

Of the Sky, Of the Sea, and of the Stones
Chapter 3 - Of the Sea
Part 3 - Battle in the Bloody Shallows

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Without delay, the heavily armed warriors rushed fearlessly at the giant crab who had begun to return to the sea, seemingly having completed its mission. I wanted to call out to the men and women to let it go, for in leaving it was less dangerous, however, I had no idea of the relationship between the people here and the sea. For all I knew, this shelled shatterer of ships was a recurring threat, therefore I stayed quiet. In my silence, I looked around briefly and noted that I was the only non-combatant who remained upon the docks. After seeing the colossal crab and Grandchild of Ziz head annihilate an entire frigate-sized fishing ship in a single moment, I decided to take my viewing a bit further away. There was little that obstructed my view since the docks were mostly void of ships; particularly one unfortunate one.

As the greataxe and hammer-wielding people charged at the sea fiend, I retreated further north, away from the south-facing docks, and clambered up a hill of snow and ice. It was a short trek up to a small cabin that overlooked the area, and when I reached it, I leaned upon the wooden railing of the simple porch. It looked to be the hut of a fisherman, likely one who had fled to the west of the island with the rest of the villagers and fishermen. Although not that far from where I was before, I was at a higher elevation and had some shelter as the porch had a half-roof. I doubted it would do much good if the crab-dragon hybrid launched a serious attack my way, though I felt that the odds were low enough not to be an immediate concern. I pulled my thick traveling cloak about myself as I watched the battle upon the docks unfold.

Three warriors shouted at the crab, who turned swiftly to face the oncoming threat. They snapped both claws aggressively, as if accepting the challenge, and returned from the subtle depths. It approached the humans slowly until it was in ankle-deep water. Strategically, the group of people fanned out to encircle the beast and I counted an even dozen fighters.

Without warning, one warrior from each flank of the crab charged at the crustacean and began bashing the column-like red-orange legs, though it did not seem to do much damage. The crab retaliated with a wide swipe from its massive left claw

that sent the two attackers sprawling, though mostly uninjured. They quickly rose and rejoined their formation.

The warriors seemed to be discussing what to do, yelling at one another, though it was then that the giant foe struck back. With an unexpectedly fast lunge, it strafed swiftly to one side and snatched up a hammer-holding warrior in its left pincer. Horridly, it then became to squeeze, which caused the fighter in its grasp to begin shouting in agony. At this, all discussion ended and the rest of the eleven simultaneously attacked, axes and hammers flailing.

They grouped into units of three and four as they targeted a few specific legs together. The two primary warriors who had first tested the legs must have relayed the strength of the beast's body, though together the warriors were having a better effect. Even from where I was, I heard the cracking of chitin as the fighters did their work. However, unfortunately, it was too late for the poor man in the crustacean's huge pincer.

I saw the arm of the seabeast tense before overwhelming force was sent to the perilous pincer, which bifurcated the human in its grasp. Blood rained down and dyed the snow-white sand a vivid crimson that bled into the shallows and created a scarlet tide. Into the reddened waters fell the two halves of the man, legs and lower abdomen falling limply while the upper torso, still alive, thudded with a dull splash. The upper half writhed in dismay, doomed yet still conscious; a truly abhorrent end. I was not then, nor now, a religious man, though at that moment I prayed to nothing in particular for that poor man's end to come swiftly. It was even sadder to see that the other fighters did not notice their ally's extreme separating since they were fighting for their lives. The smaller right claw was picking and pinching at those cracking their legs, though now that the big left claw was free, it seemed that another halving was approaching, to which I cringed and furrowed my brows.

As the crustacean lifted its huge pincer, ready to strike once more with its prime weapon, a deafening crack echoed across the coast. A group of warriors had broken through the chitin of one of the crab's legs with greathammers. Wasting no time, a warrior with a greataxe cleaved at the opening made in the hard shell, and in a single, solid slash the leg went limp, which gave the crab pause. The huge beast stumbled back, dragging a dead leg. It was not severed yet was no longer moving. Reflecting on what I knew of crustacean biology, I remembered that the joints of a crab's leg needed to all be intact for that leg to function. The axe-wielder must have damaged the lower-most joint enough to disable the limb.



With the breather made by the crab's short retreat, one warrior noticed the split body of her comrade and rushed over to the upper half with a terrified scream. Even from my viewing spot, I could tell that those were the cries of someone who had lost something important; someone important. My heart ached as I watched the woman drop her hammer and kneel by the torso of the dying man. The other ten warriors put themselves between the crab and the two non-combatants. However, the break in the battle did not last long.

The crab, now wary of the humans, decided to take a different approach to the battle. Which genuinely surprised me. This crab not only displayed incredible physical traits that I had never even read about in the hundreds of biology books I had digested but remarkable intelligence as well. Higher than I had ever expected from an invertebrate.

Gently tapping upon its skull-shell, it roused the Grandchild of Ziz upon its back, who perked up as I heard the howling wind from before rising again. The crustacean turned sideways to point the deadly nostrils of its cranium carapace at the warriors, who began to panic. With a shout, they all scattered, though did not retreat. One of them spared a few moments to grab the grieving warrior from her mourning over the now-dead torso of the fallen warrior by the arm and hauled her away from the soon-to-be path of destruction. Not a moment later, the barrels of wind unleashed twin horizontal tornados that tore up the beach as well much of the wooden walkway and nearby piers. The power was so immense that even the crab itself could not seem to handle it. Their huge form began to waver unsteadily, trying to stay grounded, but it seemed that from the lack of an anchoring leg, it lacked the ability to remain stable. It began to tap upon its shell frantically, though this only seemed to cause the head of the Grandchild of Ziz to produce even more force. In desperation, the crab dug both of its claws into the sand, though this was a fatal mistake, as it angled the Grandchild's nostrils downward, which created a tremendous amount of lift that caused the colossal crustacean to completely lose its grip upon the loose, bloody sand and it was sent flying into the air.

Without any way to stabilize, the massive monster twisted about chaotically in the air above the harbour as the hurricanes of its shell whipped around. Thankfully,

the terrible gusts could not focus anywhere and did little more destruction to the fishing village. After a moment of tension, the nostrils ended up pointing upward, which forced the fearsome frame downward, slamming it into the bloody sand. It hit with such force that the Grandchild of Ziz's semi-skull was knocked off of the crab. As it was separated, the nostril twisters subsided, leaving an eerie stillness in its wake. The skull, motionless, stared with a vivid emerald eye at its surroundings. They were great enough that I could see their constricted pupils darting to and fro, frantically. It rested upon its side, though was deep enough in the sand and shallow water that its nostrils were buried. I heard a muffled howling, though it was stifled and subsided. It picked up again only to subside once more. It appeared as if the wet sand was preventing it from using its wind attacks, which I was immensely grateful for.

The crab was in an equally dire circumstance as it was upsidedown and had its belly exposed. It twitched feebly, unable to right itself, and was also likely stunned by the impact.

Seeing their opportunity, the warriors charged at the crab with violent intent and began demolishing its underside with their huge weapons. Chitin-covered it was, but not for long as eleven enraged fighters felled their fierce foe.