

Chapter 249: The Sea Sovereign

All eight Pirate Lords, and Vexx, rounded on Scáthach as she stood before her throne, the air tense and electric with fear. "We take her together!" Jayce declared, Sola and Luna flicking out into a pair of longswords. Scáthach tilted her head and looked at him, a bemused smile on her face as Jayce cautiously edged forwards. Her deep brown eyes pulsed purple and she darted towards him. He raised his blades to block her strike but a hand grabbed his shoulder and pulled him back. "Snap out of it," Kitty warned, the entire environment around them changing in an instant.

Scáthach sat on her throne, an extended finger tapping her chin as she watched the display in front of her. Her dark orange hair was messily tied up, with a few strands hanging over her eyes. She'd kept in her numerous piercings throughout her nose and ears, a lone lip ring on the bottom right of her mouth. Dark, winged eyeliner surrounded her eyes and she wore simple green baggy trousers and a plain black t-shirt. No weapons sat in her hands, not that she'd need them. The eight Engines had all turned on one another, beaming holes through each other in a desperate fight against nothing.

Jayce turned to stop them but Kitty's grip remained firm on his shoulder. "They're dead already," she stated, Scáthach's lips curling into a sadistic grin. One surviving Engine staggered forwards, only to lurch backwards as Scáthach shimmered in her chair and apparated in front of it. She grabbed the cyclops mask and pulled, peeling the flesh from the metal in a long gargling retch as the metal tendrils throughout the host were forcibly ripped out. "Well?" Scáthach questioned. "Are we just going to stand around, or are we going to fight?"

Tim began to chant and the Machinist unleashed a pair of thin streams of golden fire towards Scáthach. Jayce, Vexx, Ningyo, Thákane, Tanare and Kitty all darted forwards, pursuing Scáthach around the huge throne room as she dashed backwards in a series of fast leaps. She moved impossibly quickly, using the air itself to propel and twist herself away from Kitty's and Tanare's glowing and flaming claws, all whilst avoiding and ducking under Vexx's precise chops, kicks and strikes. Ningyo did what he could, but as he moved after Jayce and the others a periodic dribble of blood would fall to the floor behind him. He was injured and Scáthach noticed it immediately.

"Protect him!" Jayce yelled, all four other melee Pirate Lords turning and lunging to intercept Scáthach as she suddenly leant forwards and leapt at Ningyo with intention to kill. In a singular point, Jayce's blades, Kitty and Tanare's claws and

Vexx's palms met Scáthach's extended fingers. Focus met Focus, sending waves of black and white flame across the room as Jayce yelled out, his legs slowly bending as Scáthach pressed closer and closer through the unified defence. But a bolt of lightning caught Scáthach from behind, causing her to lurch before Tanare delivered a firm and well-placed kick to her side that tore her free from the melee.

The Machinist bent over, unleashing a barrage of rockets from her back that Scáthach pirouetted and somersaulted through as the floor of the throne room shattered and exploded. A twin plume of flame was then launched from the Machinist's exosuit as she aimed her flamethrowers and fired, met by a large beam of icy energy on the other side from Thákane's draconic mouth. Scáthach screamed with brief pain as her clothes tore and ignited. A crackling storm of lightning filled the ceiling of the room, Scáthach's eyes turning away from the Machinist, even as she stood caught within the plumes of flame, towards Tim.

She took a step forwards, but Tanare intercepted her, dancing with her in the flames in a flurry of blue swipes and slashes. "Wear her down!" Vexx yelled, leaping into the stream of fire and ice with Tanare and filling the gaps of his strikes with his own. Kitty and Jayce both faltered, neither of them were fast enough to match the blows, their own eyes barely able to keep up with the storm. "Tanare!" Tim yelled, wary of catching both Vexx and Tanare within his spell. "Do it!" yelled the therian, a heavy lightning storm descending upon the trio and drawing out screams and grunts of pain from all of them. Still, they battled, until finally the flames from the Machinist stopped as her tanks ran dry. "Shit!" the Machinist cried, Scáthach ducking away from the pair of traitor Betrayers and launching at the exosuit as it desperately tried to use its reserves to pull away.

"Screw this!" yelled the Machinist, launching like a rocket at the main doors and shattering through them. A furious Scáthach tore after her, with Thákane flying after them using a pair of large draconic wings. Vexx and Tanare both staggered, the pair of them covered in char and burns. Jayce fumbled inside his bottomless bag and tossed them both a healing potion before taking off after Kitty and Ningyo, both Betrayers following closely after with Tim bringing up the rear.

