

# Wakfu<sup>®</sup>

1

## L'ATTAQUE SURPRISE



bayard poche

# Surprise Attack

## Foreword

The Wakfu “novels” are a series of short stories set during season 1 of the animated series, while the Brotherhood of the Tofu searches for Oma Island. They all make up a single story arc in which the group’s most prized possessions are stolen by a clan of Rogues and they try to take them back.

I was given scans of the first volume years ago with hopes that I would translate it, but I could never convince myself to work on it seriously, in part because the writing is noticeably intended for children and I had little personal motivation to even finish reading it. But since people have always been curious about these books, I finally gave myself a push to translate this first volume and give everyone an idea of what they are like.

I omitted extra content like the character bios and the glossary. The point is mostly to show the format and style of the story. I can’t say I did my best with the illustrations, but they appear mostly where they were in the original.

I don’t intend to translate the rest of the series, so you can consider this a demo or preview.

— Seth, September 2017

**Cover artist: Mig**

**Author: Christophe Lambert**

## **Chapter I – Invasion!**

From afar, the ship lost in the blue vastness of the ocean looked like a tiny nutshell with a single sail. Az, Yugo's pet Tofu, was passing time next to the old Ruel, who whistled a tune while manning the rudder. The bird decided to head to the lower deck and see what his young master Yugo was doing. He reached the hatchway in a few flaps of his wings and met Percedal on his way. The Iop knight was greener than a Sadida's hair. Bent over the railing, he emptied the contents of his stomach into the ocean, much to the pleasure of the Snappers following the ship.

"Bleeeh, this is too much," he complained through a hiccup. He had been seasick ever since his overdose of red fruits.

Az went into the common room, where Yugo was almost done setting the table for lunch. That was the task he had been given for the day by their random distribution of chores. Meanwhile, Amalia and Evangelyne were busying themselves with the cooking.

"Say, Yugo," the Sadida princess asked from the kitchen, "did you brush your teeth this morning?"

“Um, yeah,” the boy grumbled.

“I think I saw light coming out of your room last night,” Eva joined in. “Alibert wouldn’t like you staying up so late...”

She was referring to the young Eliatrope’s adoptive father, who owned an inn in a small town, far, far away from here.

“I was consulting Skribble,” Yugo explained. Even though Skribble—a Shushu demon locked inside a magical map—was temperamental and susceptible, he had recently sworn allegiance to Yugo. The boy was counting on this peculiar ally to reach Oma, the island where his origins were supposed to be revealed.

“Sheesh,” Yugo sighed at Az, “they really take me for a baby!”

“What did you say?” Amalia asked.

“Nothing, never mind...”

Suddenly, Ruel’s voice was heard coming from the upper deck:





“We have company!”

Their curiosity piqued, Yugo, Az and the girls climbed up immediately.

“Whoa...”



That was all Yugo could say. Six strange shapes were crossing the sky in close formation, right above their ship. The shapes looked like giant, flying sausages.

“Dirigibles?” Amalia exclaimed, dumbfounded.

The next moment, dozens of men jumped from the airships’ bridges. Each was wearing a harness equipped with a flexible rope, whose elasticity could be adjusted at will. Their weapons were unusual but deadly, a mismatched assembly of



swords, pikes and clubs, and their outfits were visibly composed of various garments that hadn't been meant to be worn together.

"Rogues!" Ruel warned as he let go of the rudder and grabbed his shovel. He was pointing at the white eye painted on the dirigibles' balloons.

"What?" Evangelyne asked.

"These sky pirates must belong to the Smisse clan! They're the worst gang of thieves the World of Twelve has ever known..."

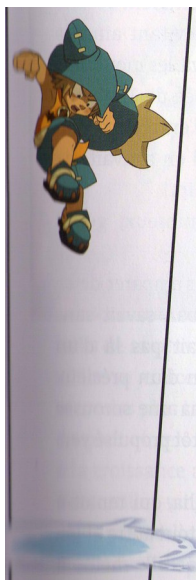
"Aaaaah, perfect, action at last!" Percedal exclaimed, as though his sickness had suddenly vanished.



There was nothing better than a good brawl to put a Iop knight back on his feet, and the young man's possessed sword shared his enthusiasm.

"Let's have at them!" roared Rubilax, the demon contained in the sword.

As the Iop proverb teaches, "When you're outnumbered, start swinging your sword!" The impetuous knight rushed headlong into the fight without hesitation.



Yugo was everywhere and nowhere at once. He jumped from one end of the deck to another using his Zaap portals, a power he was increasingly comfortable with. But the pirates were tough opponents: their bungee ropes allowed them to make impressive jumps, dodging most of Eva's arrows, Ruel's whirling shovel and Percedal's blade.

What's more, every time one of the Rogues was knocked out, ten more seemed to jump down from the sky!

“There’s too many,” Amalia moaned heartlessly.

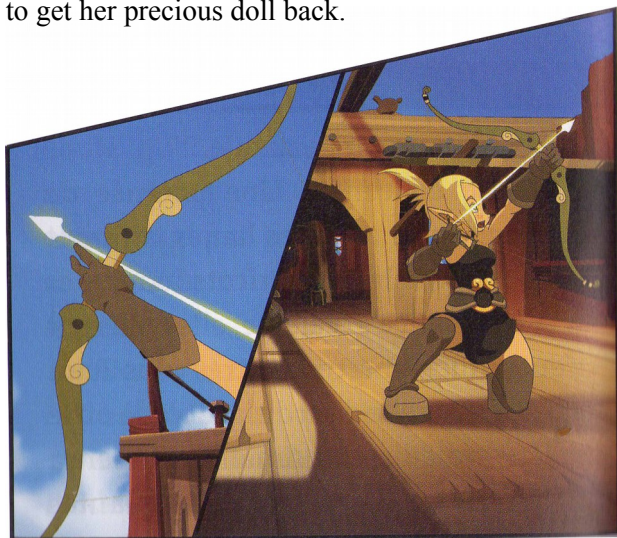
A thief had just snagged her Sadida doll. The pirate must have known it wasn’t a mere toy, but a precious magic item. He gave his harness a tug and was instantly pulled back to his flying ship.

“Nooooooo!” she cried out.



That doll was more precious to her than any other object, as she had made it herself using the fabrics, barks and leaves of her homeland. She focused her mind. Seconds later, vines appeared on the deck. Like magic beanstalks, they grew in an instant and attached themselves to a dirigible twenty kameters

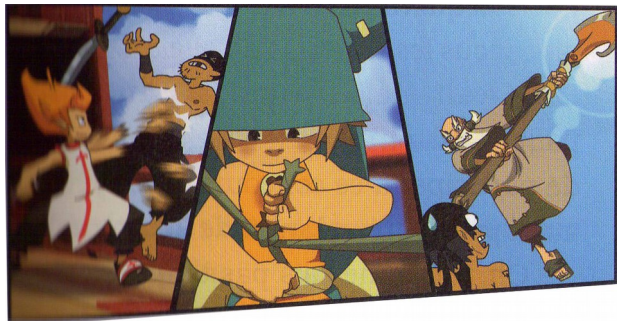
above. Amalia began to climb the natural ladder to the dirigible where her assailant had fled, intending to get her precious doll back.



Down on the deck, Eva was too busy loosing arrows every which way to notice her friend taking off. As for Ruel, he wasn't missing a bit of the action. He had understood the bandits' combat technique and adapted to it. Much quicker than his venerable age would suggest, he cleared a space between his assailants and himself, using his shovel's handle, flat and blade in succession. Yugo



was making a strange ballet above the ship. Disappearing, reappearing, he entangled the bandits' ropes, tied knots, jumped from one to another... And Percedal was enjoying the battle to the fullest with Rubilax!



“That’s eighteen!” Ruel announced as he launched a bandit overboard.

“Nineteen for me!” Percedal replied proudly.

“You mean for US,” Rubilax corrected him.

