded to her then they led the Leathrock soldiers out onto the deck together.

As they emerged on the deck, Bonson was extremely disappointed. He hoped they'd all psyched themselves up for nothing but alas, they hadn't. Heiner's ship was indeed in sight and a fight was inevitable. He could but release a despondent sigh. He had no doubt they'd win as he was convinced that Daman Siria was guiding them, he just didn't fancy exerting himself after a heavy night's drinking. Making no attempt to hide the fact he didn't want to do battle, he thumped the rail in anger and swore under his breath. Normally, he'd make a fuss about wanting no part of it then feel guilty and join in. On this occasion however, being too tired to kick up a protest, he simply accepted the inevitable, albeit with a resentful snarl on his face.

As Flaxley spied the enemy ship for the first time, he felt anger rage through his entire body. Allowing his mind to channel that emotion, he thought about his old friend Croxton and how they'd struck him down in his prime. In that moment, the impending battle became more than a simple matter of saving the world from Heiner and whatever evil key he intended to create. This was personal.

Bizarrely, always the first to shy away from any sort of conflict, Mandika was also in the mood for a fight. As far as she was concerned, had it not been for Heiner's evil plans, she wouldn't have ended up on the ship and could well have spent the last week relaxing in Leathrock presidential palace, being treated like the queen she was. Completely glossing over the fact that she was only in Leathrock because of Heiner's evil plans, anger took over and she forgot to be afraid.

For Lefiat, the battle plan was simple. He knew to just protect his beloved and let the others do what they did best.

For a good few minutes the Leathrock soldiers stood side by side with Flaxley and his crew, staring at the enemy ship as they bore down on it from behind. Nobody spoke a word. The only person to avert his gaze, even for a moment, was Flaxley as he counted his allies. They added up to a paltry 32. Hoping against hope they didn't have cannons on Heiner's ship, he then looked about the Colloskayak and considered the formation for a battle. With next to no tactical options open to him, he bit his lip then ordered the men and women under his command to simply spread out and prepare themselves. The Colloskayak was gaining fast and as soon as it drew alongside, they had to be ready to fight.

Aboard Heiner's ship there'd been similar tension. A lookout in the crow's nest had spotted the Colloskayak some time earlier but their attempts to outrun it had been in vain. Knowing they'd never be able to lose a ship of such incredible speed on the empty ocean, they too were now prepared for battle.

Just like Flaxley, Heiner stood at the front of his assembled men. With more than 120 or so men at his disposal, he wasn't afraid even for a moment. He was looking forward to it. In fact, to allow the Colloskayak to catch up he'd even dropped his anchor. Flaxley had made him look quite the fool in Leathrock palace and he was looking forward to getting his revenge. His men also had every reason to be bitter after Flaxley had slaughtered so many of their comrades while protecting the president. As a result, there was a snarl in the air, and as those aboard the Colloskayak would soon find out, there was also a daunting air of confidence about them.

And so, the scene was set. There was nothing left to be said and a battle was imminent. With the warriors from both sides ready to begin as soon as the word was given, all they had to do was wait for the Colloskayak to draw alongside Heiner's ship. For both sides, this seemed to take an eternity. At first, the waiting enemy soldiers looked like faceless shadows in the distance but as they slowly drew near they started to see every detail in their angered faces. Even when they could see the whites of their eyes, however, they still had to wait for the Colloskayak to settle.

As the ship finally started its final drift into place, both sets of soldiers stared angrily into the eyes of their enemies. Looking for signs of weakness and trying to reassure themselves they were worthy, they all stood tall. So focussed were they on the impending battle, they even managed to look Kritz in the eye, rather than down her top, such was the extent of their concentration. As ever, the two leaders focussed solely on each other. For any leader, personally taking down his opposite number was

the greatest victory of all. Confident he could snap Heiner in two without even trying, Flaxley stood tall and smirked at him arrogantly. Sharing the same arrogance, Heiner stood with his hands behind his back wearing a knowing smile. They were both convinced that any moment now, the other would be dead.

Finally, after what had felt like an eternity, the Colloskayak drew alongside Heiner's ship and dropped anchor. The captain may have claimed incompetence on several occasions but his handling of the ship was perfect. The ships were so close even Lefiat would have trouble falling down the gap in the middle. And so, with everything in place, Flaxley allowed Heiner to have the first word, such was his confidence in the belief he was about to kill him and have the last. Very often this was the worst part of a battle for any soldier, waiting for their leader to give the order to commence fighting. Having to stand by and watch the banter was never easy. Today was no exception.

Smirking knowingly, Heiner nodded and looked about the Colloskayak at the assembled enemy.)

HEINER: So Flaxley, at last we meet!

(As always, Flaxley was primed and ready for some decent pre-fight banter but could only offer Heiner a scornful raised eyebrow for his feeble effort. Not wanting to be outclassed without his opponent even having to speak, Heiner was quick to scowl back and elaborate.)

HEINER: Obviously, we've already met. I mean in battle!

(Considering their one and only prior meeting had also been in battle, Flaxley just rolled his eyes and looked to the heavens.)

HEINER: And by that I mean, this time we're ready!

(Flaxley puffed out and spoke in a pitying voice.)

FLAXLEY: Clearly you've never done this before so would you like me to start?

(Not wanting to look a fool in front of his men, despite already having done so, Heiner looked around at his soldiers and scoffed.)

HEINER: Yeah right!

(With that, he scratched his head and gave Flaxley a stealthy nod, imploring him to speak and spare his blushes. Allowing himself a nod, Flaxley stood tall and began.)

FLAXLEY: Fine. You didn't really think you could get away with it, did you?

(Heiner winked gratefully before matching Flaxley's cocky stance and retorting arrogantly.)

HEINER: Flaxley, Flaxley, Flaxley, I already *have* got away with it!

(Flaxley frowned scornfully.)

FLAXLEY: No you haven't, you tit! We just caught you!

HEINER: That doesn't mean we haven't got away with it!

FLAXLEY: Actually, by virtue of the fact you haven't got away and are standing right there...

(Getting quite irate inside, Heiner snapped angrily.)

HEINER: Look! Just face facts, I'm going to win, okay???

FLAXLEY: Hamlet, listen...

HEINER: It's Heiner!!!

FLAXLEY: Whatever! I hope your fighting is better than your banter. If not just give me the gold chains and surrender now!

(Relenting his high and mighty stance, Heiner threw his arms in the air.)

HEINER: Okay, let me level with you, Flaxley! I'm not that good at banter!

FLAXLEY: Really? You hide it so well though!

HEINER: And to be honest, I don't really care. Banter isn't going to win this battle!

FLAXLEY: Well yours certainly isn't it!

HEINER: Such arrogance...

(By now the soldiers on both sides were getting restless and couldn't wait for the battle to begin. Unfortunately their two leaders were too busy trying to belittle the other one to give the order.)

A short while later, having finally realised he was getting nowhere with the banter, Heiner decided it was time to for a change of tactics. Looking nonchalant he pulled a metal key from his pocket and held it before his face.)

HEINER: See this, Flaxley?

FLAXLEY: So you wear a chastity belt, what of it?

