

## Project Deus Side Story Anthology

### *Children of the Storm: Reunions*

Dusk had fallen over the world, bathing the world in a blanket of black and dark blue.

Amidst the sea of clouds, an airship donning a flag depicting a skeleton toasting a devil with one hand and spearing a heart with another sailed through the air. The figures of numerous men and women in attire could be seen running about the ship and handling tasks related to making sure it sailed. Some were fiddling with weapons ranging from guns to crossbows to knives and swords.

At the helm, two people stood and watched their fellow crewmates running on the lower deck.

“Boy, do you think you’ll be up to the task?” a gruff voice asked sternly.

“What do you take me for, Old Man? We both know I’ve got this.” The cocky tone of the answer bordered on overconfidence.

A large man with dark hair and a bushy beard stood tall at the helm of the massive airship sailing through the skies. The rumble of high-propulsion engines powered by generators could be heard wind mana was taken from the atmosphere. He was clad in an open coat, dark undershirt, boots, slacks and had a tricorne hat atop his head. Attached to his belt was a gun which more like a hand cannon. The weapon’s ammo cartridge held a revolving cylinder with various runes on different faces.

At the man’s side was a blonde boy who looked to be in his early teens. He was dressed in a military green aviator jacket with a hood sewn onto it, fingerless gloves, brown steel-toed boots, and jeans. His blue eyes were hidden behind the bronze-tinted lenses of the pilot goggles over his face. Two pistols rested in holsters tied to his belt.

The bearded man snorted. “Well, you’re certainly not short on guts, Zephyr.”

The boy grinned. “I’d like to think I learned a thing or two from you, oh great and mighty Blackbeard, ‘Scourge of the Skies.’” Despite his playful tone, Zephyr had nothing but respect for the man next to him.

Blackbeard smirked lightly. “Don’t push it with the titles too much, Boy.” His mouth formed a thin line as an air of professionalism returned to him. “Jokes aside, you know what you’re supposed to do, right?”

“Fly off the ship and sneak into the joint while you and the crew distract the owner, AKA Asshole McGee, then retrieve the target. If I have to, knock her out. Easy peasy, right?” he answered casually.

“Boy.” Blackbeard crossed his arms and gave him an unimpressed look.

Zephyr raised an eyebrow. “What?”

“Stop playing games and answer me seriously,” the bearded man ordered. “First, you remember what I specifically told you not to do, correct?”

The boy looked down as his grin left his face. “...Yeah, I remember, loud and clear. ‘Whatever happens, don’t engage Aquillion Gale and avoid fighting any military guys that could show up, especially if it’s a Dragoon. Keep those hood and goggles on and make sure absolutely no one sees your face.’”

Blackbeard nodded. “Good.” While he liked his cabin boy’s gusto, the man couldn’t afford to let him get too reckless.

His crew may have antagonized the sky-dwelling city-states of Sanctum many times in the past and raided their ships for supplies and funds to give to the citizens back at Nassau, but they never attacked the nation’s leader directly. Unfortunately, it wouldn’t be long until they breached

his personal abode. Their current mission would permanently land them all on the magi businessman's blacklist.

They were here for one thing only: to capture Aquillion's daughter, Serah Gale, and bring her to their client at Lightning Country.

By the end of the night, Aquillion Gale would be out for blood. Alongside his reputation as a ruthless businessman, he was also one of the absolute most powerful magi in Sanctum. Anyone who crossed him once never got the chance to do it again. He made sure of it.

Blackbeard knew this meant war would be coming later. He was fine with that, but what he wasn't fine with was making a child pay for her father's crimes in blood. And he knew more than a few people in Nassau who lost many things because of Aquillion. She wasn't even safe in Sanctum. The girl's father made too many enemies for that.

So, the next best thing was to remove the child from the equation entirely and keep her out of both sides' clutches. He had plans which relied on his young protégé staying out of Sanctum's radar.

The bearded man put a hand on Zephyr's shoulder and gave it a comforting squeeze. "Chin up, Boy. I can't have you getting cold feet on me either."

