



Three days passed as I picked my way across the brutally rocky terrain in Rattlefax, travelling from town to town trying to glean whatever information I could about the region. Unfortunately, the inhabitants were as stony-faced as their homeland.

Eventually I reached the huge lake forming one of Rattlefax's borders. If my map was to be believed, then this lake covered the entirety of Ververst. I followed the coastline around toward the castle, a beautiful turquoise palace about half a league out over the water. Two equally beautiful galleons sat on either side of it - they must have been built here on the lake - and dozens of smaller boats flocked around the castle.

I paid for passage on a small merchant vessel and journeyed out to the castle. It was surrounded by towers armed with cannons, and I believe I caught one of them tracking my short journey. Docking at the edge of the small stilt-town surrounding the castle, I ventured inside.

The interior was decorated with thousands of coloured pearls and gleaming stones. It had an actual museum filled with records of Yorovash's sea life. It was, by far, the nicest place I had visited in weeks.

"Hello." A young woman had crept up beside me. "I'm Amala. Are you sure you're not lost? The museum isn't usually the first attraction in Ververst." She was smiling, and had flowing blonde hair, blue eyes, and the Ververstian turquoise-tinged skin. In her arms was a thick catalogue of the day's additions.

"A welcome change from recent sights," I said. "Does your ruler visit it often?"

She hesitated. "Lady Zorra... loves the museum. It helps her forget about all of Yorovash's politics, and lets her just surround herself with reminders of how little they mean in the scheme of things."

"Her lake is magnificent."

"It is more than magnificent," she said with surprising ferocity. "Yet once, it was even greater. A perfect circle of water - until Numinort and Yrn pushed their way onto it with their filthy industry." I heard her teeth grinding. "But Lady Zorra will push back."

I bowed, and stepped away from the wingshark skeleton I'd been eyeing. "I should go and get some rest. Thank you, Amala. Send the Lady this traveller's regards."

"And send the Empress mine."

I turned around, startled, but she was gone.

Act IV
Scene 3

Art of Steganography

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