

Of the Sky, Of the Sea, and of the Stones
Chapter 3 - Of the Sea
Part 6 - To The Coast

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Such a brutal end followed by a simple, immediate, minimal, organic funeral where only a single person attended to weep and grieve was likely a common occurrence on Kioshell island. Each of the warrior-hunters, that I accompanied to the dwelling of a knowledgeable stranger named Pyloc, looked like hardened souls who had seen great suffering. Their many scars, including some gruesome ones upon most of their faces, told tales of epic battles with mighty foes from the sea. This was a cold place inhabited by cold people, I noted, and did not forget it, for relying on the kindness of strangers in some parts is ill-advised, even if they were amiable.

Our group rolled the tarp-covered dragon heart on a snowy path flanked on either side by walls of opaque ice; a natural corridor that led east. As we cleared the passageway, we came to a nexus of four separate yet similar hallways of ice. One was the way we came and the remaining three led to different directions: north, east, and south. There was a light-coloured wooden signpost in the center of the otherwise barren square of space that mentioned what could be found in each direction. The north passage led to the base of Ice Hammer, the island's huge mountain; the east led to the coast; and the south led to somewhere called "Greygrip's Grounds", the latter of which was adorned with skulls and bones painted in red and white as opposed to the black lettering that made up the words.

"We're not going south, are we?" I asked Eocar, who simply shook their head in response, to which I sighed in relief.

"East, Pyloc lives along t'e coast," a hunter in leather armor adorned with kelp informed me.

I nodded my thanks to them for the information as they went over to help some of the others with the rolling heart; they had all been taking turns. The rest of the trip was short, as the eastern corridor of ice led us to the salty sea and a shoreline that curved northward. After a few minutes, we came upon a wooden house built into the sandy shallows, and it seemed to be swaying slightly with each wave, though it was not floating above them like how a boat would. I smiled in curiosity as the group approached what I took to be Pyloc's place.

“Wait ‘ere,” Eocar told me while pointing to a nondescript patch of sand a few meters from both the shoreline and the dark-wood structure. The mohawked leader then turned to a couple of hunters, “Aet’, Calap, wait wit’ t’e sc’olar,” they commanded.

I did as I was told, for I did not wish to upset anyone, though the view of the sea held my attention as Eocar, the heart, and most of the warriors traveled around the eastern end of the house that was in slightly deeper water. The two left to accompany (and possibly protect) me stood nearby, also staring out to sea. Across dull navy ways beneath a slate-coloured sky, hundreds of kilometers away yet still just visible on the horizon, was an island I had heard about but never visited: Grand Tusk. This relatively small island found upon the northeastern part of the map depicting the known world was a mysterious and mostly-unexplored place. Along its southern and eastern shores was said to be a channel of blood, not unlike the red sea known aptly as Leviathan’s Blood in the far southwest of the world, which was said to be the life’s essence of a terrifying large sea monster or god of the deep. I pondered what mysteries such strange and frightening places held and shuddered as a cold wind blew by me.



My slowly reeling mind was interrupted when Calap, a hunter-warrior in bumpy beige crab shell armor with dun dreadlocks armed with two hammers on his belt, spoke to me, “Are you all righ’, mister sco’lar?”

“Oh, yes, I’m quite all right, thank you,” I replied as I adjusted my thick robes and coats. “Please, call me Athos,” I introduced myself with a smile that held slightly chattering teeth.

“An Orosian name.” Declared Aeth, a lithe woman in light yellow and large purple-spotted crab shell armor. “Yet you’re far too small to be from Orosilla,” she looked down, towering at least a third of a meter over me, like all the other hunters.

“I’m actually from Euryph, to the southeast of Orosilla, though I have lived and studied on Mount Oros for quite a while,” I informed, happy to make conversation to pass the time.

“You’ve seen many places, t’en.” Aeth replied, straight-faced and confident.

Before I could reply, Calap spoke up as well, “And ‘e seeks to see many more from t’e way ‘e was peering at Grand Tusk.”

“Both correct and well-observed!” I remarked, genuinely impressed by how sharp the crab hunters were despite their almost brutish appearances.

From there, I chatted with the two warriors from Kioshell about rumours we had all heard of Grand Tusk and I told them of my travels and research at their questions. They seemed to want to know how I knew about the Grandchild of Ziz and its heart. Calap was awed, tapping a thick finger excitedly on his square jaw, by my description of Temptes Equit while Aeth seemed to find the great red eel that had destroyed it more interesting, though the only change in her expression was her thin eyebrows rising while flanking a vertical scar on the bridge of her nose.

After about half an hour, Eocar and the others returned while being trailed by one I had yet to meet who I assumed was Pyloc. This new figure was much shorter than the hunters, similar to my height, and was wearing a deep blue shroud that was the colour of the sea and rippled with a similar motion from the blowing of the coastal winds along the shoreline. His face was a mess of long grey hair and a shaggy beard, which I was honestly a bit jealous of, as it seemed very warm. As the approaching group reached where Calap, Aeth, and I were standing, the stranger addressed me in a brusque tone, “Who are you and what do you know about sky dragons?”