The boy smiled at that. "Thanks, Old Man."

Blackbeard rolled his eyes. "Now if only I could get you to stop calling me that. I'm only in my thirties, Boy. I'm not that old yet."

"In your dreams, Old Man." The young rogue laughed. "Besides, this is personal."

"Indeed, it is," the captain agreed. "It's why I chose you in the first place."

"Captain!" a voice called from the crow's nest, "The Gale Manor is just over the horizon."

Both captain and cabin boy looked forward into the distance and saw a cluster of lights floating in the air. One of the sources was the mana-fueled engines keeping the ground which the Gale Manor stood on aloft in all its Victorian glory. Another was the manor itself. The last was the glow of the runes carved into the outer rim of the flying island.

“Hmm. I guess the time to prove yourself is now, Boy. Still think you have this handled? I can just as easily ask Bonny and Read to do this instead of you,” he offered.

Zephyr shook his head. “Nope. I’m not backing out now.”

Blackbeard’s lip curled upwards in amusement. “Thatta boy!” He pointed at one of the crew members on the lower deck. “Bellamy, go down to the engine room and tell the men to put them at full thrust and to engage the barrier spells. We’re ramming the Queen Anne’s Revenge straight into that blowhard’s office.”

“Yes, sir!” The bandana-wearing brunette saluted and proceeded to the ship’s interior.

“Hell yeah!” Zephyr cheered, his previous worries forgotten. If there was anything he enjoyed as a member of Blackbeard’s crew, it was annoying Sanctum’s top dog.

Blackbeard began barking orders and getting his crew ready to enact their raid. The man’s gaze continued to shift to multiple directions as he directed his subordinates. When he turned to his cabin boy...

“Boy, what are you doing with that camera?”

“What? I want to get the ship crashing into Lord Asshat’s place on camera.”

“What did I say about playing games?”

“Oh, come on!”

“Get to the deck and prepare your flight spell. If it makes you feel better, I’ll get someone else to record it for you.”

“Fine.”

The goggled blonde grumbled his displeasure under his breath as he approached the back end of the ship.

Moments later, the Queen Anne’s Revenge was a living streak in the night sky, the runes on the ship illuminating it with an emerald glow that left behind a trail of light. Clouds in the ship’s seemed to disappear entirely as it continued to get faster until the vessel pierced through the barrier runes of the Gale Manor like an arrow, crashing into its target.

From the ship’s trail came a small hooded figure gliding through the air, emerald motes of mana being exuded from his body as he flew. Floating down until he was just a foot above the roof, a rune flashed to life and disappeared underneath his feet before he landed.

Zephyr quickly scanned his surroundings. Strangely enough, there were no guards in sight and whatever security runes in place on the manor were already going off due to Blackbeard’s ‘stunt’.

He made his way to the edge of the roof and climbed down the wall until he reached a window. Looking inside, he checked for security running about and couldn’t find any. The young rogue proceeded to go inside and pulled out his twin pistols in case he ran into a fight.

*‘Alright, the coast is clear, somehow.’*

Heeding his captain’s words, the boy stuck to the shadows and remained careful as he traversed the halls at speeds which made him a blur to the naked eye. The boy expected there to be more resistance or some form of non-runic security, some guards at the least, but couldn’t find any. He heard Aquillion Gale had an obsession with strength and a hatred of weakness, but did that extend to seeing actual guards as a sign of weakness? If it did, then that just made Zephyr’s job easier.

*'Okay, if those schematics Mystery Man sent us weren't wrong, Serah's room should be...There!'*

Turning a corner, Zephyr spotted a door with a rather ornate sigil on it, the symbol of the Gale family in the form of a dragon's claw over a tempest. He quickly ran towards it.

As he did this, a large tremor rocked the entire manor. Running at high speeds, the boy stumbled mid-dash and couldn't stop himself before he crashed through the door, breaking it into multiple pieces.

To the boy's credit, he managed to catch himself, go into a roll and handspring back up on his feet instead of falling flat on his face. He could immediately tell he was in someone's bedroom, a rather large one at that, from the obvious furniture within it and the computer at a work desk.