(Heiner scoffed.)

HEINER: Getting desperate, Flaxley? I haven't worn one of those since I was fifteen!

(While the soldiers on both sides gave him a disturbed glance, Heiner continued.)

HEINER: This is why you're going to lose!

(Flaxley nodded knowingly.)

FLAXLEY: You want me to think you used the sceptre and made a key already?

HEINER: I don't want you to think it; I want you to see it!

(Eager to call his bluff, Flaxley gave him a contemptuous glance.)

FLAXLEY: You're going to strike us down with the mighty "Key of door" are you?

(Sharing Flaxley's scepticism about the key, Flaxley's allies laughed. Bizarrely, so did Heiner.)

HEINER: Oh, that's hilarious! Good one!

(With that he scowled venomously and thrust the key towards a Leathrock soldier.)

HEINER: Die!!!

(Much to everyone's horror and amazement, the soldier yelled in pain and collapsed to the deck, his life force obliterated at Heiner's whim. Naturally, everyone on the Colloskayak was immediately set on edge while Heiner's crew rubbed their hands mercilessly. Looking horrified, Flaxley looked up from his dead ally and snarled bitterly.)

FLAXLEY: You killed him!!!

(Heiner beamed.)

HEINER: That's for giving me lip, Flaxley!!! Now, have you got any more dumb comments or are you going to accept defeat gracefully?

(Not wanting to be outdone, Flaxley stood tall and folded his arms.)

FLAXLEY: Actually...

(Immediately, a Leathrock soldier placed his hand over Flaxley's mouth while the rest of his comrades shushed him and implored him to shut his mouth before he got them all killed. Revelling in their obvious fear, Heiner laughed heartily.)

HEINER: I thought so!

(He kissed the key and looked about the terrified crew of the Colloskayak.)

HEINER: This is going to be the shortest battle in history. If I wish it so, you die! I love this thing. I call it my key of death.

(He grinned arrogantly.)

HEINER: The world is going to bow before me!

(Feeling like the happiest man alive, he then paced up and down the deck of his ship, checking out the enemy.)

HEINER: Hmm... very nice! I'll take the sexy one in the leather skirt to my harem, I

think. Oh and that looks like Queen Mandika of Guevina over there!

(He gave her a wink.)

HEINER: Don't worry; you can be in my harem too! In fact, I think I'll spare all the pretty ones; the rest of you can die. That includes the green, frog looking dude!

(He stopped pacing and smirked.)

HEINER: Now...

(He raised the key above his shoulder.)

HEINER: Who wants to sample this thing next? Any volunteers?

(Instinctively, many of the Leathrock soldiers immediately started to pace backwards in fear for their lives. Realising it was now or never, Flaxley opted to do the opposite. Determined not to let Heiner win at any cost, even that of his life, he attempted to draw his sword in the vain hope that he could reach Heiner without being killed. He didn't rate his chances but for the sake of all he loved, he knew he had to try. Taking even a one in a million chance was better than being struck down without a fight. Anticipating such a move, however, Heiner spotted Flaxley's movement immediately and grinned.)

HEINER: I hoped it'd be you! Now...

(Certain his number was up, Flaxley snarled and attempted to throw his sword to take Heiner down with him and give his allies at least a fighting chance. Before he could even begin to hurl his mighty weapon, however, a blinding streak of lightning flashed past his head. Much to Heiner's distress, he never got to utter the instruction for Flaxley to die as the lightning bolt crashed into the top of the key. In some considerable pain, he bellowed out and the key flew into the air. Not needing a second invitation, Flaxley immediately leapt onto Heiner's boat, bellowing at the top of his voice.)

FLAXLEY: Attack!!!

(With a deafening roar, the soldiers from both sides then leapt into action. Baiting for each other's blood, they sprung onto each other's ships and the clashing of steel commenced. Being as heavily outnumbered as they were, the crew of the Colloskayak were only too relieved to have magic on their side. Unfortunately, magic was difficult to use in an open battle as Derek had found out before when he'd struck down his own allies by mistake. As a result, he used his fists and horns. Lefiat did what he did best, he stood guard over Mandika and protected her with some precision swordsmanship, the likes of which he was normally incapable. Bonson also protected the one he loved using his inferno magic, namely himself. Kassy, like Flaxley preferred the sword and was somewhat taken aback to see that Kritz didn't. The sight of her little sister taking on men twice her size with her bare hands was something to behold.

As always in such battles, as soon as the order to fight was given, nerves became a thing of the past. You had to leap into the fray and kill or be killed. Those who hesitated almost always met their end. Thankfully for Flaxley and his comrades, the Leathrock soldiers were well trained. Unfortunately, however, Heiner's men were no slouches either. As far as Flaxley was concerned, this meant there'd be too much countering and not enough killing. This was something he was keen to address, starting with Heiner.

Heiner's first reaction had been to scream in pain having had the key thrust out of his hand by a powerful lightning bolt, his second reaction was to see where it landed. Unfortunately for him, he didn't see where it went and had to take the third, less

attractive option. Defending himself against the marauding Flaxley, a globally acclaimed swordsman. Looking terrified, he could only block every powerful swing that Flaxley sent his way with very little hope of countering.)

FLAXLEY: Just die already!

HEINER: How did you do that? How did you knock the key from my hand?

(Flaxley grinned and swung the sword for his neck.)

FLAXLEY: That'd be Derek, the frog dude!

(As he ducked under the blow, Heiner frowned.)

HEINER: Using magic is cheating!!!

FLAXLEY: Oh, and enchanting mystic keys isn't?

(As Heiner continued to survive against all odds, Kritz was getting medieval on his men. Singling out those who leered at her breasts for special treatment, she was breaking noses and snapping necks with extreme venom. Flanking her every move with her sword at the ready, Kassy was astounded.)

KASSY: Where the hell did you learn to kill like that?

KRITZ: I was a Trepe, remember?

KASSY: Yeah, I hate the Trepe!

(Just then, one of Heiner's men charged Kassy from behind. Well aware of his presence, Kassy instinctively ducked down then threw him over her back towards Kritz. Wasting no time whatsoever, Kritz gauged his eyes with her fingers before punching his throat with a swift blow, killing him outright.)

KRITZ: What can I say? I didn't choose to be a Trepe!

(Kassy smiled.)

KASSY: I know! You chose *not* to be and that's what matters!

(Having shared a warm smile, Kritz grinned mercilessly.)

KRITZ: Come on; let's feed some more of these bastards to the sharks!

(For all the efforts and endeavours of the Leathrock soldiers, their lack of numbers soon began to show. Being so outrageously outnumbered, every fallen comrade was a complete catastrophe. At this early point in the battle they'd only lost five men but this accounted for almost a sixth of their entire force. Very much aware of the problem, Flaxley swiftly decided to take action. Having wasted far too long on Heiner, he decided it was time to thin the enemy herd a little. With a look of devilish joy in his eyes, he bounded away from Heiner and proceeded to slash and chop at every one of Heiner's men in range. Heads rolled and limbs were lost.