The Machinist reached open air; the death-filled warzone all around her, as she looked for any of her people to refuel her suit. "No-no-no!" she cried, only for something hard and heavy to hit her from behind, sending her spiralling down towards the ocean. She twisted her body to try and pull up but her thrusters weren't responding, a grin filling her visor as Scáthach proudly showed a fist full of components. A heavy kick sealed the deal, sending the Machinist crashing into

the ocean – the weight of her exosuit causing her to sink fast. “Help! Help!” she cried, a crack in her visor swiftly spraying water into her face as she tried to fumble for her emergency release. She sank into the darkness, eyes wide in terror as her suit filled up with more and more water.

Jayce glanced down towards the debris covered ocean; there was no telling where the Machinist had crashed. She was gone.

A huge beam of icy energy knocked Scáthach out of the air as Thákane’s Dragon fired at her. Jayce swung with his swords, cutting deep into her sides, only for the wounds to almost immediately regenerate. Scáthach winked at him and grabbed his shoulders, twisting and throwing him as hard as she could into the surface of the water. He bounced across the top of the ocean as his Focus braced the impact, a series of heavy punches detonating the water where he had been as Scáthach chose him as her next victim. “They rally around you, Jayce! You fall, and so do they!” she yelled, only to grunt as Vexx tackled her.

Kitty, Tanare and Thákane dove after Scáthach and Vexx, throwing blow after blow at her as she dashed across the warzone – the entire war nothing more than a backdrop to their battle. Ningyo leapt free from the water, swinging his trident at her whenever he could before descending back below the safety of the surface. “Cute trick!” Scáthach yelled, shattering her way through a Null Legion ship in her path before obliterating a Machinist vessel. Nanabolele roared as she dove down towards Scáthach, but the Sovereign leapt up into the air, flying past the Dragon towards the lightning-charged clouds above. The Pirate Lords pursued, with Nanabolele surging past them on a ravenous charge towards the Sovereign. The wingless water Dragon twisted through the air, only for her eyes to widen as Scáthach stuck her hand into the clouds and threw a devastating lightning-charged fist straight into the Dragon’s face.

The Dragon’s scales shattered and popped as the wrath of the skies tore through her, the blow ending her life instantly. “No!” screamed Thákane, her draconic visage vanishing from her body as her companion was executed. She began to fall, screaming as she did so, but Scáthach tore through Jayce and the others to fall beside her. “Weak,” Scáthach told her apathetically, giving a gentle kick to her tumbling body and sending Thákane spiralling down to impact upon the broken mast of one of the Null Legion ships. Thákane hung there, staring up at the sky, her body impaled and eyes wide and glazed over.

“Jayce, we’re running out of bodies!” Kitty yelled, as Scáthach skated across the surface of the debris-filled ocean - her eyes scanning for Ningyo. “We need to get

her back inside!" Jayce yelled to Tanare and Vexx. The pair nodded, and charged forwards after Scáthach. "Tim, slow her down!" he then yelled. "Kitty..." She nodded, diving after Tanare and Vexx, her numerous glowing tails flicking behind her.

Scáthach lurched as a fist of water grabbed her ankle and held her in place. She frowned as she looked down at it, before twisting her body to avoid a pair of flying fists from Tanare and Vexx. The water around her turned inky black, the surface twisting and bubbling as tentacles thrashed around her. "No!" Scáthach yelled, a tentacle grabbing her arm and pulling to the side as another grabbed her other arm, before two more took her legs. A huge beaked maw appeared below her, Jayce and the others pulling back in surprised horror as the tentacles pulled and stretched her as she thrashed, screaming, against it.

Jayce glanced to the side; Ningyo floated in the ocean – a grin on his face as he commanded the sea monsters to kill Scáthach. Limbs snapped and tore before the huge maw snapped around Scáthach and dragged her under. Kitty cheered, but both Tanare and Vexx stood stunned, unable to even believe what they had seen. "Ningyo, you did it! She's dead!" Jayce yelled, turning and looking at Ningyo only to find Scáthach sat on top of the water with a bored look on her face. She let out a yawn, Jayce's eyes widening as an ocean crawler's arm floated atop the water where the Sovereign had been. A tentacle quickly snatched it and pull the last remains of Ningyo under. "Horrible way to go," Scáthach said with a dark smile.

Scáthach apparated in front of Jayce, her nose touching his as she stared into his eyes and pulled back her arm. "Jayce!" Kitty cried, knocking him aside as Scáthach thrust her arm through Kitty's chest. Kitty coughed blood into Scáthach's face before falling away down towards the ocean. "Kitty!" Tim cried, but one of her glowing tails vanished and her body instantly regenerated. "This isn't over! Snap out of it!" Kitty yelled at Tanare and Vexx.

