

Of the Sky, Of the Sea, and of the Stones
Chapter 2 - Of the Sky
Part 18 - Rudely Awakened

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Sometime around dawn I awoke to screaming. I jumped up and looked around, greatly alarmed by all the shouting. Outside the windows at the end of a corridor I could see fire, and apparently many other scholars had noticed as well. It was after realizing this that my ears tuned in to the words being shouted.

Cais was above the crowd of frantic, panicking scholars upon the upper walkway he and I had traversed the previous day. “Everyone, stay calm! Panic is the enemy! We need to organize and find a solution!” At this many of the bookish dwellers paused their yelling and turned to face him, desperate for someone to quell their fears. “The fires began just moments ago. While on watch I noticed some odd lights and ascended to the upper level to investigate from the ceiling windows. The flames are spreading throughout the city, but the path to the harbour seems-” but that was all he was able to get out before a loud knocking interrupted.

This central reading area had four wide corridors attached to it, each leading to a different entrance of the library. The unnaturally loud knocking was coming from the only one that I had used: the doors closest to the city path leading to the harbour. Swiftly, Olhos and Maos raced to the doors while Relva stood upon the banister of the upper area with Cais. They quickly looked through the small, mostly decorative, windows adjacent to the doors before removing the bar blocking the way. They did so with much stronger looking heabutts than one would imagine capable of such small felines. When they cleared the path, the doors swung open, and about half a dozen people entered, though they were not Aetherians, for their skins were various shades of brown. The cats, using their hidden power once more, shut the massive doors and barred them again.

As the group approached, tailed by Olhos and Maos, I recognized them as some of the crew of the Bitterwind. Leading them was the First Mate, Karcharia. Without halting to address myself or anyone civilly, she grabbed me by the wrist and barked, “We’re leaving. Now.”

She then began to drag me away while another sailor explained. “Captain’s orders, Athos. The city is burning, but the crew was working overnight to repair the

ship. Now that she's all patched up, we're getting out of this forsaken city. Rainbow serpents, those same painfully bright things we saw when we first came here, are raining fire down! We need to leave," spoke Regi, his thick eyebrows quivering fearfully.

I nodded that I understood and then dug my sandalled heels into the soft carpet of the library floor. I also attempted to wrench my arm free from Karcharia's grip, but to no avail. Her arm didn't even budge at my struggling, though she scowled at me for my efforts. "The scholars and the librarians!" I shouted then, though she did not slow her pace. "We don't have time to salvage many books, but there's enough space on the Bitterwind for all those here. Please! I'll take the blame and suffer the captain's ire, if it needs to be so." The first mate's momentum continued, though. "I'll even increase payment for my passage back to Orosilla!" I screamed, at which she paused.

With a jagged frown she brought her face very close to mine and responded, "Double payment. If you can't cough up the coin when we bring you back home, you'll pay with your life."

"Deal!" I responded immediately, unconcerned with the future, as the dangers of the present immensely overwhelmed them in my mind.

"Change of plans, round up the nerds," Karcharia grunted at the other sailors. "The captain will want that extra coin, and a few more pieces of cargo won't be too much of a pain."

"B-but-" started Carl, his long fingered hands clutching his cleft-chinned face in bewilderment. Though before he could utter another word, Karcharia released my wrist and with the hand she was previously using to do so grabbed Carl by the collar.

"We're TAKING this CARGO. NOW!" She commanded before shoving Carl away, which sent the crew running back towards the central reading area.



Figure 25. Our view of one of the city's districts as we fled the Central Library

I followed them and when we reached the scholars I relayed the happenings up to Cais. Without needing any convincing, he, his feline assistants, and the other scholars followed the crew of the Bitterwind down the corridor and out of the library. The Aetherians grabbed as many books and possessions as they could carry as we all exited and raced through the city towards the harbour.