"Well that could have gon-Whoa there!"

Turning around, Zephyr did not even get to finish his sentence before rolling to the side in order to dodge a bolt of electrical energy coming his way. It impacted the wall behind him and left nothing but a few chips of what used to be wood enchanted to withstand force equivalent to tank fire as proof it existed.

His next thoughts consisted of: *'Spear. Angry girl. Must dodge!'*

The young wind mage thanked the natural agility boost his primary element granted him as he continued to bob, weave and roll his way out of a (thankfully) blunt lance's path. While dodging, he did a quick examination of the weapon's owner.

*'Let's see, blue-eyed, blonde kid around my age, looks like she has a chip on her shoulder, spear, lightning mage, obviously trained and wearing dragon wing hair clips. Yup, it's Serah all right.'* Though he had to wonder why she was wearing a suit of Dragoon training armor. Was she expecting a fight?

Zephyr jumped back, a rune flashing to life on his leg for an instant, and fired a crescent-shaped wave of wind from a kick to disperse another lightning bolt she shot his way. The wind blast continued moving towards her, prompting the girl to dash to the side to dodge. It impacted her computer and desk, sending them flying into the wall fast enough to be smashed to pieces a split second after the blast hit.

“Sorry!” he apologized. One did not just mess with another’s computer after all.

“Who are you?” the heiress shouted, her lance twirling in her hand as she rushed forward. The girl swiped it at her perceived assailant.

Zephyr said nothing as he jumped above the lance and kicked off a wall to get some distance.

*‘Okay, how do I explain the whole pirate and kidnapping thing without...Yeah, I’m probably gonna have to knock her out. Too bad blindsiding her isn’t on the table anymore.’*

If only Blackbeard didn’t tell him to keep his face and identity hidden until the mission was done, this would have been so much easier. But no, they couldn’t risk it in case things went FUBAR.

*‘Screw it.’*

Muttering a curse under his breath, the boy rushed towards the girl and vaulted over her as a cage of electricity erupted from a rune spawned at his earlier position. He ran towards the wall, then started *running on it*.

Serah struggled to keep her eyes trained on the wind mage who continued to accelerate until he became nothing more than a blur of motion to the girl. The more she tried to track his movement, the more disorientation she felt just from watching.

Zephyr’s next action took place in the span of a second.

After completing another lap on the wall, he leapt towards the ground and spun on his heel, letting the centrifugal force carry his leg as he directed it's path. He channeled the mana in his body into a rune that disappeared and reappeared on his leg. A small, sparking whirlwind surrounded it.

He raised the leg up before sending it stomping down on the shaft of Serah's lance when she moved to block his attack. The force behind the stomp made the girl let go of her weapon. Upon making contact with the ground, a sudden burst of electrified wind shot out in a circular radius with the leg as a focal point. A powerful wall of wind slammed into Serah, sending her crashing into the wall hard enough to crater it. She fell to the ground with a thud.

Zephyr took a deep breath as his leg stopped sparking. While he knew magi were much more durable than normal people, he made sure to avoid hitting her too hard. The actual kick would have done more than just knock her back.

"Well, I had to use more mana than I thought I would, but that's out of the way. Now I think I can-" He tilted his head to the side to avoid a chair being thrown his way. "Really?"

The boy sighed as he saw the girl rushing towards him again.

*'Okay, what's she doing now?'*

He raised an eyebrow at the girl miming what looked like a javelin throwing action. And for whatever reason, she didn't have a spear of lightning in her hand despite it being something she could likely pull off.

Zephyr got his answer question when he felt something disappear from under his foot and reappear in Serah's gloved hand. She proceeded to launch the item towards him at bullet speed. His eyes widened upon noticing a certain detail about the gloves.



*'Crap, she has Rift runes on them!'* And from what he saw, it was a returning enchantment connected to her spear.

Reacting quickly, the boy attempted to duck.