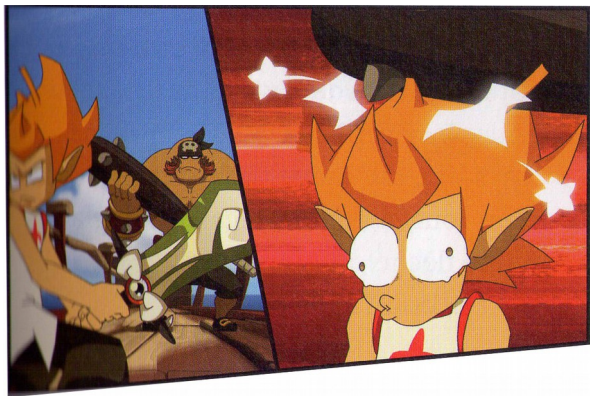
“Are you kidding me,” Eva grumbled. “Can’t you three behave like adults?”

The archer was firing bright arrows that turned anyone they hit into blocks of ice. She had already put several pirates out of commission, but she refused to take part in a contest she considered as

puerile as a Drheller Toss.

“Oh, you don’t even know what fun is anyway,” the Iop knight grumbled in turn.

He had turned toward Eva to address her—a bad idea. A bandit used this moment of inattention to bring down his large club on the knight’s skull, leaving the young man to crumple to the deck.



“Percy!” Eva shrieked.

The bandit had already grabbed his victim’s sword.

“Hey! Hands off!” Rubilax protested.

The thief tugged on his rope once and was immediately sent flying toward his ship. Eva turned



him into a block of ice before he could escape, but he didn't let go of Rubilax!

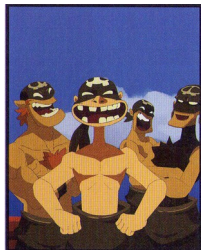
At the same moment, a terrified chirp was heard: a pirate had just captured Yugo's Tofu in a dipping net. The young Eliatrope's heart skipped a beat and his blood froze faster than Evangelyne's targets.

“Az!!!” he screamed.

After one last effort, Amalia had finally pulled herself aboard the enemy ship. In the blink of an eye, she was surrounded by pirates.

“Give me back my doll, NOW!” she yelled with the voice of one used to being obeyed.





The awful pirates just stared at her a few seconds before they burst out laughing.

“What do we do with her, Peti?” one of the men asked.

He was addressing a pipsqueak of a girl sitting on a large chair backed with carved wood. The little girl already cradled a doll in her arms. She was smiling, and some evil joy seemed to sparkle in her eyes. Every pirate looked at her, expectant but fearful.



“Throw her overboard!” she barked.

Ten hands grabbed the Sadida princess.



Yugo was about to go after Az and his kidnapper when he heard the scream. He looked in that

direction and saw Amalia falling and flailing her arms desperately. He jumped, disappeared into a scintillating Zaap portal and reappeared instantly across Amalia's trajectory. The impact was a bit

rough and they both fell into the water, a few kameters below. When Yugo's head breached the surface, he saw that the pirates were all back on board their airships. They were already getting away, gaining speed as their propellers accelerated.

"Are you okay?" the boy asked Amalia.

"I swallowed some water, but I'm okay," the princess replied. "Thank you, Yugo."

On the ship, Eva aimed a fire arrow at one of the



dirigibles. A shroud of flame seemed to blossom on the large balloon, in the middle of the symbol that looked like an eye. But that was all!

“Their surface is protected by a special alloy,” Ruel explained in response to her surprised expression. “Don’t bother, that thing can’t be pierced!”

“Hm... If we can’t pierce it, we can at least make it heavier,” Eva thought aloud.

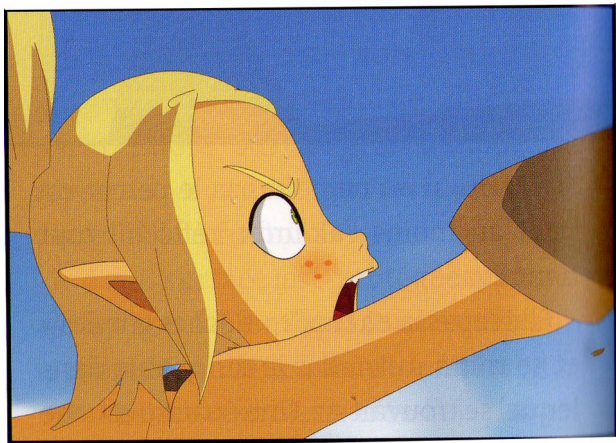
She went back to freezing arrows and fired a volley at the dirigible where Az had been taken. A thick layer of ice soon covered the airship, which was now losing altitude.

“Hey, yeah! Keep going!” Ruel cheered her on.

Suddenly, a rope was cast from one of the airships, with a pair of metal claws at the extremity flying toward them. The claws snapped shut on Eva’s bow and the rope was pulled back.

“Noooo!” she screamed as her weapon was yanked out of her grip.

She saw her bow fly toward whoever had cast the grappling hook and imagined they must be very proud of their misdeed.



“Not this,” the girl moaned. A Cra warrior’s bow was her most precious belonging, and Evangelyne’s was no exception. She was ready to dive and swim after the airships to get it back, but Ruel stopped her.

“Come now, Eva, that would get you nowhere...”

A groan was heard nearby: Percedal was coming back to his senses. Amalia and Yugo climbed back on board, drenched but safe and sound.

“So, what’s the situation?” Yugo asked.

“They stole my sword,” Percedal whined.

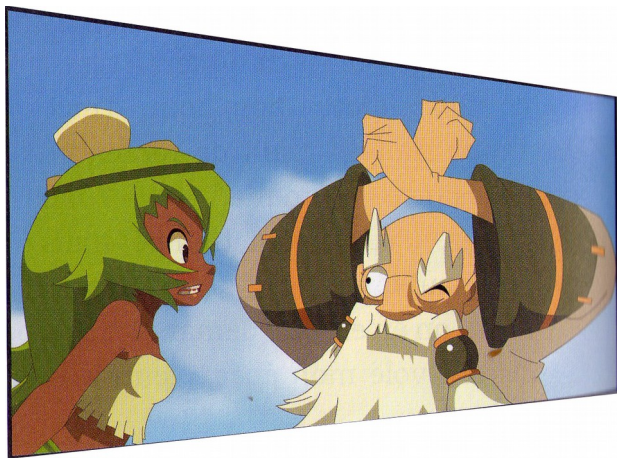
“And they stole my bow!” Eva added angrily.

“And my doll!” Amalia concluded as she erupted in tears.

Ruel tried to be philosophical about it:

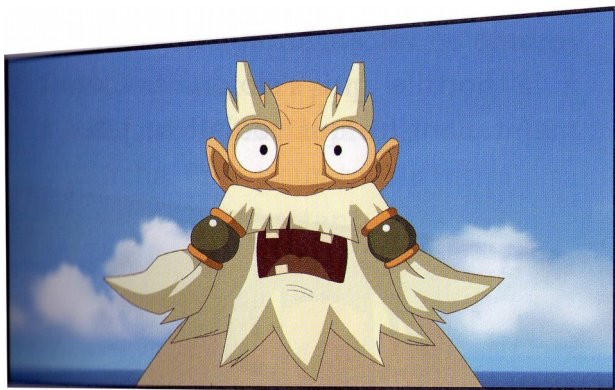
“Friends, you shouldn’t get so attached to inanimate objects,” he suggested.

“That coming from you!?” Amalia bellowed, daggers in her eyes. “Are you kidding me!?”



“Take it from me and my breadth of experience, you should never...”

“They also took your Haven Bag,” Evangelyne chimed in.



“What???”

“Yeah, I didn’t have the time to tell you in the middle of the skirmish, but I saw a thief come up from the lower deck with your bag.”

“WHAT!?”

The old Enutrof’s bag of tricks held all of his precious items and many more...

“What a bunch of... of...”

Ruel turned red and blew off like a volcano, yelling insults at the fleeing ships. He was now the one trying to jump off and swim after the thieves, and it took the four of them to stop him.





Suddenly, a gnawing suspicion made its way to Yugo's mind: *If those bandits are after Shushus and magic items, they must be very interested in...*

"The map!"

He let go of Ruel and ran to his cabin, his heart racing.

To his horror, the map was also gone!

"Hm, that is troublesome."

The man who had uttered those words wore a sinister mask and dark clothing. He was in a strange place, full of cogwheels and clockwork. He was

watching Yugo and his friends through an oval screen embedded into a metal frame. His mask did not allow anyone to see his expression, but his voice alone said he was no friend of theirs.

“If Yugo loses the map, he will never find Oma Island... and therefore, me neither.”

He shook his head.

“Unacceptable.”