For Bonson, this was a battle like no other. Whereas before he'd found himself lost in the moment with his adrenaline pumping through him like a man half his age, this time he felt numb about the whole thing. And so, he'd found a quiet corner of the deck to stand in, so he could easily fend off all potential attacks with inferno magic while he waited for Daman Siria to win the battle for them.

Rapidly becoming quite bored, he yawned to himself then sauntered over to where Lefiat was desperately protecting Mandika from a muscular, toothless bandit with a killer look in his eye.)

BONSON: Need a hand there, Mandika? I'm bored of standing about doing nothing.

(Having barely managed to avoid the blade of his merciless foe on three separate occasions, Lefiat bellowed back with terror in his eyes.)

LEFIAT: Bored???

BONSON: Yeah, these battles seem so pointless when you already know you'll win, I can't even be bothered with it!

(Pinned to the railings of the ship, looking terrified, Mandika glared at him.)

MANDIKA: Be bothered!!!

BONSON: What's the point? We're going to win anyway, Daman has already seen to that!

(As Lefiat once again ducked under a flailing sword blade, Mandika scowled at him.)

MANDIKA: Bonson! Do something!

(Bonson waved her away.)

BONSON: You'll be fine!

(As Lefiat's tin helmet flew over the side of the ship with half his hair still inside it, Mandika begged to differ.)

MANDIKA: We're gonna die!!!

BONSON: Oh fine, if it makes you feel better!

(With that, he flicked out his fingers and set Lefiat's foe ablaze. Screaming like a wild banshee, the burning man cursed for all he was worth and dived overboard.)

BONSON: There! Now stop complaining about nothing!

(As he stood there sporting a new haircut, bald on top and tufts poking out from the back and sides, Lefiat flapped wildly.)

LEFIAT: Bonson you git! He could have killed me!

BONSON: Yes well, just be grateful Mandika's here, otherwise I'd happily have let him! And anyway, don't be such a drama queen. I saved you eventually, didn't I?

(Just then, the sound of Mandika screaming made them both spin her way.)

MANDIKA: No!!!

(She looked from Bonson to Lefiat and back again repeatedly.)

MANDIKA: You look like father and son!!!

(Bonson was not impressed.)

BONSON: How dare you???

LEFIAT: Yeah! You mean grandfather!

(Before Bonson could demean him, Lefiat was immediately called into action once more. Allowing him to get on with it while Mandika cowered in fear, Bonson started to walk away.)

MANDIKA: Bonson!!!

BONSON: Oh, what now?

MANDIKA: If you really want to do something, find that key of death!

BONSON: What?

MANDIKA: If you really think we're being controlled and protected by Daman, go and find that key! It flew out of Heiner's hand and obviously nobody's found it yet or we'd all be dead.

(Bonson mused to himself.)

BONSON: Hmm... well, if it gets me away from you two then I might just do that!

(With that, he strolled across the deck, right through the centre of the raging battle as if on a stroll through the park. Half expecting Daman to appear and direct him straight to the key, he then jumped from the Colloskayak onto the enemy craft and ducked a flailing sword.)

BONSON: Careful with that thing!

(Starting to whistle as he strolled towards where he thought the key might have gone, he wasn't even remotely surprised to hear Daman's voice in his head.)

DAMAN'S VOICE: Bonson, Bonson old chap!

(Bonson looked vindicated and scoffed.)

BONSON: Well, well... Daman, I've been expecting you!

(He looked about himself.)

BONSON: Where are you?

DAMAN'S VOICE: I'm not here. I'm talking directly into your mind!

BONSON: Oh, like Derek does?

DAMAN'S VOICE: Yes!

BONSON: Right, so where's this key then? Let me grab it so we can piss off home!

DAMAN'S VOICE: This is why I'm here, Bonson. There is no thrall, there is no control. If one of those sword blades hits you, you will die! I've only come to warn you!

(Bonson scoffed.)

BONSON: How dumb do I look, Daman?

(Just then, a sword blade flashed towards him. Instinctively he dived out of the way and crashed to the deck.)

BONSON: Hey! I'm an old man, don't attack me!

(At this point he felt a shooting pain in his arm. Grimacing wildly, he looked down at it and noticed a huge chunk of his sleeve missing and blood oozing from a cut on his forearm.)

BONSON: You mean...

(What was left of his hair, stood on end.)

BONSON: This battle is for real???

DAMAN'S VOICE: For the hundredth time, yes!!!

(Filled with abject terror, he swiftly about turned firing random fireballs about the place as he scarpered back to the Colloskayak. Fortunately, nobody on his own side was hit. Looking terrified, he raced back to help Mandika and all the old feelings of an adrenaline rush returned to him.)

BONSON: Okay, you were right! Let's kill these arseholes. Let's see that ice magic, Mandika!

MANDIKA: I'm on my honeymoon!

BONSON: Yes, that's the spirit!

(With Flaxley and Kritz on a crusade to kill every enemy soldier in as shorter time as possible, things started to look a little better for the crew of the Colloskayak. Their number was continuing to dwindle however, and they knew that unless they managed to keep up this high intensity they might just run out of people.

Absolutely flabbergasted by Flaxley's incredible strength, the terrified Heiner had put all his efforts into finding the key ever since Flaxley had ended their personal battle to thin the herd. Without it he feared he and his men were doomed and despite sword blades flailing wildly overhead, he was spending the entire battle on his hands and knees searching for it.

And so, the battle raged on. The air was filled with the sound of thrashing metal and cries of pain and chaos reigned. There were limbs flying everywhere. The battle had become immense and it was far too close even for Flaxley's liking. It would be no exaggeration to say that if the killing continued at the same ratio there'd be very few survivors, both sides cancelling out the other. As long as his side had magic, however, Flaxley remained confident.

Still unenthusiastic about using magic in a running battle, Derek was being singled out for his height far too often for his liking. It was a foolish mistake to assume that this little green man couldn't take care of himself but he was beginning to get riled by all the attention. Despite this, he'd so far managed to avoid the urge to use magic.

The final straw came, however, when a massive soldier bounded towards him giggling like a yokel while spinning two battle axes at him. The man was so large, his bounding steps rocked the ship.)

CHESNEY: Little green frog dude, I bet you taste good!

(Derek scowled as the sizable idiot raged towards him. The suggestion that he was a mere snack food was about all he could stand.)

DEREK: Right, that's done it. I'm gonna fry you good!

(Taking special care to aim for the giant man's groin, Derek raised his hand and sneered venomously.)

DEREK: Take...

(Much to his horror, the giant man turned out to be surprisingly quick. Before he could fire his magic, he managed to grab Derek's fingers and lift him up. There was nothing Derek could do in the short term but dangle there and stare into his eyes. He wouldn't be able to fire magic anywhere but directly upwards.)

CHESNEY: You're gonna be good with some peppercorn sauce I reckon!

(Derek had to think quickly.)

DEREK: Actually, I'm poisonous!

CHESNEY: That's fine, *most* the shit I eat aint sanitary!

DEREK: Oh!

CHESNEY: Right, first thing I need to do before I cook you, is tenderise you!

(He grinned into Derek's face, his breath smelling of mouldy cabbages.)

DEREK: Yoicks!