**BOOOOOOOOOM**

The boy's attempt to dodge fell short when a sudden tremor that rocked the manor in tandem with the sound of thunder caused him to stumble. He managed to avoid getting stabbed in the face, but the spear caught his hood. Judging from the smirk on Serah's face, that seemed to be her aim.

*'Great, even when Asshole McGee's not around, he's still screwing me over.'* He knew where that thunder had to have come from and what caused it. There was only one lightning mage in the area strong enough to pull it off.

Zephyr was dragged off his feet as the polearm impaled itself through the wall. The boy then got sent *through* the wall and into the bathroom on the other side when Serah delivered a brutal kick to his mid-section. The wind mage could feel the air leaving his lungs as spittle mixed with blood came out of his mouth.

"Ugh," the wind mage groaned when his back hit the floor. He grunted upon feeling a new weight press down on his chest.

"Alright, now who sent you and what do they want...with...me?" Serah started to demand, gradually pausing as she discovered some new details about her 'assailant'. She immediately removed her spear's tip from his chest as recognition flared in her eyes. The features he had were uncannily similar to her own. "Zephyr?" the girl asked in disbelief.

Sitting up, the young wind mage started to dust himself off before his brain processed what he just heard. He immediately began feeling for his hood and couldn't find it over his head, nor

his goggles for that matter. His eyes traced the ground and spotted the torn-off hood and the goggles on the ground with the band snapped in half.

*'Well crap. The Old Man's not gonna like this.'* He turned to Serah who looked like she was still trying to gather her bearings. *'When in doubt, wing it.'*

Zephyr grinned and gave her a two finger salute. "Hey, Sis. Been a while, hasn't it? I see you still have a good kick." And he meant it too. He was pretty sure his ribs were cracked.

Before he could say anything else, the boy found himself getting wrapped up in a bear hug and lifted off the ground.

"It's so good to see you! And I am so, so sorry!" she greeted and apologized. "It's just-I didn't know it was you, I've been really paranoid this week ever since someone tried to assassinate me a while back, that ship crash brought back A LOT of bad memories, and-" She started to ramble on, speaking faster the more she talked.

He smiled. *'You haven't changed a bit, have you, Sis?'*

He was happy to see that years of living with their biological father's influence without their mother didn't erase the annoying little sister he spent his early life with. But the painful hugs were something he could do without.

"Umm, Sis," Zephyr rasped out, feeling his breath leave his lungs again, "Can't breathe."

She quickly let go of him. "Sorry! It's just been so long since I've last seen you. At least five years or so? I forgot about your condition and I really, really missed you and-" Zephyr cut her off by holding a hand in front of her.

"Don't worry. I get it." Though he still lamented the reminder of the fact she was physically the stronger one between them. If she held him for any longer, the girl might have actually broken his spine by accident. "And please don't take this the wrong way, but I'm...kinda here to take you

to Blackbeard. He's not gonna hurt you though. I promise!" he explained, hastily adding the last two sentences at the end. "He's one of the coolest guys I know. I can vouch for him."

She simply stared at him in silence with wide eyes.

Zephyr scratched his cheek and laughed awkwardly. *'Talk about a mood killer.'*

However, what Serah said next wasn't anything he expected to hear.

"Blackbeard's here? Huh, took him long enough. I thought some of those Medici guys planned another assassination or something," she mused while walking out of the bathroom.

"What?" Zephyr looked at her incredulously. He was so shocked he almost forgot to make a mental note to ask about the assassination bit later. "You knew?!"

"Yup," she answered, popping the 'p'. She went over to her bed and pulled out a backpack. "I've been waiting to leave this place all night. I didn't hire him for nothing after all." She scratched her cheek. "Well, technically I used a proxy, but this was still my idea. Before we leave, could we maybe make a small detour?" Zephyr wanted to needle her for more information, but another tremor rocked the manor and the words died in his mouth. They heard the rumbling of engines that signaled the Queen Anne's Revenge taking off from their location.

The communicator in Zephyr's pocket rang. He answered and heard Blackbeard's voice boom through it.

"Boy, get your arse back to the Queen Anne's Revenge. The Sanctum military's responding faster than we thought. Is the girl with you?"