His form disappeared in a bluish spark of static.



## Chapter II – A Source of Trouble?

The five friends were sitting in a circle on the main bridge, holding an emergency council.

“So, what do we do?” Yugo asked.

“We need to get Rubilax back first,” said Percedal.

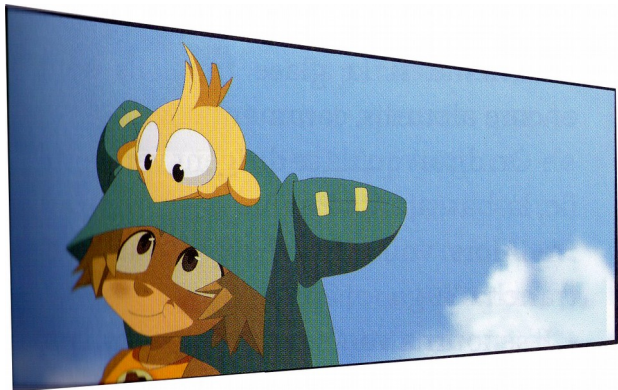
“No, first my bow,” Eva countered.

“My baaaag!” Ruel lamented, still quite upset.

“What a bunch of egoists!” Amalia erupted.  
“What about my Sadida doll?”

Yugo was torn. He knew the map was the only way to learn more about himself. The key to his origins awaited on Oma Island. Who were his real family? Where did they come from? Those questions were never far from the young orphan’s mind.

On the other hand, he couldn’t help but worry about Az, his loyal friend. The Tofu had grown up with him, in his adoptive father’s inn, and he couldn’t imagine life without the pet’s loving presence and friendship. As far as he could remember, they had always watched over each other.



The Eliatrope stood up and asked:

“Which dirigible did they put Az on?”

“The one I hit with my freezing arrows,” Evangelyne answered. “Look, it’s lagging behind the rest.”

The Cra warrior was right. Five of the airships were now mere dots in the sky, but the sixth seemed much bigger and, more importantly, flying lower than the rest, almost touching the horizon.

“Even though the ice is melting, it’s heavier than the rest,” Eva commented.

“It looks like they’re going to that island over there,” Percy added.

“Then that settles it,” Yugo announced.

He turned to his companions, resolute:



“We’ll find your magic items, I swear it, my friends. But first, we’re going to save Az!”

Az had been locked in a cage with four other birds: a baby Tofu, a Tofu Ghostof, a Royal Tofu and a Tofoone. The animals were trembling and all seemed as scared as Yugo’s little friend. Around them, pirates were running in all directions.



“We’re gonna crash!” one screamed.

“Everyone to their station!” the Rogue captain ordered. “Prepare for a crash landing!”



He was a tall man who carried himself well, covered in a dark cloak. His messy hair moved with the wind, and his eyes were underlined by makeup as dark as his clothing. He went to the cage and addressed the birds:

“Don’t worry little ones, Captain Ober Smisse always pulls through.”



The dirigible was leaning to the port side, where the ice wasn’t done melting. The crew were hanging on to whatever they could. Considerably calm, their captain stood in the middle of the chaos. The danger was mounting, but Ober Smisse was unconcerned!

Az saw the ground coming closer: trees, then more trees, then he heard a loud noise and the world started to spin as the sound of splintered wood came from every direction.



“They landed on the other side of this small mountain,” Evangelyne said, shielding her eyes from the sun with one hand.

Yugo and his friends were landing on a white sand beach, at the center of a U-shaped cove. Palm trees marked the end of the beach and the start of a forest.

“I’ll scout ahead,” Yugo decided.

He tapped a small barrel that sounded almost empty.

“Try to find a source of fresh water. We’re almost

out.”

“I’m coming with you,” Percedal announced. “A lop knight has better things to do than look for water!”

“No, Percy,” Yugo opposed, “you would slow me down. With my Zaap portals, I’ll be on the other side of the island in no time...”





“Be careful,” said Amalia.

“Don’t worry,” the Eliatrope boy replied with a wink.

He jumped and disappeared into a circle of pure light.

“Damage report?” the Rogues’ leader asked.

The airship’s deck was covered with debris. Some of the men were helping others get back on their feet. The whole crew seemed disoriented.



“Captain, the flight deck is caught in this large tree’s branches and the rear propeller’s axis is

bent,” a bandit wearing an eye patch reported. “And the hull is breached in many places.”

“How much time to repair?”

“I’d say about ten hours... maybe less.”

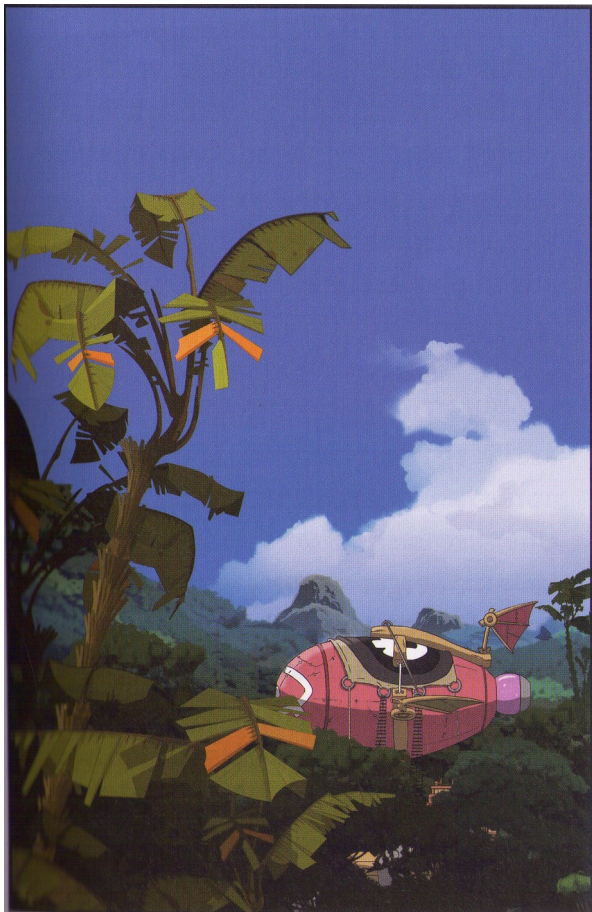
“Good,” Ober Smisse approved. “By then, this damnable ice will be completely melted and we’ll be ready to go. I don’t intend to dawdle in this hole any longer than necessary.”

He bent to look at the cage holding the birds captive.

“See, my pretties, just a good scare, hehe...”

Scared by his evil smile, the birds huddled closer together.

Yugo appeared in the middle of a steep slope that led down to the core of the forest. The dirigible could be seen above the sea of leaves. Its surface, still covered in ice, glistened in the sun, giving it some similarity to an iceberg. Yugo’s gaze followed the trail of destruction left behind the airship: so many trees knocked over, uprooted, smashed to pieces...



*Good thing Amalia didn't see this, she'd be sick with grief!*

Like all Sadidas, Princess Sheran Sharm could not bear anyone maiming nature, especially trees.

A cacophony of sounds could be heard coming from the unseen parts of the airship. Yugo recognized the screeching of wood saws in between the banging of hammers and the hacking of axes.

*They're repairing... That means they're stuck here for at least a few hours. That's enough time for us to intervene!*

The only problem was that he had yet to come up with a course of action.

Ruel, Percedal, Eva and Amalia reached the foot of the mountain after a fifteen-minute trek. There, a cascade threw its waters into a small lake surrounded by trees, whose foliage provided shade to the lakeside. The water was crystal-clear and one could see Snappers swimming near the surface.

“Ah, there you go!” Percedal rejoiced.

The Iop knight and the two girls quenched their thirst before filling the Gobball leather waterskins they had taken with them.



Meanwhile, Ruel had vanished in the undergrowth. He came back wearing nothing more than some old patched up underwear.

“Eeeek!” Eva shrieked.

“I don’t want to see this,” Amalia groaned while averting her gaze.

“Yuck,” Percedal said simply.

“What’s the big deal?” Ruel asked as he stuck out his skinny, dirty chest. “I figured this would be a good time for a quick wash!”

And he jumped into the water.