The pair of Ex-Betrayers lunged at Scáthach, both far faster than they had been moments before. Tanare raked his claws across her face and Vexx slashed across her neck with his hand, almost beheading her. The skin knitted back together, Scáthach's face turning into a snarl of aggression as her playtime came to an end. "This is losing its fun!" Scáthach yelled, throwing an impaling fist at Vexx only for Kitty to once again throw her body in the way, sacrificing another of her lives to open up an opportunity for Jayce and the others to wound the Sovereign.

"Bitch!" Scáthach yelled, turning on Kitty as she regenerated once more. A beam of black energy hit her from behind, another spell following almost instantly from Tim. Vexx covered for Tim as she charged at him, knocking her aside only for Tanare to land a firm swipe and for Jayce to cut her open a moment later. In a rhythm, the five of them struck at her, using Kitty as a sacrificial lamb to take any blow that go too close for comfort. "Running low!" Kitty yelled, a trio of tails flicking angrily behind her as she died and revived once more. A golden circle surrounded Scáthach, a beam of divine energy slamming down onto her from above as Jayce, Tanare and Vexx pinned her inside the circle. "Dammit!" Scáthach yelled, dashing through them back towards her mansion.

She moved like a blur, far faster than even Vexx could move. They pursued her, crashing back into the throne room in a spray of dust and stone but she was nowhere in sight. "Where is she?" questioned Jayce, stepping forwards with a firm grip on his swords as he scanned the room. "Oh no," uttered Tanare, his eyes towards the throne. "Oh no?" questioned Kitty. "What the hell do you mean 'oh no'?"

A heavy metallic clang shook the room, a vault door rolling free from beneath the stairs leading up to the Sovereign's throne. It fell over with a crash and Scáthach stepped out from beneath the steps, dressed from the chin down in a black skintight suit covered in armour plating. A pair of large axes hung in both hands, the sight painting an uncomfortable resemblance to Jayce's own mother. The suit glowed vividly in Jayce's eyes, firm enchantments embedded throughout it, and with each movement, as Scáthach rolled her arms a faint mechanical whir could be heard within.

Vexx stepped over towards Jayce. "I may need these," he stated, looking down towards Sola and Luna. "I'll do you one better," Jayce responded, reaching into his bottomless bag and pulling out a pair of spiked gauntlets and a small curved dagger. "You kept them?" Vexx questioned, unable to force a faint smile as a loud whining built up from Scáthach's armour. "Leave nothing in reserve!" Jayce stated. "Tim, get it done!" he commanded.

Yells came from behind, a flood of Pirates and Engines charging in as reinforcements. "Whoever takes her head rules the seas!" declared one of the Machinist's cyborgs, charging straight past Jayce with a large cleaver in hand. Scáthach barely moved, chopping downwards with terrifying speed and splitting the cyborg cleanly in half. A faint trail of her body followed her around

as she tore apart the reinforcements, twirling her axes around in a fatal and brutal dance.

Blue flames ignited across Tanare's body as he and Vexx dashed into the fray, twisting and ducking under her blows whilst throwing back brief attacks of their own – their strikes either being absorbed by her combat suit or her body regenerating from the blows. Jayce dashed into the fight, leaving Kitty to guard Tim as he painted a ritual circle on the floor and dropped a small clay golem into the ring before repeating the process in another part of the room. Pirates and Engines threw themselves in desperation at Scáthach, each being cleaved apart with ease for their effort, but the mass of bodies helped defend Jayce, Vexx and Tanare – especially with Vexx and Tanare cruelly pushing the grunts into the living blender that was Scáthach with little concern to the lives they were helping to end.

"This isn't going to go your way!" Jayce yelled, stepping into a downward blow and blocking it with his swords, only to hastily defend a quick sideways chop aimed at his midriff. The force of the blow sent him sliding away across the blood-covered floor. "You and your Demon will perish here together! You can't beat us all!" Jayce declared. "Paimon foresaw your downfall! Your end, Astaroth!" Jayce goaded, targeting the Demon within Scáthach.

"Shut up!" Scáthach yelled, her movements only getting faster and faster. "You know that Baal is in my crew, as is Belial, Paimon, Raim, Asmodeus, Byleth!" Jayce pressed, Tanare and Vexx picking their moments to interrupt Scáthach's blows and throw her off balance before countering with their own strikes. Jayce glanced backwards, the faintest of nods coming from Tim as he began to chant and rise up into the air.