CHESNEY: This might hurt a little!

(With that, the giant man proceeded to slap and whack him about the deck as if he was softening a juicy steak for dinner.)

CHESNEY: Hell, this is almost as fun as the eating!

(While Derek's hell continued, Heiner's looked like coming to an end. Having crawled on his hands and knees while ducking and rolling to avoid flailing steel, he finally spotted something stuck between two of the deck's wooden boards. Shining like a diamond on wooden rough, he was drawn to it like a moth to a flame. Grinning excitedly, he wasted no time in charging towards it and diving down in readiness to scoop it up. He'd found the key. Desperate to make Flaxley and his allies pay in the most horrible way, he snarled as he thrust himself towards it on all fours. This was going to be his moment. Unfortunately, he hadn't legislated for Chesney. Having been holding Derek by the fingertips and thrashing him about with extreme force, it was only ever going to be a matter of time before he lost his grip. Upon throwing Derek back over his shoulder with the intention of thudding him down as hard as possible, the inevitable happened. Derek slipped through his fingers and flew through the air like a rocket. Just as Heiner reached to grab the key, Derek thudded head first into his backside, his horn penetrating deep into his buttock. In extreme pain, Heiner immediately leapt to his feet and screamed in agony, his cries even drowning out the sound of the battle. To make matters worse, he didn't even get the chance to try to remove the unconscious alien from his backside before Flaxley raged towards him once more.)

FLAXLEY: A-ha!!! This time, you're going to bleed... matey!

(With a painful, defeated grimace on his face, Heiner raised his sword and frowned.)

HEINER: This isn't a fair fight! Do you have no honour?

FLAXLEY: You question my honour? Ha! I mock you! This fight will be fair and just, not to mention easy!

HEINER: Well of course it will, I have an alien impaled in my arse!

(Flaxley scoffed.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah, right. Do you realise how many times I've heard that excuse?

HEINER: Eh?

FLAXLEY: Look, never mind that. You shall now die!

(Looking forward to gutting Heiner in the most painful way imaginable for what he'd done to Croxton, Flaxley grinned from ear to ear. Before he could strike him down however, the air was filled with a cacophony of shouting and the battle fell silent, almost as if it had been ordered to a halt by a higher force. Worst of all, he then heard Kritz release an anguished cry. Looking somewhat tortured, he immediately spun around to be greeted by the sight of Morten leading Phisele from the cabins on the Colloskayak with a sword at her throat.)

FLAXLEY: That bastard!

(Desperate not to let Heiner out of his sight, he then stepped aside him to watch as Kritz approach Morten.

It was as if someone had frozen the battle in time. The bandits were amazed to see their second in command again and had stopped fighting upon his shouted command. The allies had simply reacted to them stopping and could only gape at Morton's despicable act.

As Kritz approached Morten, she had no idea what she'd say. Very much in the moment, on the other hand, Morten said plenty.)

MORTEN: Now stop! Everybody stop!

(He looked across to Heiner and smiled as he continued to hold the sword to Phisele's neck and usher her along.)

KRITZ: Everybody *has* stopped, now let the girl go!

(Morten rolled his eyes.)

MORTEN: Yeah, like that was my only demand!

KRITZ: Then what?

MORTEN: Surrender! Surrender or the girl gets it!

(Watching on, Heiner beamed.)

HEINER: Seeing this takes the pain in my arse away a little. Don't fret though Flaxley, you did well to almost stop me.

FLAXLEY: Damn you, Heiner!

(As she watched from the deck of the Colloskayak, Mandika bit her lip and prayed quietly to herself.)

MANDIKA: Go on Morten, kill her, kill her...

(Looking for the best way to save Phisele, Kritz thought hard. Not giving her time to think of a way out, however, Morten raised his voice.)

MORTEN: Hey, no funny business! Do you want me to kill her?

KRITZ: Hey but if we surrender you'll kill her anyway!

(Morten shrugged.)

MORTEN: We might! But then we might not. Her only hope of a chance is for you to surrender!

(Seeing his point, Kritz sighed. Looking nervous, Phisele pouted and sighed outwardly.)

PHISELE: I'm bored of this game now, Morten! I want to go back inside!

(Morten gave an evil laugh.)

MORTEN: You foolish little girl! This was never a game. I tricked you.

PHISELE: What?

MORTEN: You walked onto my sword of your own accord and now your friends are all going to die!

PHISELE: You said you were on our team now, that's why you weren't in a cell!

MORTEN: I weren't in a cell 'cause that idiot Flaxley broke the door. I just walked out, fooled you and now I've won the day for my men!

(Phisele nodded.)

PHISELE: Oh! In that case...

(As Morten flew over the side of the ship with his own sword impaled in his head, the battle resumed. Kritz was so proud of the psychotic little Phisele she could have cried. With the fight still to be won, however, she packed her back into the cabins again then came back fighting.

As the fight resumed the death toll soon started to rise way beyond the depths of inhumanity. With magic to aid their battle, Bonson, Lefiat, Mandika and Kritz had been able to defend themselves with relative ease; with only swords for their salvation however, the Leathrock soldiers were now in single figures. With a good fifty or so men still in the thick of things, the bandits soon found themselves well on top. The crew of the Colloskayak were now reduced to defence while the bandits tried to find a way past Bonson's walls of flames to strike them down. Knowing that if he stopped firing the magic at any point they'd all die, Bonson even managed to resist the temptation to complain about the extreme arm ache he was suffering.

In their personal battle, Flaxley and Heiner had seen the pendulum swing once again. While Morten thought he was achieving something, Heiner had been on top. Now he was gone, Flaxley was ready to strike him down. Unable to retreat for the alien that protruded from his buttock, Heiner held his sword firm and scowled obstinately.)

HEINER: Do your worst Flaxley, I don't go down easily!

(Flaxley scoffed.)

FLAXLEY: Huh! That's what my wife said when I first met her but that proved to be false too.

HEINER: Joker, huh?

FLAXLEY: I can be quite witty when I want to be, yes!

HEINER: Well this isn't over! You couldn't beat me before so what makes you think you can beat me now?

FLAXLEY: Well, before you didn't have a three foot tall green alien stuck up your arse!

HEINER: Well... now I do!

FLAXLEY: Indeed! So you have a choice, would you like me to kill you or wait for Derek to regain consciousness so he can fry you alive?

(Heiner sneered.)

HEINER: Neither! Now are we gonna fight or what?

(Flaxley shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: Well, okay!

(With that, he lashed into him with a varied sortie of extreme sword attacks. With eyes on stalks, Heiner somehow managed to deflect them, however. Undeterred by his lack of success, Flaxley then stepped up his game and attacked with such intensity that he forced Heiner back a good few feet making Derek's horn poke deeper into his buttock with every backward movement he made. Once the sortie ended, a full minute later, Flaxley frowned with frustration.)

FLAXLEY: You know, by rights you ought to be dead by now!

HEINER: Probably! Ouch!!!

(And thus, Flaxley came at him once more. This time he added punches to the mix but still Heiner somehow managed to keep him at bay. His backside was by now throbbing in agony and he was running out of room to back up.)

