

Of the Sky, Of the Sea, and of the Stones
Chapter 2 - Of the Sky
Part 2 - The Harbour

Written by Athos Angion
Loremaster of the GLRU - Mount Oros Chapter

Illustrated by Elador Loam
Novice of the GLRU - Mount Oros Chapter

As I gazed towards the highest peaks, I spied the far off forms of great sky serpents. Long and majestic, their many-coloured feathers left marks in the sky. I've read legends of these creatures, referred to in ancient texts in passing as 'The Children of Ziz'. Little information about them exists in written form, but from what I have read, these winged serpents were harbingers of madness and the might of The Sky. Where their mother was, I did not know, but was grateful that she was not present. For what I read of her gave me the impression that sighting her usually preludes to one's doom.

Reds that smeared away into faded, bizarre tints and violets that faded along into smeared, queer shades trailed behind them. I was transfixed by the sight, but soon my eyes began to burn. I tried to look away, I even remember turning my head, but my eyes were too strongly drawn upwards. From my peripherals, I could sense that the crew around me were in similar situations. Some began to moan in agony while others began to panic, cursing the serpents.

When the crew and I felt that our minds were at their breaking points, the sky serpents flew away, off into the north. As they retreated into the distance, I felt the pain leave my eyes. With relief, I closed them, savouring the sweet darkness of my eyelids for much longer than a moment before re-opening them.

"What the fuck was that about?" I heard one sailor ask another.

"I dunno, Regi, but I don't like it! Them sky devils would have made us go mad!" Regi's comrade stated in response. "We should turn back and get out of this place! It's pretty, but I don't like it. There's too many strange things here."

At this, many of the crew nodded and agreed aloud. It was then that I had to speak up, indicating an issue with their idea, "And how would we turn back?" I asked before gesturing with a single hand towards the aft of the ship. Many sailors looked the same way, leaning over the railings to get a better look behind us.

“That waterfall thing. It’s gone!” A different sailor exclaimed. He ran his hands through his bushy, brown hair, clearly stressed.

It was then that the captain spoke up, “Relax! Everyone, please relax.” After getting everyone’s attention from the upper deck, he whispered something to the helmsman before addressing the entire crew once more. “Lads and Lasses, we are in a strange, new place. That much is apparent to any with eyes. But panic would only prevent us from finding a solution. Besides, we did not come here to immediately turn back. We were hired by a scholar to take them to a floating city AND bring them back to the shores of Orosilla,” the captain emphasized. He paused to gauge the expressions of the crew, who were all murmuring among themselves. “I’m fairly certain that no person upon this vessel is a coward. If you find that during recent happenings that that has changed, please feel free to throw yourself overboard so that I don’t have to deal with the likes of any yellow-bellied worms!”

“I ain’t no yellow-bellied worm!” Regi’s friend shouted in response, rousing the spirits of the crew.

“Yeah, you tell ‘em, Carl!”, Regi agreed amiably.

And with the crew’s resolve restored, we began to navigate the strange, brilliant docks as best we could. As everyone began making observations and suggestions about what to do next, I internally thanked the captain for his clear mastery of his duties. Particularly, his attention to contracts made and his understanding of his crew’s hearts and minds. I truly picked a worthy vessel and crew for this voyage.

Regi and Carl, being the two loudest members of the crew, made their ideas known. Though, the bushy haired one who was stressed by our lack of retreat options, whose name was Jonas, debated them at nearly every word. The crew squabbled as they tried to interpret the geography and architecture of the strange surroundings.

While they debated, however, I stepped up to the frontmost part of the ship’s prow, to peer ahead. There were quite a few other ships in the maze of docks and channels, though they were alien in most regards. Their hulls were in the shape of slender, oval bowls, and had no sails. At least, none that were unfurled, as I spied rolled up sheets of some sort near the aft of each of these oval vessels. On their sides were many portholes, each accompanied by an oar, indicating that these ships were propelled by those who rode within.

