

“We’re almost clear.” Tevan muttered, looking at the misty horizon. “A few more minutes and...”

“Ship astern!” called the watchman.

“Damnation,” he spat. “Colours?”

“Can’t see yet, two of them. Three masts, full sail, narrow beam. They’re gaining.”

“Clipper traders?” Ardan asked. Tevan shook his head. “Not this time of year.”

He jumped turned around from the helm and peered into the early morning gloom behind them, scanning the horizon. The other ships were coming out of the east, the sun neatly silhouetting them, only their dark outlines were visible. By contrast the *Book of Days* would be fully illuminated.

“They must have spotted us coming around the cove.” Ardan said.

“Only if they were ready to sail and knew where we’d be,” Tevan spat. “It’s a trap.”

“Pirates?” Tania asked.

“Or hired hands. Somebody wants us caught, and badly. Without steam...” Tevan turned back to the waiting crew. “Full sail! Two points into the wind!”

The crew went to work with a will, unfurling the great masses of canvasses. Within minutes the ship was trimmed for full speed.

“Seven knots, Captain,” said the helmsmen, looking at the gauge.

“Not bad for sail,” Ardan commented.

“Not enough,” Tevan replied, sourly.

“They’ll catch us?” Tania asked.

“Eventually,” Tevan replied. “We’re too heavy. Without our engines we’re as quick as a barge.”

“What will they do if they catch us?”

“Depends. If we’re lucky they’ll just kill us.”

Tania’s face went white.

“You don’t need to scare her,” Ardan said. “She’s...”

“She’s got more reason to be scared than the rest of us,” Tevan snapped back. “She’s a rogue mage and a woman. She can guess the rest.”

“What can we do?”

“Captain! Ships forward!” the lookout called.

Tevan gave them both a resigned look.

“How many?” he said, not turning away.

“Three ships, same configuration, flying empire colours.”

“Empire ships!” Ardan replied, his countenance dropping into grim despair.  
“Already?”

The three empire ships ahead were closing fast. Tevan brought the *Book of Days* broadside and fired the cannons at them. One ship lost a mast, the rigging tumbling in a devastating mess. The other two ships came on. Tevan could see a man standing at the fo’c’sle, standing with his arms raised. He was familiar with the stance now.

“Magicians!” Tevan yelled. “All hands! Brace!”

They watched as the dark robed man clapped his hands together and a ball of flame appeared between them. With an incendiary roar it began rolling through the air towards their ship.

Tevan swung the helm over in an attempt to dodge, but the ship was too sluggish. The fireball arced down towards them, heading directly for the vulnerable sails of the *Book of Days*.

Tevan heard a strange muttering from beside him. He looked across and saw the young woman Ardan had brought aboard, standing with her arms outstretched and eyes closed.

The fireball suddenly changed course, spiraling away and detonating harmlessly into the sea. The surface was covered with burning oil. The *Book of Days* sailed past unaffected.

Tania opened her eyes, holding onto the railing for support, weakened.

She can’t do this much longer,” Ardan shouted. “There are three of them! We need an escape route!”

“I’m open to suggestions.” Tevan roared back over the noise of the cannon fire. “If you hadn’t noticed, we’re surrounded!”

“I can do it,” Tania gasped. “Set a course for the open sea.”

“You’re not ramming them!” Tevan snapped. “Not in my ship!”

“Just do it. Please. Before it’s too late!” Tania replied.

Tevan looked at Ardan, who shrugged. There was nothing else they could do. They were being slowly cut down. Tevan swung the helm around and made for the sea, two of the Empire ships were directly in the path. As they saw the *Book of Days* making sail again the other three dropped in behind. Arrows sliced the air, tearing holes in the rigging.

“Now what?” Tevan demanded, as the first set of Empire ships loomed frighteningly close in front of them.

Tania had her eyes closed again, her mouth muttering some kind of incantation. She slowly raised her arms.

The ship lurched as if it had met an expected wave. The crew at the bow yelled and began running back as the front of their vessel rose into the air. Tevan saw them lose their footing and begin to slide down the deck. The bow was still rising, now at an impossible angle. He felt the helm go slack, freely spinning in his hands. Instinctively he put it hard over, fearing a collision, but the ship didn't turn. He could hear the crew screaming in terror as the sea dropped away below them.

The *Book of Days* was floating... in the air.

Majestically it rose over thirty feet, water cascading from it as the scuppers and bilges emptied back into the sea. Tevan could hear the shouts of surprise and fear from the crews of the Empire ships below.

Behind them, the Empire ships suddenly found themselves in collision.

The *Book of Days* suddenly began to drop, the bow falling downwards as if the ship was about to founder. It nosed into the sea with an abrupt change of speed, spilling the crew back across the deck to the accompaniment of a huge splash of water thrown up by the bow. For a moment it seemed as if they would continue down into the depths, but the ship righted, as if establishing itself back into its natural medium.

Tevan recovered immediately, looking astern, to where the Empire ships were trying to extricate themselves from each other, his jaw slack with disbelief.

“Full sail! Now, while we still can!”