"Yeah, she is."

"Then what are you still standing around there for? Get over here!" he barked. The sound of howling winds could be heard from the other line.

Serah looked at her brother pleadingly.

Zephyr mentally repeated his personal mantra. *'When in doubt, wing it.'*

Looking at the communicator, the wind mage hastily replied, "We'll be there in a bit. Gotta make a quick detour though. Make sure Duke Dickhead doesn't fry the Queen Anne's Revenge. Bye."

"Boy—" The young rogue hung up on him.

Turning to Serah, he said, "This better be fast."

"It'll be quick. Promise," she assured.

Serah led Zephyr through the halls of the manor as they sped towards the girl's destination. More questions ran through the boy's mind as he went outside and into a smaller, separate building.

All his questions were promptly answered when he found himself in a pen staring into the reptilian eyes of a winged beast with a snake-like head that was glowering at him. "You have a damn dragon?!"

From atop the rider's saddle, Serah replied, "A wyvern to be specific, but yeah. All Dragoons, even those still in training, get one if they pass an exam for it. His name's Mikhail." She rubbed the wyvern's neck and the draconian beast responded with a purr-like growl. "Now get on. We've got a pirate ship to board."

Looking between Serah, Mikhail and the shape of the Queen Anne's Revenge disembarking from the crash point, Zephyr nodded and seated himself behind his sibling. "He better not shake me off though."

"He won't," the younger mage assured. "Now let's ride, Mikhail!"

The wyvern met her command with a command with a roar and took off at speeds rivaling a fighter jet. As they approached the ship, both siblings could see multiple emerald lights out in the distance. There looked to be about a dozen ships heading their way.

“Yeesh. The Old Man wasn’t kidding when he said they got here fast.” The real question is: did someone tip them off? And if so, then who?

“I think I might know why.”

“Does it have anything to do with those Medici guys you mentioned?”

Serah grimaced. “Yeah. I think they might have paid off some officers in the military or have some Illusion magi pulling a few strings.”

“Glad to know the underworld is a dick to deal with no matter what side of the law you happen to be on,” Zephyr snarked.

“I know. I had to live with it for years,” the blonde girl replied. She raised an eyebrow at seeing Mikhail craning his neck behind them. Doing the same, Serah’s eyes widened as a speck of light from the manner rapidly approached and grew larger.

“Zephyr, hold on!”

The blonde twin did exactly what he was told as the wyvern performed a barrel roll to further the distance between itself and a stream of lightning wider than a bus. The beam continued until it grazed the hull of the Queen Anne’s Revenge.

Zephyr’s shoulder slumped in relief. “Nice one, Sis.”

“You can thank Mikhail for that one.” Serah rubbed the scales of the wyvern’s neckline. “Great job, buddy!”

As the two talked, Mikhail landed on the deck of Blackbeard’s ship after some of the crewmen made space for it.

“Boy!” a familiar, gruff voice called out.

Approaching the duo, Blackbeard asked, “I see you’ve accomplished your task. Though it looks like you improvised a new route seeing as Miss Gale’s not restrained or incapacitated.”

“Hehe...That’s one way to call it.” If anyone asked, she only got the hits she did because he went easy on her.

“Right, but onto more important matters...Did anyone aside from your sister see you?” he asked.

Zephyr shook his head. “No. Hell, there wasn’t really any security either. It was weird.”

Serah chose now to chime in. “You can thank me for that.” The cabin boy and captain looked at her skeptically as she put her hands on her hips and puffed her chest out proudly. “I got the staff to take the night off since I knew you guys would be coming for me.”

Blackbeard raised an eyebrow and looked between Zephyr and Serah. “Boy, Miss Gale, I’ll be getting your accounts later. For now, you two and your wyvern hold onto something.” He walked away from them and yelled, “Bellamy, get those thrusters back to full burst. We’re going to remind Sanctum why the Queen Anne’s Revenge is one of the fastest ships there is.”

Zephyr grinned ferally. “Oh, this is going to be fun.”