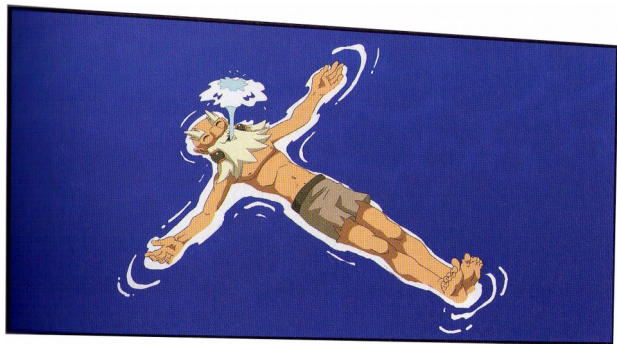


“This... this is repulsive...” Amalia said with difficulty.

As if on cue, a dozen dead Snappers quickly floated to the surface and lay there, bellies up.

“Thank Sadida we’ve already filled the waterskins.”

“Come on, join in! It’s delicious!” the old man called out. He turned to float on his back, spat out a stream of water like a human fountain, and turned on his belly.



“No thanks, I’m fine here,” Percedal replied, voicing everyone else’s feelings.

“You don’t know what you’re missing!” Ruel laughed, before disappearing once again under the surface.

“What a child,” Eva sighed.

Suddenly, a sneer contorted her normally pretty face.

“Hey, are you okay?” asked a worried Percedal.

The Cra warrior dropped to her knees.

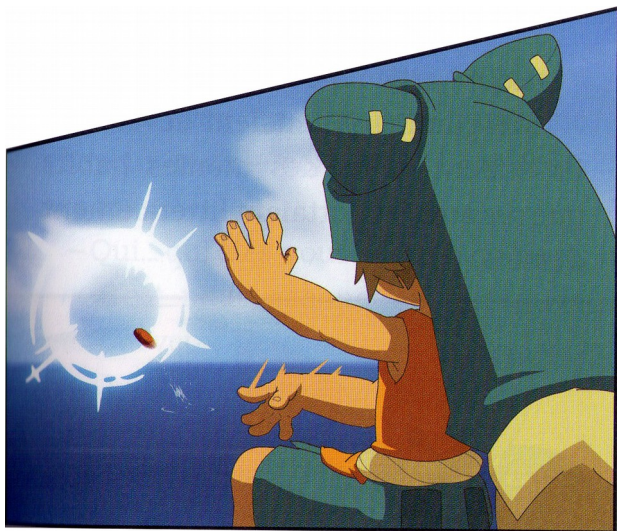
“I’m not feeling so good...”

Percy went to help her up, but he was suddenly taken with vertigo. His head was spinning, but he heard Amalia groan painfully.



“I’m feeling really weird too,” she said.  
What followed was very blurry.

Yugo was skipping stones on the beach as he waited for his friends to return. The flat pebbles bounced on the water, vanished through portals and reappeared a dozen or two kameters farther, at the boy’s whim, to continue on their new trajectory.



“What are they doing?” he mumbled. “What’s taking them so long?”



Just then, he heard a noise behind him. Bushes were getting pushed aside. He turned to look, ready for anything... except what he saw!

“What?” was all he could say, dumbfounded as he was.

Three children were standing before him. They were wearing the same clothes as his friends, though they were so oversized that they really only had them on their backs.

The taller of the trio, a lanky boy with a mess of red hair, was holding a baby in his arms.

“Who... who are you?” Yugo asked.

“It’s us,” the green-haired girl replied.

“What do you mean, ‘us?’”

“Well, us, can’t you see?”

The girl seemed to have a short fuse, just like...

“Amalia!” Yugo exclaimed, taken aback.



### Chapter III – Young Blood

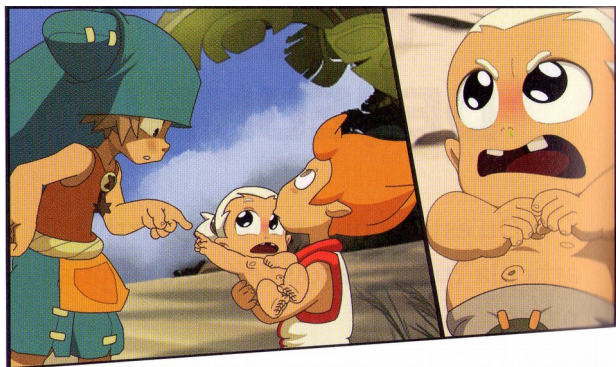
“What happened to you guys?” Yugo asked once the shock had worn off.

“We found fresh water,” Percy started.

“But it turned out to actually be...” Eva continued.

“Some kind of fountain of youth,” Amalia concluded.

Yugo gave his friends a good look-over. They all seemed to be 8 to 10 years old. Except the baby! Yugo peered at the newborn: eyes wide open, balding forehead, looking like trouble.

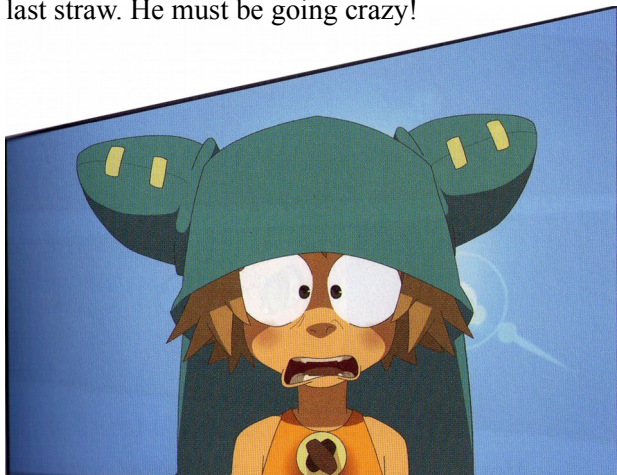


“Don’t tell me this is...”

“Yeah, it’s me,” Baby Ruel grumbled.

“Aaaah!”

Yugo jumped back, heart pounding. That was the last straw. He must be going crazy!



“He didn’t just drink the water,” Amalia explained. “He dove in and frolicked in it at least fifteen minutes. That’s why he was taken so far back.”

“You mean your bodies have gotten younger but... not your brains?”

“I guess I’m not so sure about those two...” she grumbled while staring at Eva and Percy, who were bickering for the tenth time that day:



“It’s YOUR fault! You’re the one who found this cursed fountain!”

“No, it’s YOUR fault! You ran straight at it and...”

“Nuh-uh! I said it first!”

Yugo gave a deep sigh. For the first time in his

adventuring life, he was the oldest member of the party. He could feel the weight of new responsibility on his shoulders. How was he going to save Az with the help of three tykes and a baby?

Speaking of babies, Ruel gave a few conspicuous coughs.

“What is it?” Percedal asked.

“Someone’s going to have to... *take care* of me.”

“What do you mean?”

“I um... dropped something...”

“Dropped...?”

Baby Ruel nodded meaningfully and Percy’s face turned greenish, as it had been during his sea-sickness.

“Girls, I have a mission for you!” he said as he presented them the baby at arm’s length.

“What!? No way am I changing Ruel’s nappies!” the Sadida princess exclaimed vexedly.

“Are you out of your mind!?” Evangelyne yelled.

*This is gonna be difficult...* Yugo thought, about to lose hope. *Very difficult...*

Ober Smisse grabbed the Tofu cage with both hands.

“I’m taking you to my cabin, my dears.”

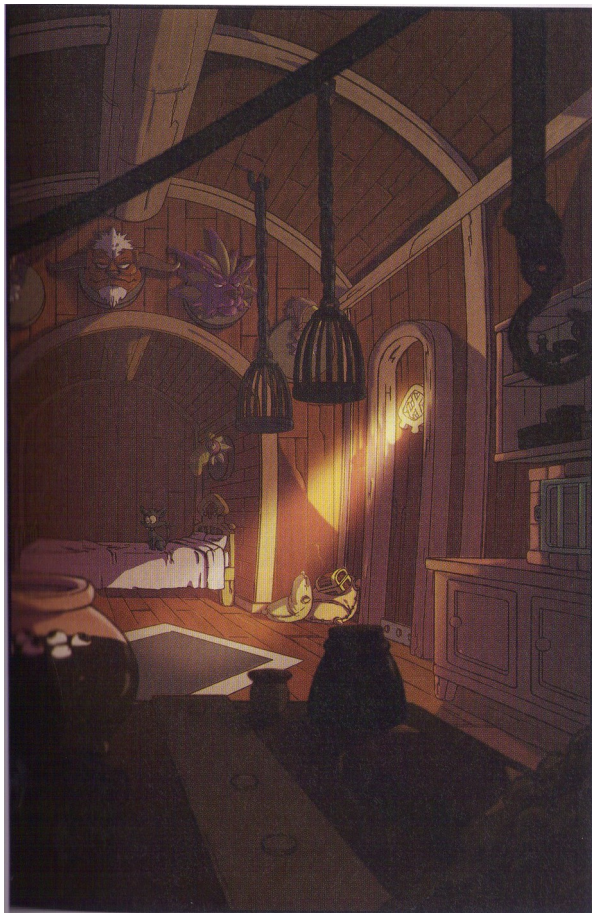
He took a staircase leading down to the steerage, followed a corridor and opened a door into a dim-lit room. The only light there was filtering in through a porthole half-covered by a curtain.