HEINER: Argh!!! I hate you, Flaxley! I wish we'd killed you back in Tifaeris!

FLAXLEY: Well, it's a mistake you won't live to regret for much longer!

(As Flaxley laid into him for a third time, Heiner staggered back a good few feet and fell to the ground screaming in agony. By now, Derek's horn was touching the bone.)

HEINER: Yow!!!

(Flaxley nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Die screaming, I like that! Very fitting!

(Heiner shook his head and sighed in defeat.)

HEINER: For fuck sake just kill me now, you...

(Having lost all hope for just a moment, Heiner's eyes then lit up. Flaxley had inadvertently backed him towards the key and knocked him down right over it.

Heiner's snarl went from a smirk in a matter of milliseconds. Looking insane with vengeful thoughts, he snapped up the key then twisted to hold it up towards Flaxley.

Being too far away to just slash him dead, Flaxley froze.)

FLAXLEY: Fuck!

HEINER: Ha, gotta love that pendulum!

FLAXLEY: No you haven't! Fuck!

(Convinced he'd met his end, Flaxley frowned and lowered his sword.)

FLAXLEY: Look, let the others live and I promise not to do anything.

HEINER: You can't do anything anyway, Flaxley. As soon as you move I'm going to wish you dead!

(He gave him a conceited grin and somehow managed to get to his feet. Grimacing with the pain as Derek hung from his backside, Heiner gritted his teeth.)

HEINER: Killing you is going to be a monumental pleasure, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Has to be said, for a guy with an alien stuck so far up his butt he can barely move, you're pretty chirpy!

(Heiner forced an insincere laugh.)

HEINER: I can afford to be. I won! Say, before you die, I just want you take a look at your allies over there keeping my men at bay. Such a valiant effort. Shame they're all about to die. Except the pretty ones, obviously. They'll have to surrender.

(Flaxley sneered.)

FLAXLEY: Kritz will never surrender!

HEINER: Kritz?

FLAXLEY: The prettiest one!

(Heiner chuckled.)

HEINER: The scantily clad tart? She'll surrender to save that little girl and I'll be banging her by midnight! Kritz that is! Trust me; she won't mourn you for long!

(He beamed.)

HEINER: Now, stand tall and I'll let you die with honour. I won't do the same for this green guy; he's been nothing but a pain in my arse!

(Flaxley shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: I shall die cursing your name, Heiner. Do your worst. Death doesn't scare me!

HEINER: Well, maybe it should! Now... it's time you weren't here.

(With that, he gave Flaxley an evil grin that left him in no doubt his time was about to come. With no more than a split second to react or die, Flaxley stepped forward to

lash his blade at him, only to hear the words he feared.)

HEINER: Die! Die! Die! Die! Die!

(Expecting the sting of a painful death, Flaxley closed his eyes and winced. A few seconds later, however, he opened them again and scratched his head, baffled as to why he was still breathing.)

FLAXLEY: Huh?

(Just then, a commotion behind him drew his attention. With extreme urgency, he spun around and saw the bandits dropping dead like flies while his allies stood on and watched in horror. Looking baffled, Flaxley glared into Heiner's eyes.)

FLAXLEY: What the?

(Heiner's eyes seemed glazed as if he was lost in a trance. Coldly he continued to say the word "die" over and over and his men fell to the deck one by one.)

FLAXLEY: This is weird!

(Wearing a solemn expression, Heiner then stopped talking and looked down at himself. With no more enemies to fight, Flaxley's allies looked across, sharing his bewilderment.)

BONSON: What the bloody hell's going on?

MANDIKA: I don't understand!

(As he looked down to his feet, Heiner then muttered one final word.)

HEINER: Die!

(With that, he collapsed forwards. Flaxley winced at the sound of ripping flesh as he tore free of the horn he'd been impaled on. As Heiner's body hit the floor, Derek remained standing, rubbing his eyes as blood dripped down his horn.)

DEREK: Man that was intense!

(He looked up at the bewildered Flaxley and placed his hands on his hips.)

DEREK: You're probably wondering what happened aren't you?

(Flaxley just stared at him with a baffled expression mounted on his face.)

DEREK: Thought so!

(As the surviving Leathrock soldiers raced over with the rest of the party, Derek looked to them all and smiled.)

DEREK: I read his mind, you see! I couldn't really help it seeing as I was impaled in his arse. Thing is, he held the key and I projected the thoughts into his head. I wasn't sure I could but it's amazing how close to someone you can be when you're literally inside them!

(Flaxley and Kritz smiled at one another.)

DEREK: Not in that way!!!

(Kritz shrugged innocently.)

KRITZ: What?

DEREK: Nothing. I think we deserve a rum!

(Bonson beamed.)

BONSON: Indeed! And what with all the casualties on our side, there's more than enough to go round again!

(Immediately, he hung his head.)

BONSON: Even for me, that was bloody insensitive!

(He shrugged.)

BONSON: Oh well, what's done is done. I've forgiven myself, now I'm moving on!

(With that, he raced away to make sure he was first in line for the rum. Watching him go, Flaxley allowed himself a chuckle.)

FLAXLEY: Come on, chaps. Let's get back on our ship, then we can sink this one and get off home.

(Derek nodded and blew on his fingers.)

DEREK: Some lightning magic to the hull ought to do the trick, Flaxley.

FLAXLEY: Excellent.

(A few minutes later, Flaxley stood upon the deck of the Colloskayak with Kritz at his side, his gold chain around his neck and two others in his hand, watching Heiner's ship go down. Watching with them, Kassy looked like a broken woman. Standing just behind her, Derek, Mandika and the newly bald Lefiat said nothing as the sea helped suck any trace of Heiner beneath the waves. Bonson, of course, was onto his second rum by now and having a knees up with the surviving Leathrock soldiers in the dining room.)

FLAXLEY: That's the last we'll see of the sceptre of the gods!

KRITZ: And the necklaces?

FLAXLEY: I'm keeping mine but we'll dump the other two on the way home.

KRITZ: Cool!

DEREK: So the key's gone has it?

(Flaxley nodded and turned to him.)

FLAXLEY: Yeah. Hopefully it'll corrode away like the other one's did!

(Derek nodded.)

FLAXLEY: Oh, and nice work today, chaps. Once again we fought together and came out alive. Oh, and thanks, Derek. I thought I was done for twice and both times you kicked arse on my behalf!

(Derek looked stumped.)

DEREK: Twice?

FLAXLEY: Yeah! You knocked the key out of Heiner's hand with your lightning magic right at the start of the battle!

(Derek shook his head.)

DEREK: No I didn't.

(He gestured towards Lefiat with his head.)

FLAXLEY: You're kidding?

(Looking amazed he stepped towards Lefiat.)

FLAXLEY: Seriously? That was you?

(Lefiat shrugged.)

LEFIAT: Well, I had to do something; I'm a knight for fuck sake. Like you said.

(Flaxley nodded, clearly impressed.)

FLAXLEY: Thanks, Lefiat! I owe you my life. In fact by knocking that key away so accurately, we all owe you our lives!

(Lefiat shrugged modestly.)

