



People called them ‘pirates’. And the sailors who lived in the world of The Break wore that title with pride, because when you live on a ship, and your life includes a lot of skulduggery and skally-waggery, what else would you call yourself but ‘pirate’?

Every one of them certainly looked the part, and the crew who called Nyfe Shaban their captain were not without style. The sailors’ appearance was as artful as it was necessary. Prosthetic legs were carved with delicate rising waves, and eyepatches were made of softened leather with the crest of the ship sewn onto them. Captain Nyfe’s own eyepatch, nestled in the hollow of where her left eye used to be, had a spray of blue embroidered on it, a homage to her





flagship the Aconite, named after the poisonous blue flower.

That night, Nyfe was engrossed in a map in front of her. She had not looked at the clock in her cabin for some time. Clocks were very important in The Break because the sunrises and sunsets were so unreliable. Nyfe had been poring over a collection of maps and charts for most of the day. A half-eaten meal had been buried under an unfurled scroll several hours ago.

Nyfe ran her hand over the map. It was circular, coloured in vivid inks and sealed with varnish. The surface shone and crackled. It was a map of her entire world. The world of The Break.

A knock sounded on her cabin door.

‘Yes?’ she said, keeping her eyes down.

‘Captain.’ Jereme, the second mate, stuck his head around the door. ‘It’s getting dark and there’s still no sign of the Nastur.’ He paused, shifting the weight of the truth he carried before dropping it. ‘The ship’s gone, Captain.’

Nyfe looked up from her chart. For a moment, worry flickered behind her eye. Then it vanished, replaced by her usual unreadable chill.

‘Tell the crew to batten down, and get themselves





some food. If they can't find the ship in the light, I doubt they'll find it in the dark.'

Jereme nodded, and excused himself.

Nyfe leant back and adjusted one of the markers on her map. In the centre of the mostly blue world was a brown island that looked like a round of bread torn open: The Break. The largest island in the waters, and the one Nyfe's world was named after.

A splatter of other islands spiralled out into the blue, but none of them rivalled the land mass of The Break. A sailor would need more than a day to walk from one side to the other.

There was a time, when Nyfe was younger, that the map she was looking at had been twice the size. Over the years, the map had been trimmed down, cut away as the sea became smaller. It had been happening for so long now, that Nyfe couldn't remember a month going by when the map had stayed as it was.

Nyfe Shaban took out a thin blade from the collection at her belt. She stabbed quickly into the edge of the map, and skimmed the blade around the edge of the circle, shaving off a slice no wider than her thumbnail. She picked up the hoop of chart, and crumpled it in her hand, before dropping it into the wastepaper basket.





‘The world is shrinking,’ she said to no one. Then, she took out a piece of thick recycled paper, and a writing set.

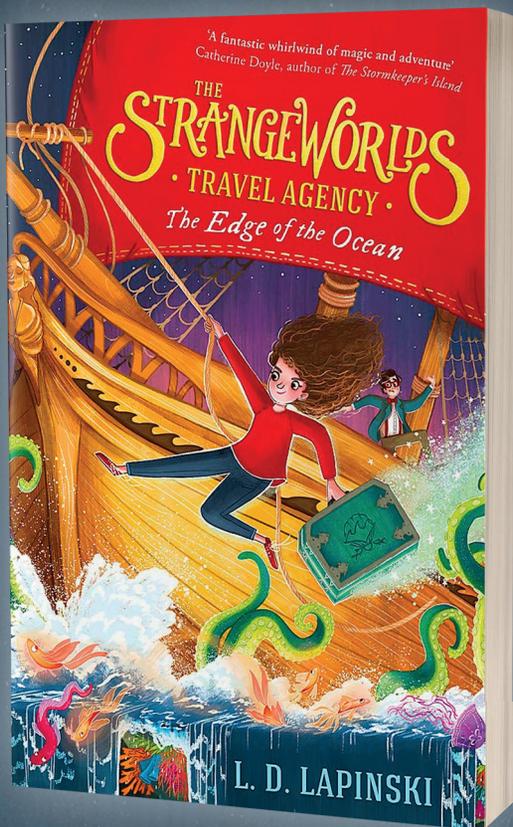
She had a letter to send.

No – not a letter.

A summons.



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