

Of the Sky, Of the Sea, and of the Stones
Chapter 2 - Of the Sky
Part 21 - Fury of the Deep

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The colossal red eel, over a kilometer long, rose vertically to tower over the city much as it had before. Thankfully, it was facing the city and completely unconcerned with us. Though, from the back, I could see great burn scars rife with bubbled flesh that had cooled. A memento from Temptes Equit's defenses. I could not see its wicked eyes, but I sensed from the long, almost inaudibly low, hiss and the massive form's quivering, that the titanic serpentine beast was focused with utter rage upon the city before it.

From a porthole, I continued to stare behind the Bitterwind at the city riding a storm, hovering about a hundred meters from the sea. The whirling, grey clouds between the city's foundation and the surface of the water were as twisting and powerful as they seemed upon our entrance into the city. Though, there was a change in the surroundings. The Bitterwind seemed to come across a strong wind blowing in suddenly from an unexpected direction, which had nothing to do with the winds below Temptes Equit. They caused the whole ship to turn more east. This obstructed my view of the eel and the flying city. I could not contain my curiosity, and believing that it was safe to return above deck, I made my way up. A few Aetherians joined me as they, understandably, had an even greater desire to see what would happen. Though many, shaken and depressed by the ordeal, opted to stay below and mourn for a great loss. Myself and those that went above gathered near the back of the ship and leaned upon the railing, observing what happened next.

Some of Ziz's flying rainbow serpent offspring were redirecting their attention towards the red eel. They formed a squad in the air in the shape of an arrow and shot forth with fire and fury. The red giant hissed with rage so potent that it caused a shockwave to be sent through wind and waves. Undeterred, the many-winged dragons, each probably as long as our ship, began spewing flames down upon the fiend from the deep. Returning fire, the eel spat black tar upwards at the squadron. The dark ooze, wet and vile, doused much of the flames as the sodden projectile hit multiple sky serpents. Some were knocked from the sky, falling into the sea or crashed into the razed remnants of Temptes Equit.



Figure 28. The maw of the colossal red eel as it rose

The great red beast then let out a series of rapid, staccato hisses and reared its head back. At first, I thought it was in victory but then saw that it must have been some sort of call.

Pink, slug-like masses, now hard to see from how far the Bitterwind was from the city, began jumping off the ramparts, into the sea. When they resurfaced, they were dark red in colour; a shade matching that of the crimson eel they had somewhat originated from. Part of me was reviled, while the other was curious at the biological meaning of this abhorrent sight.

I then saw that the colossal eel was rearing back because it was lifting its other half up from the abyss. The scholars and I gasped as the fiend wound its red limb back and proceeded to slam the side of the city. Even though the beast was mighty, I doubted that slamming itself against stone and metal walls would do much to shake the structure, let alone sink it.

Beside me, I heard Cais gasp and exclaim that the eel was repeatedly hitting the same spot. The area closest to an external entrance to the Soul of the city; the energetic core that powers the storm it rides. One meant only for maintenance, apparently. Another scholar asked how the eel could know about this opening, hidden by a door matching the walls around it, to which the head librarian shrugged, uncertain. I hypothesized that maybe the tongue-beasts within the city had relayed

information to it somehow, which queued up numerous other thoughts and theories, though the discussion was interrupted by a raucous noise.

The shattering of metal and stone echoed over the sea. The great, sea serpent then dove head-first into the massive, broken doorway. Then, slowly yet undeniably, the raging twister below the city began to calm. And Temptes Equit began to fall.