For someone who loved going fast, the Queen Anne’s Revenge going at full thrust was nothing short of euphoric. The sheer speeds at which the ship could go while not falling apart was one of the reasons nobody managed to catch Blackbeard yet. It made even the fastest Sanctum airships green with envy.

The lightning mage took a step back from her brother and gulped. “I don’t think I like that look on your face.”

“Hey Sis, ever wonder what it’s like to be an adrenaline junkie?” he asked with a light smirk.

“What does that have to do with anything?”

Blackbeard began a countdown. “All hands on deck, hold onto your arses in 5...”

Zephyr looked his sister in the eye and said, “Cause you’re about to feel one heck of a rush.” Now if only he still had his goggles.

“2...1...ENGAGE!” Blackboard’s voice roared alongside the thrum of the engines as the noise they emitted intensified.

“AAAAAGGGGGHHHHH!!!” Serah’s screaming was music to Zephyr’s ears.

By the time the Queen Anne’s Revenge finally slowed down and entered a low-power state, Serah had screamed her lungs out while her brother did the same but for a different reason. The girl was currently holding onto the leg of Mikhail who sank his claws into the deck of the ship during the rush. Even the wyvern seemed rattled.

The lightning mage slowly extricated herself from her draconian ally’s leg. “T-That was...”

“Awesome!” Zephyr finished for her.

The Dragoon girl glared at him. “No, not awesome.” She received a round of agreements from the crew members who were lying down in various states of disorientation.

Blackbeard scoffed. “Wimps, the lot of ya.”

“I know, right?” his cabin boy agreed.

Everyone on the crew collectively rolled their eyes at this. They were quite familiar with the captain’s thrill-seeker tendencies. As much as they respected him, some of his quirks were not good for their health.

“Alrighty then, Boy, Miss Gale, how about we continue our discussion in my office?” Blackbeard suggested, opening the door to his office. “I believe there are some things you can enlighten me on.” He gestured the two siblings to follow him inside and they did.

“Right. Please, don’t blame Uncle Abel though. We needed to play things safe so nothing got traced back to me until I managed to leave,” Serah explained as she went through the door.

With how much of an eye her father kept on her activities, setting up something like this herself would be close to impossible.

“Wait, Abel?” Zephyr recognized the name. “You mean the head honcho of Sanctum’s Dragoon Corps? How’d you manage to rope him into this? And did you just say, ‘Uncle’?” If he was related to their dad, then where the hell has he been all their lives? And if she was related to their mom, again, where the hell has he been all their lives?!

Serah scratched her cheek. “He’s not related to us. He’s actually my main combat instructor. It’s just something I call him since...”

“Our sperm donor’s a massive dick?” her brother finished for her.

“Language,” she chided, almost reflexively. Although, she didn’t disagree with him. The man’s obsession with strength and weakness was the reason he divorced their mother when she got terminally ill. He even refused to pay for her treatment despite the resources he had. She only found out about the last part after conducting some personal investigation. It was just another nail in the coffin for why she wanted to leave.

Zephyr snorted. “Uh-huh. Like you have the right to say that considering you swore like a sailor when we were little.”

“No, I didn’t!” the girl denied profusely.

“Sure, you didn’t,” he teased.

“Hey, Boy, Miss Gale, are you two just going to blabber on or sit down?” Blackbeard interrupted.

Looking at the chairs and then at each other, the two siblings chuckled awkwardly before seating themselves.

*‘I can definitely see the resemblance,’* Blackbeard mentally mused.



Serah sat herself down normally while Zephyr leaned into his seat and put his feet on Blackbeard's table.

*'And now I can see the difference'* the bearded man thought dryly.

The discussion that followed was mostly an explanation from Serah's end. She explained how she arranged for her 'kidnapping' with the help of Abel who contacted Blackbeard on the girl's behalf. After she was 'retrieved', the plan was for her to go into hiding by applying to Academia as a student and maintaining a cover identity. When she got around to explaining what she called, "the straw that broke the camel's back," both her brother and the pirate captain immediately felt murderous.

