

Of the Sky, Of the Sea, and of the Stones
Chapter 3 - Of the Sea
Part 13 - Through the Ruins

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We proceeded through the ruins of Old Pleon, though they were different from how I imagined. While the area was undeniably decrepit and void of human care, the structures were all more or less intact. However, each and every house, communal building, or other building we passed had its entrance broken in some way and clear signs of forced entry, such as doors and gates laying in pieces around penetrated entryways. Time and the weather had coated everything in varying degrees of ice and snow, much like the rest of Kioshell island, and the party was able to come to a startling realization as we traveled as north as the snow wall encroaching upon the northeastern corner of the desolate and frigid village would allow us.

“T’ese tracks...” Carpi said, crouching down to brush her fingers along the frozen footprints of some unknown beast as the group paused for a water break. “T’ey press into t’e ice, cracking it, but snow covers t’em all, undisturbed.”

“We’re not alone, t’en, in Old Pleon,” Eocar scowled quietly, though not in surprise, as their steady yet irate expression had been growing upon their stern features like a stony crescendo. They seemed to have been simply waiting for the right time to bring it up, so they continued quietly yet quickly, “from t’is point forward, we do not stop until we are out of t’e village. T’ese tracks look like t’ey are from the c’itinous feet of a breed of sea beast known as t’e ‘omarim.”

Pyloc and I exchanged glances of concern before the bearded scholar spoke up, “These Homarim,” he began, examining the tracks that Carpi had pointed out with his fingers, just as she did, “are they like giant lobsters or shrimp?”

“Ay!” Carpi answered enthusiastically, which earned her a dour reminder to keep quiet from Eocar. “T’ey are as tall as Eocar and ‘ave meaty claws t’at t’ey use to pummel and s’red t’eir prey,” she continued in a whisper, though while pantomiming how the Homarim batter and clamp their foes with her arms, which, were aptly shell-covered for the demonstration.

“Are they red and blue?” Pyloc asked, to which Eocar nodded.

“Males are brig’t red wit’ blue spots and females are t’e reverse. I t’ink t’at I once read t’at t’ey were called ‘Nep’ropids’,” Eocar confirmed before indicating with a hand gesture that we should get moving once more, though we continued the discussion in hushed tones as we hugged the houses bordering the snowy banks guiding our way northwest.

“Nephropids are a species of surprisingly intelligent and huge crustacean that live on the seafloor in certain areas of the Koivu Sea,” Pyloc explained, apparently only needing confirmation from the hunters about his silent suspicions before sharing his knowledge. “They are one of a few undersea creatures who possess the adequate intelligence to form societies, however, they currently seem to be in a tribal stage of sorts, which results in attacks on Koivan islands on occasion. I had a feeling that they were the culprits of Pleon’s desolation, but these tracks and the statements of the hunter-warriors confirm it.”



From there, we ventured further and discussed the nature of the Homarim, who apparently raided human settlements on occasion for the thrill of it instead of hunting or defense. It was like some sort of rite, to prove themselves in some way, though these were speculations borne from observations Pyloc had read about and tales Eocar and Carpi had heard while growing up in Cephalon. This explained why there weren’t any reports of people being eaten when the invasion from the sea happened, and why the Homarim did not pursue the people evacuating the city, for there were no trace of them before entering Old Pleon. In one way, this was a relief since it meant we weren’t actively being sought out by the sea fiends, though, it also meant what they could or would do to people might be far worse.

As this thought proliferated our minds, we turned a corner around an abandoned bakery to find ourselves on a dirt road running north to south. Down the south end, the road extended into the white haze that was steadily growing thicker as we approached the coast beyond the western perimeter of the village. To our north,

we saw a large, open metal gate that looked to be Pleon's main way in and out of this side of the village. Before anyone could be relieved or excited, however, we spotted the last thing that any of us wanted to see at that point in time: a Homarim.

The bright blue female with splashes of crimson speckles on her back was scuttling casually by herself, examining the frozen remains of what looked to be a trash can. She looked up from her inspection to see the four of us, standing shocked in the middle of the road, and she did not hesitate to react. Immediately, she let out a chittering screech that pierced my senses with terror, and then she skittered swiftly west, across the street, and disappeared beyond the nearest house, though we heard her rapidly-moving legs propel her for a ways.

Our attempt at stealth foiled, the four of us ran northward, hoping to be free of the city before the Homarim could do us any harm, but it was too late. As we reached the broken and open gateway of mangled metal marking the border of the ruins, we saw it blocked by a line of Homarim on the other side. We turned around and saw that there were few other options, as to our east was a wall of snow overgrowing a fishing supply shop and to the south and west approached more vibrant red and blue Homarim. We were trapped and surrounded, at the mercy of fiends renowned for their apathy and destructive power.