LEFIAT: It wasn't that accurate!

FLAXLEY: Are you kidding? A tiny key from what? Thirty feet away?

LEFIAT: Yeah, but I was aiming for his head!

FLAXLEY: Oh!

(He chuckled.)

FLAXLEY: Then that's quite a miss!

LEFIAT: Yeah!

MANDIKA: Miss or not, he protected me well. And now he needs a new pot 'cause he kinda looks like Bonson. There's no way on earth I'm going to get into bed with him looking like that!

LEFIAT: I'll have to get a toupee! I don't want to look like Bonson either!

KRITZ: I wonder what he'd say to that if he was here!

DEREK: I shudder to think.

MANDIKA: Shall we go inside then guys?

FLAXLEY: Why not?

(As Flaxley, Lefiat, Derek and Mandika headed inside, Kritz stepped up to her sister to urge her to join them.)

KRITZ: Come on!

(Kassy looked to her with tears pouring down her face.)

KRITZ: Hey, you okay?

(Kassy shook her head.)

KASSY: Those weren't just soldiers who died, Kritz, they were my friends! There was over forty of us a few days ago and now there's nine. We're coming home and we've saved the world but how am I supposed to feel good about it? I was their leader and I've led them to their graves!

(Kritz nodded. Kassy's pain sounded all too familiar.)

KRITZ: Kassy, this may sound harsh but you have to consider the alternative!

KASSY: What do you mean?

KRITZ: Well, Tifaeris was attacked again a few years ago, did you hear?

(Kassy looked stunned.)

KASSY: No!

KRITZ: Trepe again!

KASSY: Bitches!

KRITZ: This time we beat them.

(Kassy smiled half-heartedly.)

KASSY: Good!

KRITZ: Thing is, we lost all but five or six of our army, including Phisele's father. It was horrendous. I mean so many good people gone forever. Flaxley trained them and took them to war to fight at his side and then blamed himself for all the widows and orphans that were made.

KASSY: Harsh!

KRITZ: Yeah, but Phisele's mum told him he was right to do what he did and not to blame himself. If they hadn't followed Flaxley, things would have been much worse. Phisele and her mum, everybody could have been wiped out, just like all those years ago!

(Kassy nodded.)

KASSY: I see!

KRITZ: Good. Just like Flaxley, you ordered your people to do something and if you hadn't... then things would have been far worse for everyone. Those who died are heroes, Kassy. Just make sure the president knows that and that their memories are honoured!

(Kassy smiled.)

KASSY: You've become an amazing woman, Kritz. Mum and dad would be proud!

KRITZ: Yeah?

KASSY: Nah! Mum would, but dad... he's probably spinning in his grave right now! You and me, girl, we're not the prima donna's he raised.

(They both chuckled then headed for the cabins.)

KASSY: So, what now?

KRITZ: Back to Leathrock, I guess!

KASSY: And then?

KRITZ: Home!

(Kassy nodded and gave a sigh of relief as they entered the cabin doors. She was finally free to use the word she'd avoided for a long time and it felt good.)

KASSY: Home!

(And thus, they disappeared through the doors, leaving an empty deck behind them to join the celebrations in the dining hall. As always, they remained true to their belief that celebrating should always wait until victory has been confirmed and the fight is at its end. That time had come. With the mission complete and the ship heading at full speed back to Leathrock, there was nothing left to do but eat, drink, be merry and thank the stars that they'd lived through it.

Had anyone been on deck at the back end of the Colloskayak, a few minutes after Kritz and Kassy had headed inside, they'd have seen the mast of Heiner's ship finally sink beneath the waves and begin its descent to the bottom of the ocean where it'd rest forever. The final resting place for the sceptre of the gods and the men who'd tried to manipulate it for their own personal gain. The bodies of the fallen Leathrock soldiers, on the other hand, were returning home on the Colloskayak to be buried as the heroes they were. Many a toast was held in their honour by the survivors as they sailed for home. Their sacrifice would never be forgotten.

Tifaeris – Several days later

Flaxley's home was among the finest in all Tifaeris. The wood was the toughest, smoothest timber available and the structure was as sturdy as it could possibly be. The windows were sized to allow optimum light into the room and the curtains, stolen by Kritz from a hotel in Port Shehi, were of the highest quality. The décor and furniture, which one again, Flaxley daren't enquire into the origins of, was also of the finest stock. It was no exaggeration to say that Flaxley, Kritz and the rest of the travelling party were looking forward to getting back there. Even Mandika was looking forward to a rest on a comfortable chair and maybe a nap before retrieving her coach and heading back to Guevina.

After what had felt like an eternity away, as soon as the travellers arrived outside Flaxley and Kritz's home, they wasted no time in alighting the coach and heading for the door. Having waited impatiently for a moment while Flaxley grabbed together their luggage from the rear compartment, they all bundled inside as soon as the door was open. The only exception was Phisele. Looking like she was about to explode with excitement, she raced towards her house shouting excitedly that she was home.

As Bonson, Lefiat, Mandika and Derek took seats on the numerous sofas that lined the walls, they all exhaled like tired old folk. Having been in a coach for the last seven hours as they headed back from Leathrock, the seats felt like heavenly clouds to their backsides. Also anxious to take the weight off her feet, Kritz sat herself at a chair around the table that dominated the centre of the room and offered Kassy to do likewise. She'd opted to quit the Leathrock navy and spend some time getting to know her sister and see a bit of Tifaeris. Delighted to be home, Flaxley placed his hand lovingly on Kritz's shoulder and beamed.)

FLAXLEY: I'm never going out of that front door again!

(Kritz laughed to herself.)

KRITZ: I doubt you can resist the inn that long, my love!

FLAXLEY: In that case I'll use the side door, either way I'm never leaving Tifaeris

again!

KRITZ: Me either!

KASSY: I can't wait to take a look around. Last time I was here it was just a burned out shell with miserable hungry people, now it's just so beautiful. I really love that golden eagle on top of that building!

(Mandika scowled.)

MANDIKA: Yeah, we'll be taking that with us, thanks!

(Kritz gave her an apologetic grin and shrugged.)

KRITZ: You might not be able to, it's kinda cemented in up there!

MANDIKA: We'll find a way! Bloody thief!

(Fearing Mandika was about to rant, Bonson cut in.)

BONSON: So, the sceptre's gone has it?

FLAXLEY: Yup. Sunk to the bottom of the ocean.

BONSON: Shame that!

(He received several sideways glances.)

BONSON: Well think about it, we could have made anything!

DEREK: Such as?

BONSON: I dunno...

(Following a brief pause for thought, his eyes glazed over and he started to drool.)

BONSON: The key of ale, we could have made rivers of the stuff!

(He sighed lovingly.)

BONSON: Of course, we'd have used the Guevina recipe. The ale here in Tifaeris already tastes like it came straight out of a river.

(Flaxley frowned.)

FLAXLEY: So you don't fancy an ale then? Just one for the rest of us, is it?

BONSON: Don't be silly, it might taste like diluted cow shit but it's still ale. Set me up!

(With that, Flaxley chuckled and headed into the kitchen to fetch a barrel and some tankards.)