The captain lay his “guests” down on a bedside table placed next to a bunk that was secured to the nearby wall.

“There. You’ll be more at peace in here.”

An odd smell, both insistent and unpleasant, permeated the room. Az noticed a feline shape on the bed, unmoving. The Bow Meow was curled up, seeming to sleep... except... if you looked closely, it wasn’t breathing!

Ober Smisse pulled the curtain, and the room was filled with light. Horrified, Az suddenly saw a slew of torture instruments arranged on a nearby desk: scalpels and all sorts of knives, needles, thread, vials of unknown chemicals—that explained the smell—Gobball wool for stuffing... No doubt about it, the room’s occupant had a penchant for taxidermy!





The man took a moment to pet the stuffed Bow Meow on the bed:

“See how beautiful and calm Chafou has become. I have given him eternal youth, and soon you will receive the same gift, my little friends.”

Now Az was certain: his kidnapper was completely mad!

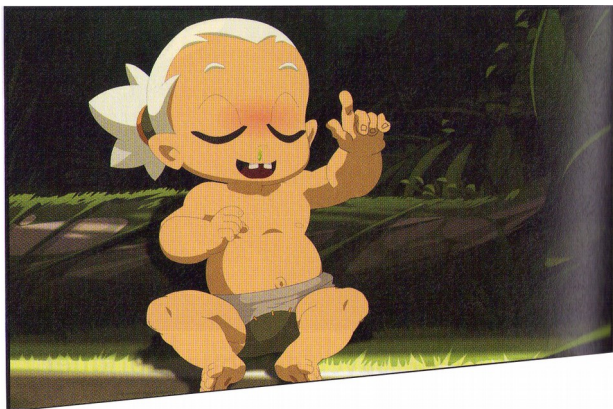


“We can’t keep these clothes on,” Percedal grumbled, pointing for emphasis at his tabard, which was only about half on him, and half on the ground.

“I’ll try to make us loincloths out of palm leaves!” Amalia suggested.

“Good idea,” Eva approved. After pondering a moment, she added: “Do you think we’re going to stay like this... forever?”

“No idea,” Percedal said. “This is the first time I drink from a fountain of youth. I didn’t even know they existed!”



“I’ve heard about them,” Ruel said. “There’s a legend about a mysterious island in the middle of the Troubled Waters, an island with a magical water source hidden in its midst...”

“So we’re in Troubled Waters?” Percy asked.

“You can say that again,” Amalia mumbled.

A shroud of silence, heavy with desperation, fell upon the group. The only sounds left were those of the sea wind visiting the surrounding trees and bushes.

Suddenly, Yugo brightened up.

“I think I have an idea!”

## Chapter IV – Diversion

“Well, what’s the situation?” Ober Smisse asked his first mate.

“We’ve sawed off the branches that had crashed through the flight deck,” the man with the eye patch replied. “We still need to fix the propeller...”

“Good. Very good...”

All of a sudden, they heard strange squeaks coming from a copse of trees that had miraculously been spared by the crashing ship.

“What is that?” Smisse grumbled.

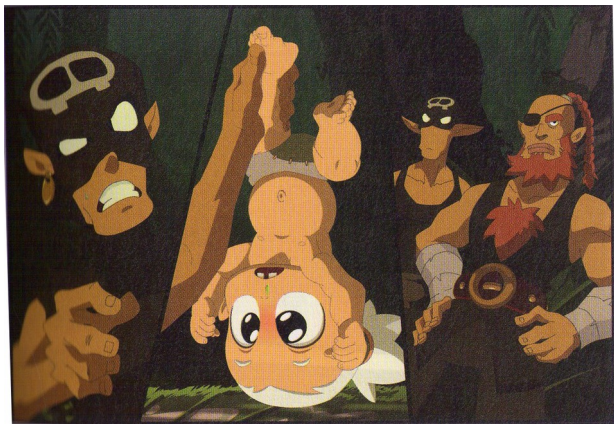
“Sounds like a small animal,” the one-eyed man ventured.

“Take two men and look into it.”

“Yes, sir!”

Baby Ruel had been placed on a carpet of fragrant moss. He was trying to imitate the sounds of a newborn, but his squeaks sounded more like a Bow Meow that had its tail caught in a door.

He stopped when he saw three figures emerge from the undergrowth.



“Will you look at this!” the one-eyed man exclaimed.

“A baby!?” added another of the pirates.

The third picked up Baby Ruel and winced.

“What an ugly thing.”

Ruel looked at him with daggers in his eyes, but made an effort to hold his tongue.

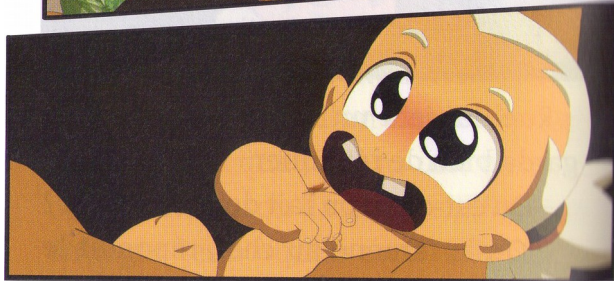
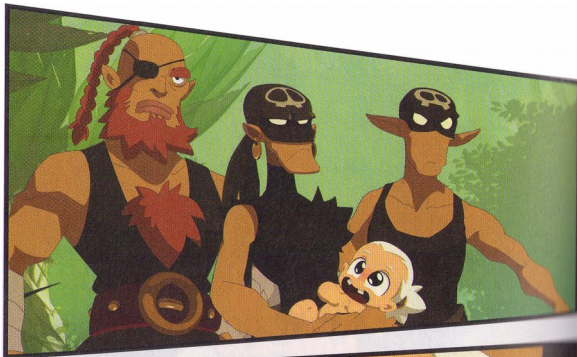
“What do we do with that brat?”

“Take him to the captain,” the first mate replied.  
“He’ll decide.”

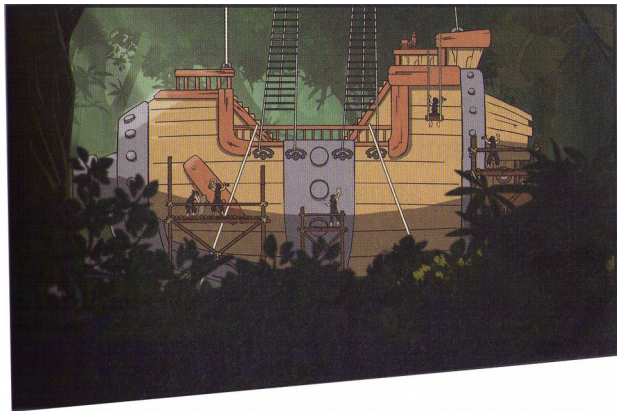
The men returned to the airship without another word. Ruel had stopped pretending to cry and was

paying close attention to his surroundings.

The airship was held down by thick cables tied to stakes that had been driven into the ground. Several men worked at repairing the ship on scaffolding made of bamboo.



*Hm... interesting,* the Enutrof thought.



The eye-patched man and his companions climbed on board using a retractable staircase that reached all the way to the ground. Once they had reached the main deck, they headed toward the leader of the Rogues, who was waiting at the helm.

“A baby!?” shouted an incredulous Ober Smisse.

“Yes, captain. He was the one making those weird noises.”

Smisse towered over the Enutrof, examining him skeptically as if he had been served food of dubious origin.

“Aga?” Ruel tried.

The captain straightened.