Scáthach turned and dove at him like a lightning bolt, Kitty getting torn in half through the waist for her trouble as she blocked the blow. A heavy boom rang out, sending Scáthach crashing into an opposing wall. "Two," Kitty groaned, her body reforming in a green flash. "Now or never!" Jayce yelled, leaping at Scáthach and meeting her heavy blows with his own. Vexx came in from the right, striking her weapons to knock them off trajectory and granting Jayce openings to begin cutting at the minimal weak points across Scáthach's armour. Tanare roared and slammed into her, picking her up before slamming her to the ground.

The ritual circle they landed on began to glow. "Astaroth! This is your only chance!" Jayce threatened. The clay doll beside her began to twist and melt.

"Traitor!" Scáthach cried as her Demon abandoned her, a small white goat with four large horns forming from the clay. Jayce snatched up the Demon and stuffed him inside his bottomless bag. "Give him back!" Scáthach cried, an expression of utter hatred on her face as the battle suddenly and immediately became very real for her.

She unleashed a blast of Panic, knocking the five of them away as she leapt back up to her feet. Jayce rolled to his feet as the others got up, the group spread around her. "So, this is how it ends. The five of you. One of me. Well, go on then! Who will take my crown?" she questioned, a golden band appearing on her head. No one stepped forwards, they were all exhausted. "It doesn't have to be this way," Jayce attempted. Scáthach turned and faced him, a look of disappointment on her face as Kitty rolled her eyes and shook her head. "You know it does," Scáthach stated. "It's the way it always has been - a battle of blood and a bid for true freedom."

She stepped forwards towards Jayce and Vexx lunged, meeting her heavy swings with his gauntlets in a spray of sparks. Kitty dashed through, her claws opening a hole in Scáthach's side. Scáthach groaned and threw one of her axes, the blade embedding itself in Kitty's head. Tanare then struck from behind, knocking Scáthach to the floor. She laughed as she lay face down, slowly crawling forwards towards Jayce. She raised her head and looked at him, opening her mouth only for a heavy foot to stomp down on her neck and end her life.

Jayce looked up at Tanare as he panted heavily. Despite it all, Jayce couldn't help but feel some form of pity for her. She had been a monster, yes, evil to the core, certainly... but... Jayce shook his head and stepped forwards, closing her eyes. The crown atop her head faded away into nothingness, a golden beam falling down upon the Sea Sovereign's throne and the crown sat upon it. The mansion shook, a heavy chunk of ceiling crashing down to the floor nearby. "The bombardment has begun," Kitty stated, stretching on the floor like a cat before looking towards the throne. "This place will be rubble in minutes. It's over."

"No, it's not," Tim stated, stepping away from the group towards the throne and the Sea Sovereign's crown. "Tim, let it go," Jayce stated, stepping forwards and placing a hand on his shoulder. "The boy is right," Tanare stated, similarly stepping towards the throne. "This isn't over. She may be dead, but that throne belongs to someone." Jayce's eyes widened as Tanare and Tim continued forwards towards the throne, the pair of them stopping at the bottom of the stairs and facing one another. "Guys, this isn't worth it! If anyone takes that crown then

the whole cycle will just continue! You'll be the next Scáthach, and people will be trying to take your head too," Jayce argued, approaching the pair, even as more chunks fell from the ceiling. "Jayce..." Kitty said softly, glancing towards Vexx – whose gaze hadn't lifted from Scáthach's corpse.

"We can end it here, bury the title with her death. Let it end, please!" Jayce pleaded. Tim turned and looked at Jayce, a weary smile on his face as he drew his sword. "You know, Captain, you inspired me to be a better man – to push for more and make a bigger impact on this world than just a life as a monster hunter. My Grandfather taught me that there's always a limit to people's achievements – a wall will always arise to stop them. This is your wall, not mine. As a friend, Jayce, go. This throne is mine, and I will surpass you!"

Tanare also looked at Jayce, his hands igniting in blue flame. "You know kid, Valentine always dreamt of sitting atop this world... of being the freest man alive... But he's gone, and I'm still here. So, I'm sorry Jayce. I really am. But I cannot let this go – not for my people, not for you, not for the Captain." Both Pirate Lords met each other's gazes: one that had inspired Jayce, one that Jayce had inspired. A heavy clanking drew their attention to the doors, a near-dead Engine dragging its body into the room and extending a metallic tentacle towards the throne. "Mine!" it buzzed, only for a spear of ice to impale it and a sailing slash of fire to cut it down. Both Tanare and Tim then looked warningly towards Jayce and Kitty – a silent threat to not intervene. "Jayce, we need to go!" Kitty told him, grabbing his arm and pulling him backwards. Jayce turned and ran, grabbing Vexx and snapping him out of his daze as the room erupted into fire and ice.