Each silvery ship, seemingly all made from the same light gray metal, paused in each cell of the docks before someone on board called out with some signal. It sounded like they alternated between three main words. When someone cried out “Priory!” the way forward was opened. At “Dextera!” the rightmost channel opened. And at “Sinistra!” the leftmost way was cleared. I had no idea who, or what, was

controlling the network of docks and blocks forming the harbour's maze, but the verbal signals seemed to be the best way to navigate our own ship.

I relayed my findings to the captain, who set the crew to the tasks of emulating the oval ships ahead of us. The captain assigned his first mate, a fearsome looking woman named Karcharia, to do the verbal signalling. The captain, crew, and I saw an open looking area further into the docks. A few ships seemed to be anchored there, so we assumed that it would be fine for us to do the same.

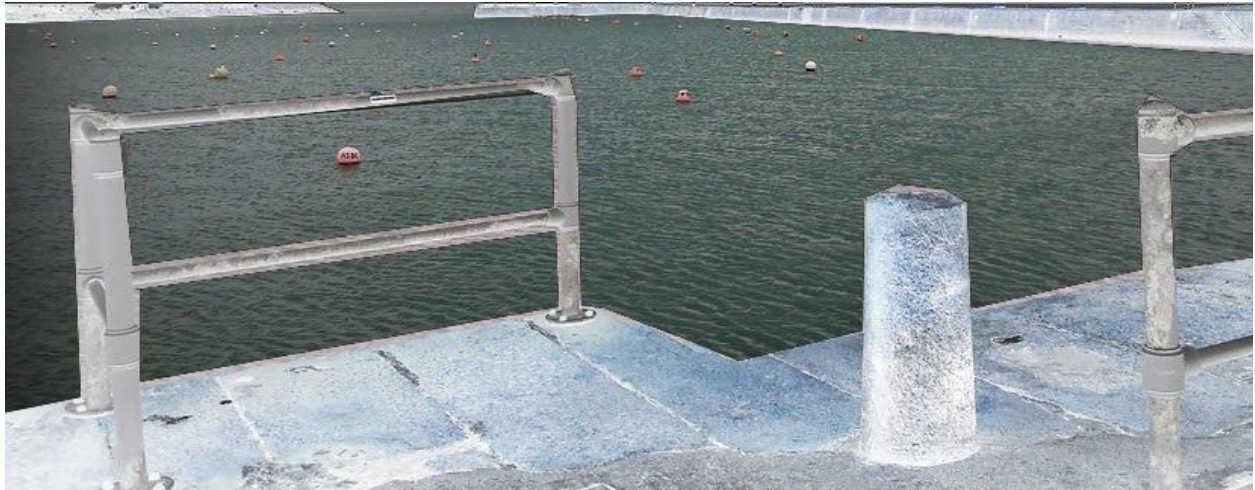


Figure 9. The bricks that paved the harbour were pale and seemed to glow slightly.

Utilizing the same method as the oval ships, we made our way to the docking area and dropped anchor. The crew then set up the gang-plank so that we could venture ashore and get a grasp of this wondrous city, where everything was clean and almost shone. But as they did so, a group blocked the way off the ship. People of light blue skin stood between us and the dock proper, though they did not look hostile, merely curious.

Then, one of them stepped forward, resting on the centre of the gangplank. This individual was separated from the rest by the regal looking toga about her body. It was pale in colour, but adorned with many odd ornamentations. By comparison, the others that grouped up behind her were quite plain.

She then spoke, and addressed the captain, crew, and I together, though she spoke in a language that I had never heard aloud before, save in lecture halls and literary recitals. She was speaking Koivan, a language long thought dead and only used for reading ancient texts, tomes, and scrolls. It took me a few moments to understand, as her tone and inflections were vastly different from the ways I heard Koivan read aloud. Though, I finally grasped what she was saying after using much mental power.

Combined with the expression on her face, as well as that of those behind her, her words seemed to be a plea for assistance. Something seemed to be troubling them, but as I was mentally forming a response in Koivan, I felt a great tremor shake the ship. Though, I noticed that it was not only the ship that was shaking, for the entire city then began to rumble in a hideous manner.