

Of the Sky, Of the Sea, and of the Stones
Chapter 3 - Of the Sea
Part 11 - Along Kio Road

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Carpi, in her blood-red shell plate armour, skipped along merrily next to the three more subdued individuals on the journey down Kio Road. I was constantly slightly cold, despite the fact that my thick, brown wool traveling cloak was shielding me sufficiently from the worst of Kioshell Island's bitter chill. The company was fine, as were the conditions, which made the continuous yet minute shivering far more tolerable, though my mouth was still drawn into a straight line. Next to me, on my right, was Pyloc in his cobalt blue traveling cloak that was of thick fabric, though not wool; it looked like some form of especially dense hemp. His eyes were set straight ahead, though slightly glazed from being within the depths of some thought likely pertaining to our destination, the ominous Sea Temple in a watery cove beneath a small mountain north of the Pleon Ruins. Next to bearded Pyloc was Eocar, stern as always, though with a determined expression that betrayed no hint of concern. The leader of the hunting party who accompanied us was wearing black and brown crabshell armour that looked like it could withstand the assault of gunfire, such as the simple pistols and rifles wielded by pirates. Beside Eocar, Carpi hopped and hummed cheerfully despite also being in thick, yet thinner and less bulky than Eocar's, crabshell armour.

"How can you two, and the other hunters, constantly wear such thick and heavy armour?" I finally asked, both to keep my mind on anything besides the cold and to satisfy my curiosity about the nature borne battle-gear.

"Ooh, it's not t'at 'eavy," Carpi explained casually before doing a cartwheel in front of myself and the other two, which kicked up a small cloud of snow that was gently blowing along the hard packed dirt road. "See?!" She finished with a flourish and landed on her feet in a wobbly manner just off to the side of the road next to me. As the three of us walked by her while acknowledging the feat, she rejoined us next to me, on my left.

"Crab s'ells, and ot'er keratinous substances, are far lig'ter t'an t'ey appear," Eocar opened before elaborating, "Nature's armour is greater t'an anyt'ing man can currently make, it's 'ow t'e monstrous sea beats 'ere can grow so large and stay so well-defended."

“Agreed, it is a marvelous trait of this island’s megafauna,” concurred Pyloc, drawn out of his reverie by the talk of biology. “I’ve heard tales of crabs that can grow to the size of islands! Never seen or heard a reliable report of one, however, if the crustaceans here can grow beyond the sizes of ships and houses, who’s to say that it isn’t possible?”

As Pyloc posed his hypothetical question, Carpi replied earnestly, “I ‘eard tons of tales as a little fry about ‘ow Kios’ell Island is actually t’e dead body of a colossal crab!” The lass, likely about a third of my fifty-years, seemed excited by the stories. Her eyes were alight with wonder at the thought of titanic crustaceans and she continued, “T’ey say t’at t’e Sea Temple nort’ of Old Pleon is in a cave t’at leads into t’e broken leg of t’e Ice ‘Ammer!”

“Isn’t ‘Ice Hammer’ the name of the mountain that takes up most of the island’s northern half?” I asked as I looked northward at the imposing summit coated with ice and surrounded by countless other, smaller, frost-cloaked peaks. As I listened to the reply to my question, I was silently thankful of not having to head up any of those mountains for my research. I would take this chilly dirt road flanked by ice and snow fields any day.



“It’s bot’! T’e mountain and t’e colossal crab t’at it’s part of! Isn’t t’at convenient?” Capri smiled as her short blond hair was tousled by a small gust.

“W’ile I don’t know for certain if t’is tale is true or false, I ‘ave ‘eard t’ings from someone w’o returned from t’e Sea Temple t’at may support t’e stories,” Eocar followed up, their dour face, onyx mohawk, and linear black facepaint a sharp contrast to the younger hunter-warrior’s features.

As we walked along Kio Road in the shadows of the northern mountains ringing Ice Hammer, Eocar told us of how one man, a shell husker (someone who separates the meat and shells of crabs and sends the respective parts to butchers, armourers, and others who make the resources into goods) named Ocyp, thought himself a bold adventurer after impulsively buying a sabre from the town blacksmith while drunk one night. Upon sobering up, Ocyp was still fond of the idea, and traveled to the least-known corner of Kioshell: the Sea Temple. When he returned from the technically unnamed shrine in the northern cove, he was just as sputtering and maddened as many who had ventured there before him. As he slowly regained his senses after days of rest and recuperation, he told others of what he saw. Ocyp spoke of seeing strange, curved, smooth, diagonally angled walls within the cove that, despite looking and feeling like rock, appeared almost exactly like the inner leg of some larger species of crab and lobster that he had husked in the past. Eocar went on to say that those present dismissed Ocyp's claims as hallucinations and that he only saw the inner bits of giant crabs because he spent most of his days among such things. However, as Pyloc brought up after Eocar finished telling us of Ocyp's accounts, this could instead mean that Ocyp was simply uniquely qualified to identify this trace of a colossal, long dead crustacean.

By the time the four of us had finished discussing our theories on the matter, we passed by the final mountain blocking our view to the west and saw the Pleon Ruins, the remains of the third and smallest town on Kioshell that was ravaged by a school of extremely hostile crustaceans. Those same beasts were said to still reside within the ruins, though, since nobody goes into them out of fear, there were no reliable reports as to the status of things in Old Pleon. When the place was razed a few decades ago, the townsfolk that had evacuated all went to Pereon, leaving their lives in the north behind.

We had no desire, or plan, to enter the ruins, as we had no need to do so. We began to skirt around the east of the Pleon Ruins, continuing to follow the mountains guiding us thus far, though now west through snowfields instead of south down a dirt road. Unfortunately, our plans changed as we were faced with an obstacle that drove us into the Pleon Ruins and towards fiendish claws.