“If there’s an indigenous baby, there has to be an indigenous village nearby. Lonely-Eye, take a score of men, comb this jungle and find this damnable village!”

“And once we find it?”

“Plunder their food stocks, see if they have magic items or anything of value and bring it all back. Then we’re leaving.”

“On it, sir.”

Ober Smisse started tickling the baby’s neck with the tip of a finger.

“Tickle, tickle... Until then, I’m keeping the little guy. If anything goes wrong, a hostage can always be handy...”

The first mate nodded quickly and started to shout orders for the expedition.



Yugo and his friends were hiding not far from the stranded airship. They were all wearing primitive clothing Amalia had made out of palm leaves. Even the Eliatrope was disguised like this, but he had kept his hat on. The rest of their equipment—bags, food and Ruel's shovel—was hidden among the roots of a large tree, safe from prying eyes.



“Here they come,” Yugo whispered.

A group of men were headed into the forest in a single file. Yugo turned to his companions:

“Everyone knows what they have to do?”

His three friends nodded in unison.

“Good. Then good luck!”

He stood up and walked out of the bushes, calling out:

“Hey! Hey! Over here!”

The pirates stopped dead in their tracks. In turn, Yugo’s friends came out and waved as they shouted:

“Heeeey!”

Lonely-Eye pointed at the “natives:”

“More kids! Get them, they’ll lead us straight to their village!”

Yugo took off running in one direction with Percy, while Evangelyne and Amalia scampered another way. Likewise, their pursuers split into two groups of about ten pirates each. The first mate led the group going after Yugo and Percy.

“Don’t let them get away!” he yelled.



Captain Smisse had laid the baby hostage in a basket filled with bed sheets and various pieces of torn fabrics. After leaving the basket on his bed, down in his cabin, he had gone back to overlook the repairs. Ruel waited two minutes, then took a look outside the cozy nest that had been made for him.



First he saw the Bow Meow next to him, then the taxidermy equipment... then the Tofus! He climbed out of the basket and crawled across the bed sheets.

“I’m coming, Az... I’m coming.”

Having reached the cage, he stood up gripping the bars. The trapped animals were staring at him suspiciously. Az let out a short, questioning chirp.

“It’s me, Ruel,” the baby whispered. “Don’t worry, I’m here to save you and your friends.”

The pet Tofu’s eyes nearly fell off his head. He shrieked in a strangled, high-pitched voice and fell

to the bottom of the cage, unmoving.

*I hope I didn't give him a heart attack.*

Yugo and Percedal were zigzagging between the trees and jumping over roots and shrubs. Their faces and shoulders kept getting whipped by the lower branches, but they didn't care. The only thing that mattered was keeping the distance between them and the pirates on their heels.



“Are we almost there?” Yugo asked. “I’m getting tired.”

He couldn't use his portals yet, or the pirates might recognize him.

“Almost there,” his friend replied.



Moments later, they erupted into the clearing where Percedal had found the source earlier.

“Phew! Here we are!” the Iop let out, out of breath.

“About time!”

They stopped in the clearing and turned to face their pursuers.

“It’s up to you now, Yugo. Ready?”

The Eliatrope simply nodded. The next moment, he saw Lonely-Eye and his troop charging at them, screaming. The thugs formed a tight group, waving pikes, cutlasses and clubs about.

*Perfect*, Yugo thought.

He turned to the cascade, worked his practiced motions, and the water rushed through the portal he had opened under it.





Less than a second later, it gushed out of an exit portal that appeared right in front of the bandits. The powerful stream of water knocked the men off their feet and sent them rolling in the grass while Yugo made sure to soak them thoroughly!

Lonely-Eye was the first one back on his feet. Coughing up water like the rest of his crew, he nonetheless seemed ready to pick up the fight.

“It’ll take more than this to stop us,” he said menacingly.

“Really?” Yugo challenged confidently.

He removed the portals and the cascade returned to its natural course.

Suddenly, Lonely-Eye grasped at his belly as if someone had just punched him in the stomach. He fell to his knees, wincing.

“What... what’s happening to me!?”

Every pirate was writhing and moaning in the grass. They looked like a school of Snappers stranded on a sandbar.

“Um, that looks painful,” Yugo remarked.

“It doesn’t feel great,” Percedal confirmed. The awful transformation was still fresh in his mind.

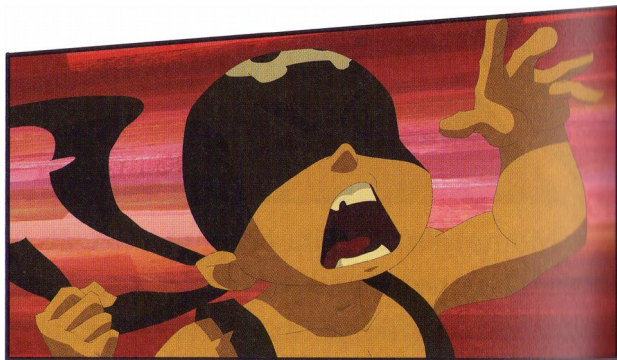




It took less than a minute for the vindictive horde to turn into a bunch of pipsqueaks who looked lost in the piles of clothing that had become much too large for them. They seemed to have regressed to 5 or 6 years of age. The nervous looks they cast around themselves were about to give way to panic and hysteria.

“What is the meaning of this?” Lonely-Eye asked in a voice that was too girly to be his.

Behind him, another pirate burst into tears, no longer able to contain his emotions.



Amalia and Evangelyne were running as fast as their short legs would allow. They had the energy of youth, but the brigands were gaining ground. Another minute or two and they would be upon them!

“Keep it up, guys! We’ve got them!”

The two friends turned into a forest of bamboos that were just far enough apart for the girls to navigate easily. Their assailants, on the other hand, had to squeeze between the lean trunks and use their weapons to hack a way through.



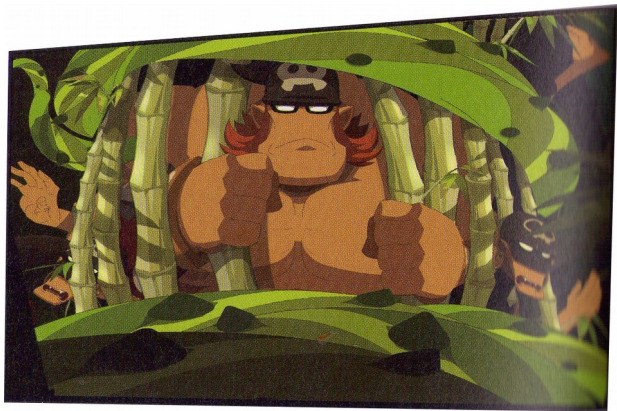
“Keep going!” Eva said encouragingly. “We’re almost there!”

The two of them emerged from the constricting forest as one. Amalia spun on her heels and, without waiting to catch her breath, pronounced an incantation.

Instantly, the bamboo trunks moved closer together and new stalks burst from the ground. Together with fast-growing ivies and creepers, they formed a prison that halted the pirates’ progression completely. They could barely move their limbs!

“Heeey!” one of them lamented.

Only one hand was out of the vegetable restraints. It tried to grab Eva, but she slapped it back.



“Hands off!”

“Now let’s meet up with the boys,” Amalia declared.

The Cra warrior nodded and they took off, making sure to avoid the “tree trap.”

## Chapter V – Showdown

Meanwhile, Yugo and Percedal had overcome the pirates. Still confused by their recent transformation, the Rogues were still experiencing various degrees of shock and disbelief.

“Now,” Yugo started, hands on his hips. “Tell me who you’re working for and where your flotilla is regrouping!”

“In your dreams!” Lonely-Eye defied.

Percedal raised one hand and waved it menacingly, pointing at it with the other hand:

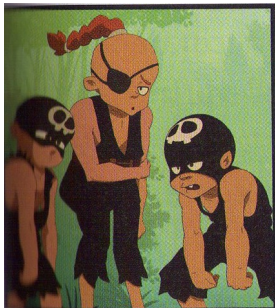
“See this bad guy? If you don’t want a pants-down spanking in front of everyone, you’d better start talking now!”

The boy in the eye patch went pale at the thought.

“Um... a-all right,” he stuttered. “We’re working for Chato Smisse. He’s the leader of the sky pirates. Our rallying point is the Floating Island.”

“Floating Island?”

