

To Know Is Not Enough by Otlal3
Chapter 7: The Sea of Meemore

A long, hearty laugh jumped into the air and floated across the open sky, touching the trees and mocking the sing-song of the wild birds. Keith was delighted at the letter from Lance and the Princess, and tears of joy collected in the corners of his eyes. He read the letter over again, admiring the slanting curves of Allura's delicate print. At the end of her first entry, Keith held the parchment to his nose, yearning for the sweetness of her scent. He smelled only the dryness of the paper and the crispness of the morning air. The smell of woman lingered only in his memory. Keith looked over Lance's writing, noting that his friend printed in all capitals with the occasional lower case errantly tossed into the tight, compressed lettering. The unpredictable nature of Lance's writing, the reader never knowing which letter would be a small one and in which word, was reflective of his personality. Keith chuckled at this insight, and tucked the letter into his sack.

He looked up from his perch and the sun struck his eyes, a sharp knife of penetrating white. He held up his hand to block it, and an image on the horizon caught his eye. A ship. He had been waiting several nights for the ship to come ashore, and its approach was imminent. Keith stood and walked to the edge of the water. The Sea of Meemore lapped at his feet. The edge of the water approached land in small, lazy waves, pulled tight to the surface of the planet in beads confined by gravity. Keith thought of the substance mercury on Earth, how it rolled across surfaces in a liquid ball. The sea's waters were a viscous white substance derived from an unknown source, an array of rainbows dancing across the surface. The waves reached out to him, then quickly rescinded their offer, a repetitive invitation that Keith did not take lightly. He had no desire to swim in this ocean, so taunting before him. It was a sea of poison.

Keith turned to the grazing Orion and removed his saddle and reins. After brushing the horse down, he rested his head on its shoulder and gazed out at the milky sea. "We must part ways, Orion. This ship can't take you. You will travel faster without me. Should you get to the other side of the sea before me, wait. I have been told it will take a week to sail across. Go fast. Be safe," Keith whispered to the equine, and with a breath, he slapped Orion's rear and the horse shot off. A moment of worry flashed across Keith's face. He knew the horse was smart and would simply follow the coastline until he reached the docking pier, but he didn't know what obstacles the horse would face, what predators might stalk him. In the interest of time and necessity, it was a risk they both were willing to take.

Orion was no longer in sight, and Keith rummaged through a bag to find the spyglass he had packed. He extended the scope to its full length and the etched brass cone glimmered in the sunlight. The ship appeared so close in the foggy glass, bobbing in the water with its sails full like the stomach of a well-fed man. Another scan of the ship and Keith saw he was being watched. A ragged man with long white beard and turban was perched on the bow of the ship watching Keith through his own spyglass. They observed each other, the silence of their standoff neither threatening nor comforting. They would meet in time, as friend or foe.

By early afternoon, the ship glided to the pier where Keith sat waiting. He stood as the crew tossed thick ropes around the pilings, securing the large vessel in place. Gentle waves bumped the gunwale against the dock and a rhythmic clapping of wood against wood sounded. The captain jumped from the stern and landed soundly on the wooden planks of the pier. Keith and the captain silently measured one another as they stood face to face.

“Good day, stranger. What brings you to the shores of this terrible sea?” The captain stroked his long silky beard of white and squinted into the sun. His green eyes were deeply set beneath lines of skin and a heavy brow, his mouth a thin stroke of pink on a canvas of brown skin. He wore heavy woolen clothes, grey and tattered over his tall frame. The old captain admired the posture of the young man before him, standing tall and confident in an unknown setting.

“I seek safe and fast passage across the Sea of Meemore. I was told there was a ship that frequented these waters in trade. Is it yours?” Keith asked.

“Yes. My life is crossing these waters. I know the route well. But I must warn you, no trip across this sea is safe. You fall overboard, you die.”

“I understand, and am willing to take the risk. I can pay you in Denubian gold, half now and half when we reach the shore across,” Keith bargained. His experience with Arusian sailors was limited, and he opted not to risk more than was a fair trade.

“Very well. Two ounces now, two when you set foot on the far shore. It’s a ten day sail. We leave this evening, at the setting sun. Gather your sea legs, stranger.” The captain stared past Keith at a caravan of wagons approaching with goods. He nodded to his passenger and stepped by him to greet the tradesmen. Keith heard the captain’s footsteps pause, and he turned to see the old man looking him over once more. The sea captain turned quickly away and continued toward shore.

Keith shouldered the saddle and carried it on board the ship, shifting slightly as he transitioned from solid ground to moving vessel. He noted the name of the ship – The Lion’s Den. It had to be a good omen. Nonetheless, when he returned to the dock for the rest of his belongings, Keith securely fitted Alfor’s sword to his back where it would stay throughout the voyage. His years fighting battles had made him wary of strangers, despite the generosity and kindness of the typical Arusian.