DEREK: I'd better go soon, Zanne is going to be furious!

KRITZ: Why? You were out saving the world!

DEREK: Like that'll change her mind. She's a woman; I'm bound to be in trouble!

(Kritz frowned.)

KRITZ: What's that supposed to mean? That fact *she's* unreasonable that doesn't mean *all* women are!

BONSON: Oh they are. Flaxley knows, he just isn't dumb enough to say so or he'll get no lovelies for a week!

DEREK: Exactly!

LEFIAT: I'm always getting the blame for stuff, even when I didn't do it. I never get any lovelies!

BONSON: Of course, only an idiot would say that when his wife is sitting right next to him!

(Sure enough, Mandika was glaring at Lefiat with a terrifying snarl on her face.)

LEFIAT: Oh shit!

MANDIKA: I'll give you "oh shit"! Honeymoon or not, you're getting no "lovelies" for a month!

(Bonson shook his head.)

BONSON: See?

(Just then, the front door creaked open and Phisele's mother entered, carefully carrying a baby in each arm. Having opened the door for her, a sheepish looking

Phisele then crept in behind her. Immediately, Kritz got to her feet, tears welling in her eyes.)

KRITZ: Aw...

(She approached her and took her babies from her carefully.)

KRITZ: I'm sorry, we just got back!

PHISELE'S MUM: That's okay. They've just this minute gone to sleep.

(She smiled.)

PHISELE'S MUM: Did you get everything sorted out?

KRITZ: Yeah, we did! Um... can you excuse me a minute? I'll just put these two to bed then I'll be back out!

PHISELE'S MUM: Sure!

(As Kritz headed for the bedrooms, Kassy watched her go and beamed. Suddenly it was real. She was an aunt. She had family. As Kritz left, Flaxley came back with a barrel over one shoulder and a tray of empty tankards. Bonson sighed merrily.)

BONSON: Excellent! The beauty of ale is, even a shit ale is still a good ale.

(Flaxley chuckled at Bonson's comment then smiled at Phisele's mum.)

FLAXLEY: Hello there... neighbour!

(Looking solemn, Phisele's mum held out her palm towards Flaxley.)

PHISELE'S MUM: Sorry about this, I think Phisele might have stolen this!

(Phisele hung her head. Flaxley looked down at her outstretched palm and shook his head.)

FLAXLEY: No, that's hers!

(Phisele's mum looked baffled.)

PHISELE'S MUM: But... she claims it's Leathrock's highest award for outstanding bravery.

FLAXLEY: It is!

PHISELE'S MUM: Huh?

FLAXLEY: We all got one. Phisele here got embroiled in something nasty, and to be blunt, she wasn't afraid for a second. Just like your husband, she's a heroine!

BONSON: Her husband was a heroine?

FLAXLEY: Shut it, Bonson! You should be...

(Before he could finish, he received a tremendous slap across the face from Phisele's mum.)

FLAXLEY: Thanks for that!

PHISELE'S MUM: She's all I have left, Flaxley! How dare you put her in danger???

(Phisele cringed. She knew that any minute now Flaxley would tell her mother how she'd stowed away and lied about being given permission to come in the first place.)

FLAXLEY: Actually...

(He looked at Phisele trembling and sighed.)

FLAXLEY: Actually, we weren't expecting danger but you're right. Completely my fault. Kritz was livid too. I'm sorry!

(Mandika was furious.)

MANDIKA: Wait a god damn minute! She...

(At this point Mandika noticed Phisele clench her fist and clammed up immediately.)

MANDIKA: Nothing!

PHISELE'S MUM: Okay, no harm done. I just don't want to lose my daughter; she's the only reminder I have of Ulrich!

FLAXLEY: Ulrich?

PHISELE'S MUM: My husband!!!

(As Phisele's mum stormed out, dragging Phisele behind her, Flaxley cringed.)

BONSON: Flaxley, you're exceedingly dumb sometimes! It has to be said.
(Feeling quite the fool, Flaxley placed the barrel and tankards on the table then about turned and headed for the bedrooms.)

FLAXLEY: Best say hello to the little ones, help yourselves to the diluted cow shit!
(As he walked into the children's room, he saw Kritz standing over them looking lost in thought.)

FLAXLEY: You okay, my love?
(Kritz sighed and looked to him with puppy dog eyes.)

KRITZ: I can't do it anymore, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Can't do what?
(She gestured to the sleeping infants.)

KRITZ: Look!
(Looking down at their tiny faces, Flaxley smiled.)

FLAXLEY: Lovely!

KRITZ: Aren't they?

FLAXLEY: Yeah, they are. So, um... what can't you do?
(She looked up to him with a saddened frown.)

KRITZ: I'm a mum not a warrior. I could be either but I wanna be their mum. If we go getting ourselves killed they're going to grow up without us. Anything could happen when we go off on these missions.
(Flaxley nodded thoughtfully.)

KRITZ: They've got to come first from now on. I don't care about anything else!

FLAXLEY: Seeing Kassy has brought this on, hasn't it?

KRITZ: Yeah. We were unlucky to lose our families but there's no need for it to happen to these two. I want them to have what we didn't. It's over for me, no more missions.

FLAXLEY: I hear you! And I feel the same.
(Kritz sighed.)

KRITZ: Do you though? You're a knight, darling, you love missions.

FLAXLEY: Yeah, I do!
(He shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: But I love those two more!
(He gently kissed Kritz's forehead.)

FLAXLEY: I'm in, darling. And just in case Daman Siria has other ideas, I think I know how to put an end to his little game.
(With that, he paced back into the main room and stood tall.)

FLAXLEY: Listen chaps! I've got something important to tell you!
(All eyes turned his way.)

FLAXLEY: Every time we've got together something diabolical has happened. We always find ourselves in mortal danger and Kritz and I have agreed, we're not doing it anymore.
(He smiled to Mandika.)

FLAXLEY: Mandika, I love you. You're like family to me but I think it's best if you and Lefiat don't come here anymore and I won't go to Guevina!
(Mandika was horrified.)

MANDIKA: But...

FLAXLEY: Oh, you too, Bonson! Sorry old friend, I'm sure you understand!

BONSON: Well that's an awful thing to decide, Flaxley!
(Flaxley shrugged.)

FLAXLEY: I just want to make sure Daman can't get the six of us together again!

BONSON: Wouldn't it be easier just to kill Lefiat though? I know I'd be okay with that!

LEFIAT: Hey!!!

(Mandika's face clouded over.)

MANDIKA: You know what? Fuck you, Flaxley!

FLAXLEY: Don't be like that, Mandika! I'm doing this for my children!

(As Kritz returned to the room, she stepped to his side.)

KRITZ: We need to look after our family now. I love you guys, but every time we meet we risk more than I'm willing to sacrifice.

FLAXLEY: Exactly!

MANDIKA: Well, fuck you both. I came here to honeymoon with my new husband and have a great time with my friends and what do I get? You sabotage my room, drag me off on a voyage to hell and back where I get covered in crap and attacked while your psychotic little protégé makes my life a misery... then when we get back you tell me to piss off 'cause you never want to see me again!

