

For the entire following day, I wandered the ports of Mornstallar in search of a captain willing to sail the notorious seas around Stormtithe, but eventually I found one: Zeel, captain of a ship called the *Last Light*.

“You’re just in time. We set off at dusk!” she exclaimed when I asked, in the most enthusiastic and carefree voice I had ever heard. “Sailing’s so much more fun at night, I’m sure you’d agree!”

That odd opinion set the tone for the journey to come. Zeel piloted her ship like a woman who knew she was on her last legs, and her crew seemed to share her apparent lust for a watery grave. Not surprisingly, I was alone in the travellers’ cabin, and gave up trying to sleep after the first few waves turned the room almost on its side.

I emerged onto the deck in the midst of a maelstrom. Waves taller than even Castle Lyre walled the ship in on all sides, and the torrential rain was pounding the wooden deck to within an inch of its life.

“Oh, hey!” cried Zeel from the helm. “You might want to grab some rope!”

“What, to hold onto?” I yelled back.

“No, tie yourself to something! We’re just getting started!”

After a long night, the storm finally subsided as daylight came streaming over the horizon. I had already been thrown all over the deck in my attempts to find some rope, and was now tied to the bulwark beside the whistling captain.

“Great, one of the smoother trips we’ve had this week,” she said. I had no idea if she was being serious. “Now, what was that you were screaming before? Something about a seagull?”

“Not a seagull,” I said as I pulled my amulet out of the hidden compartment in my sleeve and returned it to the string around my neck. “I was interested in anything you might know about Yorovash’s rulers.”

“Oh! I do know something. I know that weird gender thing. Apparently it was a law or something. No ruler controls territory adjacent to more than two other rulers of the same sex. Funny, right?”

“You found humour in those rocks we scraped, so I don’t believe I know what’s funny anymore.”

She laughed. “Well they were shaped like Lord Rylus’s head. You got a good look, so I’m sure you agree!”

Despite everything, I did chuckle.



white-skinned

scheduled

dupe or coax

ducked, avoided

able to be eaten

to tamper with; instrument

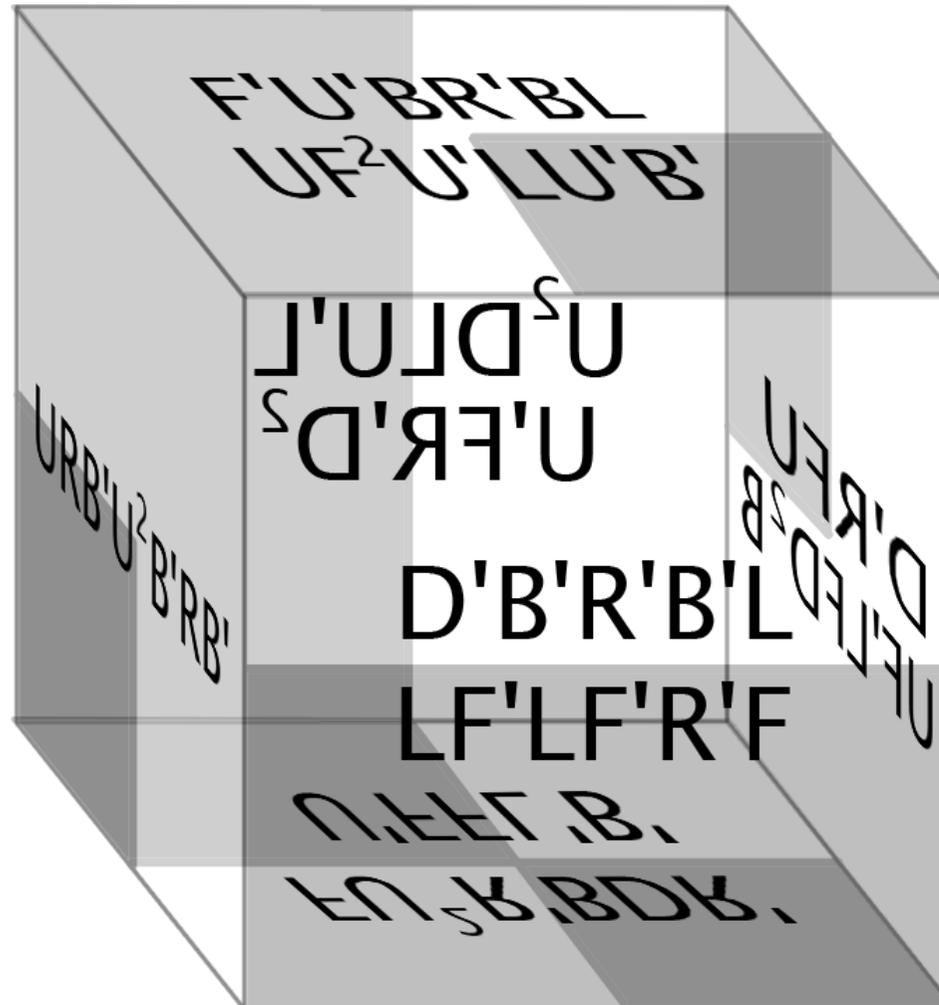
kidnap; seize control

annoying or catchy tune

amusing others; jesting

zealot; psycho

derided



bitter or sour; biting

an old breed of hound; wool blanket

untamed; beast

_____ republic; a fruit

resounding laugh, as of a witch

film; the place movies are shown

a pine box, say

unsolvable puzzle or riddle

staking; playing with interactive video

lifeform characterised by having hair

as example, *Despicable Me's* mascot