"This way!" Vexx stated, angling away from the main entrance back towards the countless rooms in the mansion. "The exit is right there!" Kitty yelled, stopping in her tracks as Jayce ran after Vexx. "But the vaults are this way!" Vexx yelled back, Kitty's eyes widening. "You want it to fall into the hands of those two?" "Point taken, lead on!" Kitty yelled, a wide grin on her face as Vexx led them through the maze of doors.

"All therians! The Sovereign is dead and this land is ours! Fight for it, fight for your new Sea Sovereign!" Tanare declared across the communicators. "All mages, wipe out the animals and show them who's in charge!" Tim responded, the mansion continuing to shake as Jayce, Kitty and Vexx approached the main vaults. Vexx placed his hand to the metal before grabbing the wheel and spinning it. The locks disengaged and the vault door slid open, revealing towers

upon towers of platinum-coloured pearls, gemstones, scrolls and magical items. Kitty's eyes sparkled as she took an unconscious step into the vault. "By the Gods, what a disgusting sight!" she stated, reaching forwards and shoving a fistful into her pockets.

"Stand back!" Jayce told her, aiming his bottomless bag and sucking in the contents of the vault in a matter of seconds. He then turned and nodded to Vexx, but not before Kitty could place a hand on his arm. "I want a fair share, understood?" He grinned at her and nodded, the three of them running for the exit as the mansion began to collapse. "Bjorn, we're getting out of here! We need a pick-up!" Jayce yelled into his communicator, as Kitty did the same to Somme. "On our way," returned Bjorn.

Jayce stumbled as he ran, his body giving out on him from the sheer exhaustion of the day. Kitty grabbed his arm and threw it over her shoulder as Vexx did the same. "Everyone back to the ship!" came Bjorn's voice through Jayce's and Vexx's communicators. "We're getting the hell out of here!" They emerged into fading daylight, the sun on a downwards trajectory to the horizon. All across the Sovereign's Island, mages and therians fought all around them – a new war taking place from the old.

The Stacked Hand was sailing quickly towards the curved tip of the island, the Great Seacat close behind. Both ships had taken a beating but were still mostly intact. "Come on!" yelled Astris from the main deck, the three of them running through bolts of energy and claws and teeth. "It's Jayce Exarga! Kill him and you'll be famous!" yelled someone, the attention of the mages and therians swiftly turning towards Jayce, Kitty and Vexx as they stumbled their way towards the cliff. "Jump!" Vexx yelled, leaping free and landing on the Stacked Hand before catching Jayce as he practically fell onto the Stacked Hand with Kitty close behind him. "Where to?" Bjorn yelled.

"Get us clear! Take us south!" Jayce returned, laying on his back and panting heavily.

Seize the Seas Tales: Loyalty to One

Kaina let out a roar of pain as she spiralled out of the sky and crashed into the garden of the Sovereign's Island. Her body was covered in dozens of bites, scratches and bullet holes – each of them little more than tiny pricks in her gigantic body. She lay there, panting heavily with her eyes shut. The fight was

far from over, but her life was fading – she knew it, the three small runts and the Rising Aces would spell her end. An end that had never truly been hers.

She thought back to the last time she had lain injured like she was. That time she'd been in water, a red-headed woman on her chest with an axe to her throat – brown eyes tainted with purple. She remembered her lungs being filled with blood that wasn't hers, her mouth having torn and chewed so many of her brethren that her home had become forever closed to her. A lone tear fell from Kaina's eyes – a short lifetime of agony, and this was where it led to.

"Get up!" came a command from above, a short, grizzled man covered in black and blue scales flying above her. Kaina opened her eyes and looked up at Ordo as he held out his greatclub towards her. Lightning sparked around him, Zhurong and Taranis circling above. "I expected more from a Betrayer!" he stated, panting heavily from the hours of battle. Kaina condensed her massive form, returning back into the body of a naked near-human woman. She created clothes to cover her and looked up at him.

A streak then zoomed over him, a long-haired man fleeing from a woman wielding an anchor. "She's dead!" Sétanta yelled, dashing off towards the horizon. Kaina's eyes widened. She sucked in a heavy inhale before spewing fire around her. When the flames faded, she was gone – free to a world she didn't know.