

**Of the Sky, Of the Sea, and of the Stones**  
**Chapter 2 - Of the Sky**  
**Part 24 - A Soul; A Heart**

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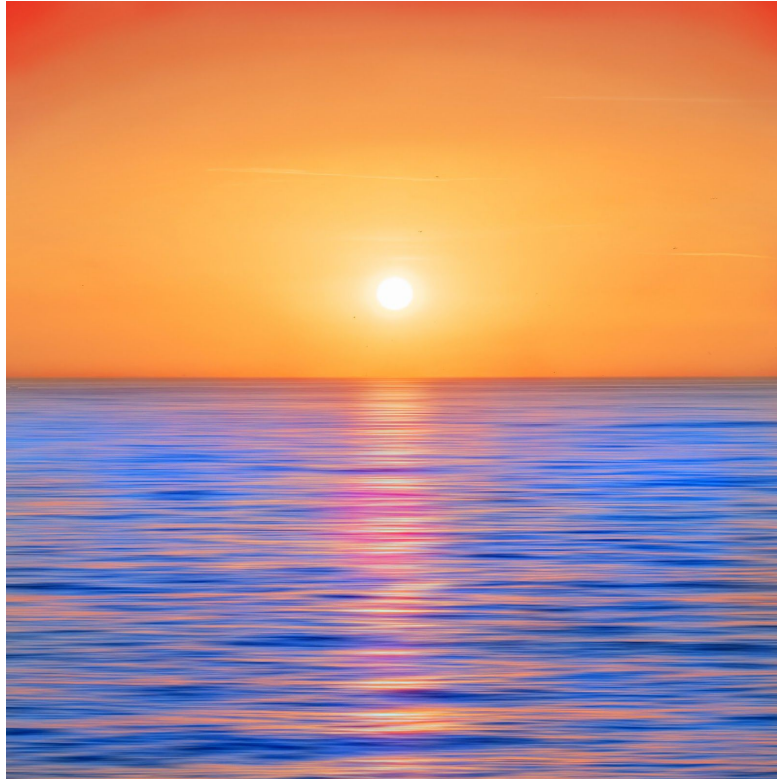
During the integration of the Aetherians into the Global Lore Researchers Union, I ended up spending a lot of time with the cyan-skinned folk. Having been through great ordeals with them, our comradery felt natural and as if I had known them for far longer than a few weeks.

With the disastrous events that befell Temptes Equit fresh in our minds, discussion of all that happened was inevitable. The blue scholars needed to cope with their loss and conversation could greatly help in the healing of this kind of sorrow. It was through one such conversation that I learned the true nature of what a flying city's "Soul" actually was.

After a particularly long day of cataloging and classifying much of the books the Aetherians had brought with them from overseas, Cais, his cats, and I decided to have some tea while gazing at the sunset from one of my favourite spots upon the western patios of the Chapter's upper terraces. Before our eyes was the shimmering North Peleca Sea, the blue expanse where Temptes Equit had rested. Above it was a gradient sky of yellow, orange, and red. From where the horizon meets the water the sun could be seen glowing gold and fierce and as the light extended upwards it reddened until the aether above was a deep maroon giving way to coming night. Around us were many naturally growing plants that thrived upon mountains, such as curving, thin-trunked pine trees, numerous vines of pink, purple, and deep green, as well as unusually active flowers shaped like blue and white bells which opened and closed rhythmically as if breathing. Here Cais and I sat while we chatted and sipped our hot beverages. Olhos, Maos, and Relva were nearby, exploring the area's sights and smells, though we brought bowls of warm milk for them so that they could join us in sharing a drink.

As Cais stared out to the west, a shadow of remembrance crossed his cyan face while the sea breeze toyed with his long mane of wavy, navy locks. "Temptes Equit had a beautiful Soul..."

Sensing that he may have brought it up because he wanted to talk about it, I engaged him on the topic. Though, I will not deny that I greatly wished to know more.



*Figure 31. Representation of what the sunset looks like from the upper terraces*

I had prodded on the matter in the past days, but the scholars could not spare the time to chat since there was much to be done in regards to setting them up within the GLRU. “What made the city’s Soul so beautiful?” I asked, “was it the colour, the power, or something else?”

He smiled sadly at me before sipping his tea. After a long drink, he replied, “Everything. It turned light and heat into harvestable energy for us, which allowed the city to stay afloat. It boosted the yield of our crops. It even purified our water. Without it, Temptes Equit would have never been created.”

I nodded understandingly. It made sense that a city’s Soul would be so revered by its people. “Where do the Souls for flying cities come from?” I queried. “Surely something of such magnificence must have an extraordinary origin.”

Cais was looking at Olhos in front of us, who was batting a blue and white bellflower playfully as it huffed and puffed. He smiled at his feline friend as he spoke, “Souls are a bit misleadingly named. They are actually the hearts of Children of Ziz, like the one that destroyed the huge crimson eel that attacked the city.”

I gasped, “Incredible! This raises so many questions. Firstly, how did your people come into possession of such an organ?”

“It was a gift. Long, long ago, when my people inhabited the cold islands in the sea your people call the ‘Koivu’, my ancestors prayed and worshipped Ziz and her children, believing them to be the creators of the world. They wished to get closer to the sky, to their gods, because they wished to be as radiant and as powerful. They would constantly offer themselves in servitude. They pledged to do anything the sky serpents wanted, though for a long time my people were ignored, for Ziz and her children wanted nothing from we tiny mortals.”

As he paused to take another drink, he raised his gaze up to where the sky met the sea on the horizon, where gold met azure. Relva had hopped onto my lap and I began petting her. “You’ve already heard this and are bored, right?” I asked the grass-green feline as she stretched and then curled up sleepily upon me.

Cais, still focused on the horizon, continued, “Eventually, however, the Children of Ziz responded to my ancestors. They descended bearing massive turquoise orbs; great serpent hearts. They bestowed the power of these treasured organs in exchange for my people’s service in observing the sea from above. The Children have a hated foe who dwells deep in the oceans of the world and who is apparently waging a war against them. They even have a prophecy stating that he will one day attempt to quench the sun with the waters of Okeanós, though I have no idea if there is any credibility to this.”

“Fascinating, so your people were given these hearts, these Souls, in order to have greater power to serve the Children of Ziz,” I summarized for my own benefit.

“Precisely. Their foes of the abyss hid from their brilliance, therefore the gods of the Aether needed others to get closer and gather information while staying within the realm of the sky. There were five hearts given to my ancestors, all from Children of Ziz who had died somehow. It is never explained fully, but the former owners of these hearts ‘fell’ to either ‘sea’ or ‘void’, likely due to the fault of their great undersea enemy. We have observed and reported on many massive sea monsters for the gods of the Aether since our taking to the sky, though we have been attacked by these sea fiends whenever we draw too close to the oceans. It’s as if they have scouts all over the world..”

“Then why was Temptes Equit so close to the water?” I pondered, still stroking Relva’s soft fur while she purred happily.

“I don’t know. Most of the city has duties that have nothing to do with our primary calling of sea monster sighting, so only the selected few observers and the city’s leaders know the details. There were rumours that Temptes Equit was planning on testing a new weapon, but I can neither confirm nor deny this,” the librarian then sighed. Prior to this conversation, he and I had been going over the minutia required for sorting almost unsortable books into Mount Oros’ library and we were both a bit drained from the matter.

Seeing deep purple bags under his eyes, I decided to end the chat there, to which he was glad. We finished our tea, and the cats their milk, before the five of us retired to our respective quarters for the night.