“It floats in the sky above the Stinky Sea.”





“And where is that?”

“Follow the sunset and you’ll get there.”

Yugo nodded, satisfied.

“Good. Thank you. We’ll leave you alone now, kids. Your ‘big brothers’ will be here to take care of you soon.”

Ruel had freed the birds, all the while humming an old folk song:

“Open, the Tofu cage.

See ‘em, fly off the stage!”

“You know what to do now,” he said to Az and his feathery friends.

He opened the porthole, and the birds flew out.



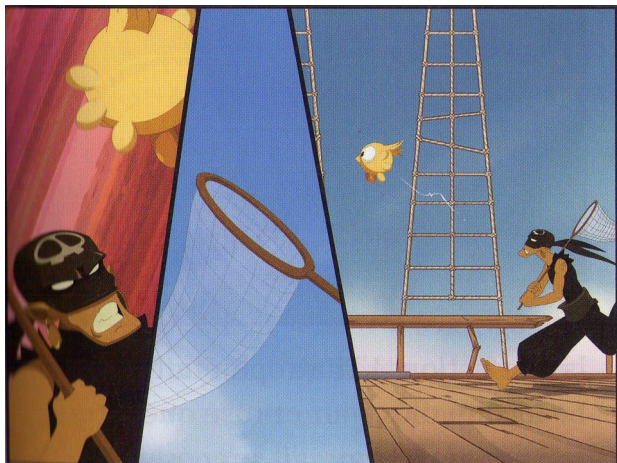
Ober Smisse was leaning against the railing of the main bridge when he saw the Tofus escape in a chorus of joyful chirping.

“Huh? WHAT?” he roared.

Az stopped to hover in front of the captain’s face and pull his tongue before getting away.

“Catch these animals!” he yelled. “NOW!”

The next moment, the men still on board grabbed nets and scoops and launched after the Tofus, who were just entering the woods.



“My, looks like it’s working,” Evangelyne said as she surveyed the pirates running after Az and his friends.

She had had reservations about Yugo’s plan at



first, but she was now forced to admit that every step of the operation was going flawlessly. The Eliatrope was a lot more mature and clever than his looks suggested.

“We can meet up with Ruel now,” Amalia said.



The young girls had fetched the Enutrof's shovel and the rest of their equipment from their cache.



Without making a sound, they left the curtain of vegetation they had been hiding behind and started toward the grounded airship with their bags on their backs.

At the door of the captain's cabin, Baby Ruel had had to use a chair to reach the knob. Fortunately, it had been left unlocked. Out in the corridor, he had crawled to the stairs leading up to the upper deck and painstakingly climbed every step, eventually reaching his destination.

*Heh, looks like the Tofu diversion worked out fine*, he thought.

The bridge was deserted. Not a single pirate in sight.

Ruel continued to progress on all fours. He was going cautiously, pausing frequently to hide behind coils of rope or various crates. He knew exactly where he was going. Peering down between the bars of the railing, he saw two long cables on starboard tied to stakes driven into the ground, 5 or 6 kameters below.

“There must be two more on port side...”

That meant four cables to cut. He took the shiny scalpel tucked inside his diaper. He had stolen it



from the captain's workbench and intended to use it to free the airship from its restraints.

He cut through the first two cables without difficulty. It was even too easy!

"Well, not going to complain."

Then he moved to the port side. The third cable was stronger, made of particularly thick strands, but he cut through it eventually. He had just started on the final cable when a scornful voice called out from behind:

"What do we have here! A baby saboteur!"

Ober Smisse was towering over Baby Ruel.

*Yikes*, the Enutrof thought.

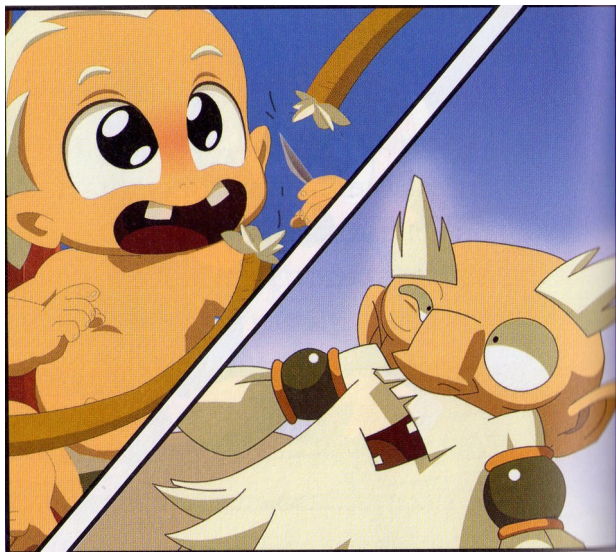
"You little pest, you're about to learn the consequences of crossing Capt..."

His words caught in his throat when he noticed what was happening in front of him. Ruel started to grow at an astonishing speed, limbs stretching out and beard growing down his droopy cheeks that had been full and rosy seconds before. His face was quickly covered in wrinkles befitting his white hair.

The Rogue took a step back.

"By all of Rushu's Shushus!"

Ruel was now back to his natural form.



*Now that's better.*

He brandished his scalpel defiantly and taunted the outlaw:

“Let’s see what you’re worth against someone your size.”

“It will be my pleasure,” Smisse replied without missing a beat.

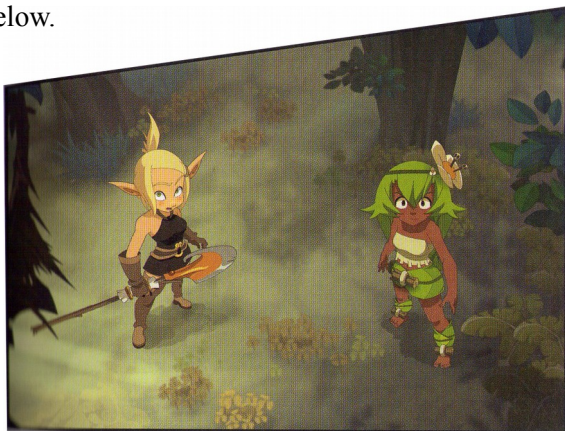
Having regained his composure, he drew his cutlass. The eye of a Shushu was clearly visible on

the weapon's hilt.

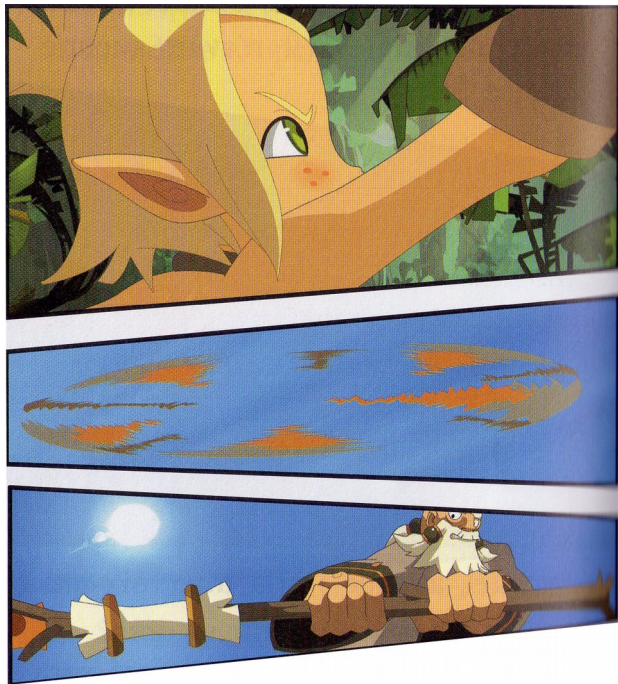


The old man swallowed hard. Scalpel versus demonic cutlass? He did not stand a chance.

“Ruel! Catch!” a feminine voice called from below.



It was Eva. She too was back to her usual self, as well as Amalia. The archer threw his shovel into the air and he caught it with both hands, quick as a viper. Now armed with his favorite weapon, he felt young again.



Smisse hurled himself at the Enutrof, but he was underestimating Ruel's reflexes. The old man caught him in the face with a strike of his shovel that sent him flying over the railing. The fight was over before it began as the pirate fell to the ground screaming.

"Good riddance," Ruel said as he cut the last remaining cable with the blade of his shovel. Not a moment later, the airship started to rise gracefully, freed from all of its restraints.