As the sun set, the white abyss of water morphed into cascade of rainbows swirling together in eddies and waves, a mirror of color stretching before them. The crew quickly boarded the Lion’s Den and without instruction unfurled the main sail. It pined for the wind, thrashing in its search for breath until it gasped into place. The ship sighed under the pull of the wind and cut through the rolling waves under its weight.

With most of his belongings secured in the hatch below deck, Keith sat atop a barrel and watched the activity of the crew. This was a seasoned ship, and rugged team of men and one woman breathed life into the large vessel. They ran about, their duties familiar and their movements quick. No one paid notice to Keith’s presence, and he assumed passengers were not an

uncommon occurrence. He wondered how the captain managed his crew, and his attention turned to the old man standing by the helm. The captain barked out instructions to his first mate, reciting bearings and star map coordinates, and Keith caught a slight twinkle in his eyes. Keith smiled and stroked his growing beard. Sailing was the old man's life, as flying the lion was to Keith. No, it was more than life, it was birth and death. Each time Keith commanded the Black Lion and Voltron, life was breathed into him and he felt purpose and passion in every cell of his body. When he left it, that flame quietly died. Keith was certain the captain of this ship experienced the same ebb and flow in his soul, so attached to this ship.

As the shore became a faded green smear on the rainbow horizon, Keith turned his attention to the breeze on his face. He scratched at his beard and thought again about shaving, a problem he so desperately wanted to solve. As he contemplated his scruffy appearance, he glimpsed at the water before him. It slowly shifted from a brilliant palette to a heavy black, its colors lost one by one to the setting sun.

"Quite a sight, isn't it?" The captain spoke from behind Keith.

"Sure is. I've never seen anything like it," Keith responded, his eyes now on the captain.

"Mmm. It's probably best that way. It's quite deceiving in its beauty. No one lives on its shores because it entices men, women, and children to drink from it like a mother's milk. Ingestion means death. Any poor soul who succumbs to its trap dies a death of the brain – torture of thought and memory."

"I see."

"There is a belief that one can survive this siren of a sea by swallowing a pebble each day. I don't know if it works, as I have yet to meet anyone who has survived such a calamity."

"Oh? Interesting."

"Each of my crew carries a pouch of pebbles, per my orders. Passengers get one as part of their fare," the captain stated as he tossed a small satchel of grinding pebbles to Keith.

"Thank you, Captain," Keith responded, aware of the gesture but uncertain of the task.

"So. You captain a different type of ship, am I not mistaken?" the captain asked, his eyes finding Keith's.

"Yes, I do," Keith said slowly. He wasn't expecting this. "How –"

"Any Arusian would recognize you, Captain. You are a legend. You captain the greatest ship on this planet. You are the Ahab of Arus."

"Well, I hope I'm not quite as compulsive as Ahab," Keith responded with a small smile.

“My point is that you will not get far under your current guise if you require anonymity. As it is, none of my crew is native to this planet and thus is unaware of your identity.” The captain gestured his hand at the seven people on board, each having settled into their own nook on deck.

“I’m not really concerned about remaining anonymous at this point, Captain. Although my purpose for being here isn’t something I wish to discuss.”

“Understandable. Well, should you need shelter there are several empty hammocks below deck. Otherwise a calm night like tonight might warrant sleeping under the stars. Every true sailor enjoys the sparkling eyes of the sky,” the captain paused, his head turned upward. “What’s it like up there?”

The question surprised Keith, and it occurred to him that the captain was not seeking information, but was genuinely inquisitive. By virtue of his age and experience, Keith had assumed the man was worldlier than him. It was easy to forget that not all of Arus had access to the stars as he did.

“It is big, Captain. Larger than anything you can fathom. But it isn’t empty. It hums with life and energy, pulses and explosions, glimmers of light and beauty. I can’t really describe it any other way. But, if you’ll forgive me for making assumptions, I imagine the sensation of being up there is much like that of being on the sea – freeing yet volatile.” Keith reflected on his time in space and his heart fluttered with the thrill of his many space explorations. He missed the sensation of flying, the pull of gravity followed by the ease of floating. He missed feeling connected to his craft, to the stars, to the vastness.

“Sounds... wonderful,” the captain sighed. “Well, enjoy your first night on board, Captain Keith. Should you need me, I go by Captain Hame.”

“Thank you, Captain. And on your vessel I am simply Keith.”

The captain nodded and walked to the helm where he stood silently as the ship rose and fell over widening swells.