On top of there being two attempts on her life twice in the past week, both culprits got off scot free on insanity defense after undergoing examination for traces of Illusion magic-related influence. The girl knew it was a load of crock, but she didn't have any proof to say otherwise. What made the situation even worse was that her father felt no concern over her and saw the events as a learning experience which would only make her stronger.

Suffice to say, Serah felt enough was enough by that point and the other two in the room more than agreed.

"And that's my piece," the girl finished.

"Quite the story there, Miss Gale," Blackbeard commented.

"Good riddance to that place. It sounds like a shit show," Zephyr added. "That Abel guy sounds pretty cool though." Anyone that was willing to defy Aquillion Gale to help his sister was okay in his book.

“That he is,” Serah agreed. “And now that we have that covered...” She immediately stood up and pointed an accusatory finger at Blackbeard. “What do you think you’re doing hiring children?!” the girl shouted.

“What does a kid think she’s doing hiring Blackbeard?” Zephyr and Blackbeard flatly retorted in unison.

Serah puffed her cheeks. Okay, they certainly had her there, but that still didn’t address the issue at hand. “Regardless, why is my brother even a member of your crew? He’s only thirteen!”

Zephyr opened his mouth to say his piece but Blackbeard beat him to it. “Me and my crew came across him a couple of years back when he was on the run from child services aiming to take him back to Sanctum after his mum died. We found him stowed away on the ship and he wouldn’t leave. Boy was damn persistent.”

“Damn right, I was,” the boy said under his breath.

The bearded man continued. “A bunch of arguments, some magic being thrown and a sob-story later, we decided to let the kid stay. He’s been with us ever since.”

“Abridge an important part of my backstory, why don’t you. It’s not like it was important or anything,” Zephyr joked.

“Hey, if we let you do it, we’d be here for an hour listening to you make yourself look good,” the older man remarked.

The wind mage huffed. “I will have you know that the stories I tell are awesome. Just ask Bonne, Bellamy and the rest of the crew.”

Blackbeard snorted. “That’s only because we humor you and you know it.”

“Ahem!” Serah coughed, interrupting the two pirates before they could deviate from the subject even more. “Thank you. Now if you guys don’t mind, could we please discuss the ethics of having a child surrounded by pirates? No offense meant.”

“None taken,” the older man waved off.

The girl continued. “And the obvious influence it has on him?”

Zephyr gave himself a onceover. “What’s wrong with me?”

“The fact you don’t see anything wrong is worrying,” Serah answered dryly.

“Well if it bugs you so much, Miss Gale, then you won’t have to worry for long. Cause the boy’s coming with you,” Blackbeard stated.

The two siblings stopped their bickering and turn to him in surprise, or in the case of Zephyr, shock.

“Old Man, what are you talking about?” the boy asked somewhat fearfully.

“You wanted to help your sister, right? Well pack your bags cause you’re going to school with her,” he answered sternly. Though any authoritative effect he tried to have was mitigated by the clearly amused smirk on his face.

“What the hell, Old Man?!” yelled in outrage.

Serah had the opposite reaction. “My brother’s coming with me? That’s great!”

Zephyr looked like someone told him he was going to Hell while Serah looked like Christmas had come early.

Blackbeard continued. “And you better not fail that entrance exam boy. I’ve supervised your magic training myself. You have the skills to pass. As for the other things, I’m sure your sister can help you with that.”

“Of course, I can!” Serah declared resolutely. “Okay, Zephyr we need to start reviewing your fundamentals. For magic, I assume you at least have your practicals down, so we’ll start with theory. I can only imagine what kind of education you’ve had up till now.”

The more his sister started to talk, the more he felt like he was entering a waking nightmare.

“Old Man, this is just a joke, right?” He knew nobody messed with Academia, but couldn’t they just go with the usual fake identities while on the run schtick? Anything but school. “Right?!”

Blackbeard guffawed at the boy’s response. “That’s what you get when you hang up on me, Boy!”

“That is bullshit and you know it!”

“Language!”

The next hour devolved into a series of back-and-forth bickering between two siblings and a gruff, middle-aged man as they awaited their next destination.