Yugo and Percy came out of the bushes the same instant, out of breath. The Iop knight was back to normal. The boys stopped momentarily when they saw that Eva and Amalia were beautiful teenagers once again.

"So you two also grew back up all of a sudden?" the Iop asked. "Good!"



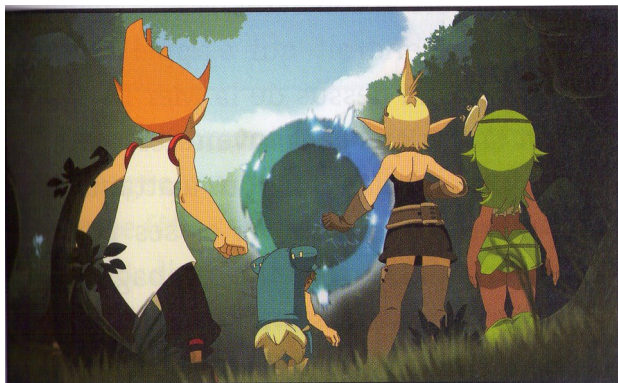


“Looks like this miraculous water only lasts a little while,” Amalia confirmed.

“I don’t want to rush anyone, but we have a ship to board,” Evangelyne interrupted.

Yugo opened a portal.

“Quick, get in there!”



His three friends ran through the blue halo. Yugo went in last and appeared on the main deck of the ship.

“We made it!”

“Thanks to you,” Amalia pointed out.

Yugo’s friends were clenching at their stomachs, feeling ill. Once the feeling had passed, Eva spoke



again:

“Your plan was brilliant, Yugo.”

Percedal put a hand on his shoulder like a big brother and added:

“You know, you have the mettle to be a great Iop knight, like me.”

“They’re right,” Ruel chipped in. “We won’t treat you like a baby anymore.”

Enjoying his moment of triumph, Yugo asked his bearded friend:

“You know how to pilot this, right?”

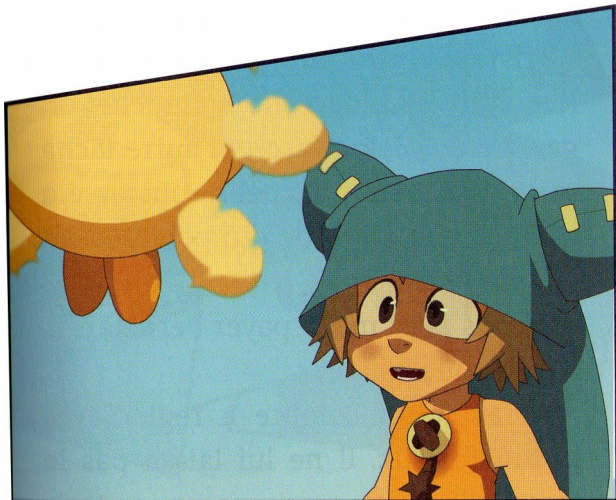
“No worries. It’s the same as a regular ship. Just give me a course.”

“Follow the sunset. We must reach a place called the Floating Island, above the Stinky Sea. That’s where we’ll find the rest of the clan that attacked us.”

Just as he finished talking, Az and his companions reached the ship and joined the adventurers. They had had no trouble eluding their pursuers.

“Az! I’m so happy to have you back! You have no idea how much I missed you!”

The boy’s happiness was clearly shared by the Tofu, who was practically dancing in the air.



All of a sudden, a scream was heard. It came from Ober Smisse, who was now shooting up from starboard like a Shushu out of a box. He must have grabbed onto the ship as he fell, and waited for the right time to strike.

Percedal was the closest to the Rogue. He hit him with a left hook to the face that forced him to let go of his grip... only to catch a length of rope that lay against the side of the ship.

“You’ll all pay for this! I’ll...”

Az had a score to settle with the madman. He

gave him no time to voice his threats: in a few flaps of his wings, he reached the pirate and started pecking furiously at his hands and face.

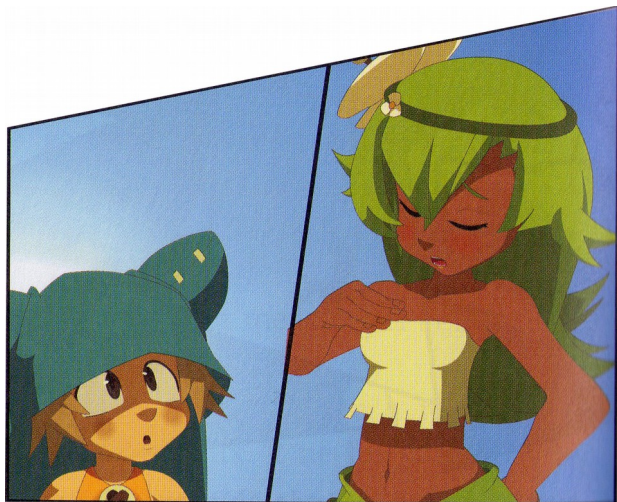
Ober Smisse screamed. He fell and flailed his arms almost comically. It only took a second for him to be swallowed by the swathes of green leaves below.



“I think this time we’re rid of him for good,” Percy said while dusting off his hands.

“I hope the other Smisses aren’t as mad as him,” Amalia said with a wince.

“Only time will tell,” Yugo said thoughtfully.



He was turned toward the sun setting on the horizon. Az landed on his shoulder, and he petted the animal. In his chest, he felt a glowing heat like the fiery orb in front of him. He didn’t know what the future had in store for them, but for now he was with his friends and happy.

## Epilogue

Ober Smisse had soon recovered from his fall. A few strained ribs were nothing for a Rogue! No sooner had he been back on his feet than he had sent teams to find the missing crew who had been hunting for the fake island natives. One group had freed the men caught in the bamboo forest, while another, led by Smisse himself, had found Lonely-Eye and his very young companions. In a few words, the first mate had told the captain how Yugo and Percedal had tricked them.

“What do we do, boss?” he asked when his report was over.

“We scout the island’s shores. The old man and his friends didn’t get here swimming!”

Indeed, after an hour of searching, the bandits found the cove where the adventurers’ ship lay at anchor.

“That’s just a small boat,” one of the child pirates commented. “There’s no room for fifty men on her!”

He was so disappointed that he started crying.

“Enough!” Smisse shouted. “Boys don’t cry!”

He turned his attention back to the small ship.



“We’ll have to squeeze up, that’s all...”

*If need be, I’ll have three quarters of the crew drink the water of youth*, he added to himself, although the idea of sailing with a bunch of rug rats was far from appealing.



Out of nowhere, a figure in a dark frayed cloak appeared between them and the ship. Levitating a few centikameters above the ground, its shadow made a dark stain on the white sand.

“My apologies, gentlemen,” the stranger said, “but I cannot allow you to use this ship. I have other plans for it.”

The man wore a mask that gave a metallic ring to his voice.

“Who is it this time...” Lonely-Eye sighed.

“Someone who’s about to regret getting in my way,” his captain growled in reply.

All in one day, he had been ridiculed, part of his crew had



been turned into whiny children and HIS airship had been hijacked... He was not in the mood for another slight.

“I’m gonna slice you up!” he called out as he drew his cutlass.

“Going all out?” the Shushu inside the weapon asked Smisse.

“Go ahead.”





The Rogue's muscles immediately started to swell. His size doubled, then tripled... His shirt split on his back, and soon his sleeves and pants were reduced to shreds. The man, if he was still one, still looked vaguely like Ober Smisse, but a third, evil-looking eye now seemed tattooed on his forehead. He charged the intruder with a deafening roar as his crew looked on, watching expectantly for the imminent clash. The outcome of the fight was a foregone conclusion to them.

The stranger raised one gloved hand, palm forward as if to say, "stop." A blinding ray of light surged from his black glove and struck Ober Smisse with full force. The mutated man flew backward



and crashed deep into the forest, tearing dozens of trees out of the ground on his way, not unlike his airship had done earlier that day.

The other pirates couldn't believe their eyes. This was the first time they had seen anyone overpower their leader so easily and thoroughly!

The mysterious man made a quick bow, like an actor after a performance, and disappeared in a sizzle of luminous blue sparks.

“What... what about the boat?” Lonely-Eye barely managed to articulate.

The boat had vanished as well.

All that remained was the sea, the sand and the endless blue sky...