DEREK: Be fair, Mandika! You know what happens when we get together and they have to put their children first now!

MANDIKA: It's okay for you, Derek. You're not on the "fuck off" list!

BONSON: Anyway, what's to stop the three of us coming to Tifaeris for our holidays, what are you gonna do about it?

FLAXLEY: Simple. I could have you banished from Tifaeris with instructions to kill you on sight!

(Kritz spammed her forehead.)

KRITZ: Tactful!

FLAXLEY: Well, he asked!

KRITZ: Look, it doesn't mean we can't all see each other, just not all at the same time.

DEREK: Exactly, you know I'll come and visit Guevina but not when these two do!

KRITZ: Yeah and if you come here, just don't all come together!

MANDIKA: No. Bollocks to that and bollocks to the lot of you! Bonson, Lefiat! We're going home!

BONSON: What? But we just got...

MANDIKA: Now, or kiss goodbye to that paid retirement!

FLAXLEY: Oh don't be like that!

MANDIKA: Lefiat, tell Flaxley I'm not talking to him!

LEFIAT: Flaxley, Mandika isn't...

FLAXLEY: I heard!!!

MANDIKA: Come on, we're going home right now!

KRITZ: Don't be silly, Mandika you can't just go like that, come on!

MANDIKA: No? Watch us!

(Sure enough, within minutes the royal coach was heading back to Guevina with Lefiat and an irate Mandika inside it and Bonson as coachman. As they stood outside Flaxley's home, watching them pass through the town gates, despite their best efforts to convince them not to go, Flaxley, Kritz, Derek and Kassy all shook their heads in unison.)

KASSY: Head strong that Mandika, isn't she?

(They all nodded.)

KRITZ: We are doing the right thing, aren't we?

DEREK: Nothing I wouldn't have done if I was in your situation!

FLAXLEY: I hope they'll be okay!

DEREK: Don't worry; I'm sure they'll visit once they've calmed down.

FLAXLEY: As long as they don't all come together, that's fine by me!

KRITZ: Yeah, it's the only way we can be certain of stopping Daman, he might claim we're under no thrall but that's the fifth time now!

FLAXLEY: Exactly!

(Kassy clapped her hands excitedly.)

KASSY: Mind if I see the twins now, Kritz?

(Kritz laughed.)

KRITZ: Okay, but don't pick them up if they're sleeping!

KASSY: Okay!

(With that, she darted back into the house excitedly.)

DEREK: I suppose I'd better get going too. I'll see you at the inn, Flaxley! That's if Zanne lets me out!

(He then headed for home looking like a man with all the woes of the world on his shoulders. As they watched him go, Flaxley mused.)

FLAXLEY: Do you think we'll end up like that?

KRITZ: What do you mean?

FLAXLEY: You complaining about everything I do, and me not wanting to go home!

KRITZ: I hope not!

FLAXLEY: Me too, let's never let it get like that, my love. I love being with you and I love the way you give me licence to be myself!

KRITZ: Yeah, I love that about me too.

(They both chuckled.)

KRITZ: I know how much you love me, Flaxley. I'll never lose sight of that.

(Just then, she produced two gold chains from down her top.)

KRITZ: By the way, I know you asked me to sling these in the sea but I thought I'd keep them!

(Flaxley was dumbstruck.)

KRITZ: Relax, we can melt them down. They'll be useless to power that sceptre but we can sell the gold and buy that new sword you wanted.

(Flaxley's eyes glazed over.)

FLAXLEY: Kritzeveltia Skizmotzo Ballevontios, I love you!

KRITZ: Yeah, I'm a great lady, I know! And you're a great man, so I figure you deserve it!

FLAXLEY: Nonsense!

(He raised a conceited eyebrow.)

FLAXLEY: I'm not a great man, I'm an exceptional man!

(Rolling her eyes, Kritz turned away.)

KRITZ: I wish you wouldn't do that!

(As they headed inside, Flaxley frowned.)

FLAXLEY: Are you complaining?

KRITZ: No, I'm just saying!

FLAXLEY: Sounds like complaining to me!

KRITZ: Well it would, you always do that!

FLAXLEY: Oh I do, do I?

(As they headed indoors, arguing all the way, Derek stood in his doorway watching them. With a sigh, he turned to go indoors.)

DEREK: Thank heavens Zanne and I aren't like that!

(As he stepped inside his home and closed the door behind him, a lone figure strolled down the centre of the thoroughfare outside. Looking thoroughly insulted, he stopped walking and gaped in horror as he watched Guevina's royal coach roll further and further into the distance.)

OMKI: Bastards!

(With that, he took off like a rocket after it.)

(The following day as the royal coach returned to Guevina, Queen Mandika remained in a foul mood. Asking her how her honeymoon went was definitely not a good idea. After all their endeavours together Bonson, Lefiat and Mandika all felt somewhat betrayed and let down by Flaxley, Kritz and Derek. As far as they were concerned they were part of the team and they'd been rejected in the most callous way. Rather than focussing on her new marriage and making the most of everything life had given her, Mandika especially chose to remain angry. When asked about the rumours that Flaxley was dead, her cries of "he is to me" only fuelled to convince the people. She even helped the "I hate Flaxley society" pay for a trip to Tifaeris to dance on his grave.

In Tifaeris, life returned to normal. Flaxley and Kritz's relationship continued to flourish and Derek and Zanne settled in no time. Kassy couldn't have been happier. Getting to know her little sister and the twins was wonderful and she even found a new love. Kritz loved having her around so much, she even pulled some strings to get her a job at the inn. A job which came with free accommodation. As a result, she settled in no time and opted never to return to Leathrock. Flaxley, Kritz and Derek had no idea how bitter their Guevina based allies were about the whole situation. As far as they were concerned they were all friends but had to avoid the six of them meeting in the same place at the same time. There was nothing heartless about it.

As for the surviving Leathrock soldiers, they were all welcomed as homecoming heroes and Sanetza itself was put on the map. Desperate to make amends for his nation's conduct in Sanetza, the president arranged for small parties to visit the Maishu tribe and offer gifts by way of an apology. Little did the president know that a few centuries later Leathrock would go on to ravage the land and wipe the Maishu from the face of the planet in a quest to build an empire. This would become the legacy. For a short period of time there would be peace but history would always remember the slaughter that came after.

Daman Siria, of course, was extremely happy. Heiner's plan had been foiled and the world was saved once again. The sceptre was lost in the ocean and two of the chains to power it had been destroyed. Never again would man be able to manipulate it. The ultimate power of "do as I say or die", the ability to strike a man dead by merely wishing it, was lost with the corroding key somewhere out in the ocean.

History would never mention Heiner or his plan. The tale of a group of sailors heading into the open sea to search for lost comrades and discovering a new continent was all the books would mention. The people of the world would have no concept of how close they came to being slaves of a vile dictator with the power to take their lives for not bowing to his every whim. The plaque on the memorial to those who never made it back from Sanetza was vague at best and merely seemed to indicate

gratitude for rescuing lost sailors. Nobody would ever know how much they owed their lives to those who lost theirs in... **The Voyage to Sanetza.**

THE END

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