

Word had spread quickly of the great orca, a beast of the depths, its sheer bulk unmatched in living memory. Few along the Ragged Coast possessed the skill and determination to face down such a beast. Fishing trawlers pulled in to their ports on every island and fjord within a day's journey, even the hardy Ironlanders afraid of a crushing death in the depths as a meal for the monstrous whale. Hungry townsfolk turned to gulls, seals, and their stores for the winter, as nets and harpoons lay dry in port.

One morning soon after, a lone skiff paddled quietly into the tiny harbor at Lowhaven. Its only occupant scanned the other vessels, then went ashore, shouldering his worn harpoon. [Harik](#), he was called. His grey eyes looked out from a face weathered by years of seagoing, his beard a windblown scraggle, his mouth a hard line chiseled into stone. He knew this place, had spent time on its fishing boats in his youth. In the common house, those eyes widened at the talk of the great orca. Eating dinner quietly by himself, Harik could hear no more without being moved to action. He seized the iron circle hanging above the long table and swore aloud, his first and only words since landing: "I will slay this monster."

The town elder sharing bread with him cut in. "I once hunted beasts, as you do with that harpoon. This orca is a sign from the Spirits Beyond; you must join us and look through the Veil to see its true nature." Without waiting for a reply, he continued, "We will have the ceremony tonight." Life at sea had left Harik superstitious as all mariners, and this custom had suited him before; he consented with a nod and a swig of mead.

The monstrous bonfire, chanting, and burnt sacrifices took the night. Harik pried himself awake at dawn, his muscles cold and stomach grumbling. He pushed his boat out into the quiet morning surf and paddled away. Though the chop was light, the area had hazardous shoals and rocky islets. Harik rowed through them resolutely, the wind and mist light upon him, his breakfast a boiled gull's egg.

Some hours later, he neared the rocky islet where the beast had last been seen. Harik knew this region like the back of his gnarled hand. He put ashore and scouted around for trace, finding a mangled seal carcass clearly savaged by something larger than a leopard shark or ordinary orca. The carcass was barely touched by the local gulls; this kill was fresh, but the beast was nowhere in sight. He climbed to the top of the islet, sweeping his gaze over the mist-coated swells as the winds whipped at him. There! A puff among the distant swells as the beast broke the surface for air among the reefs and shallow rocks. Could he get the drop on it, paddle close enough despite all these hazards? He saw the path, a clear way to a cluster of rocks that would give him sure footing.

A plan hatched in his mind. This beast was said to be huge; surely that one seal wasn't enough breakfast. As he scrambled back to the boat, he saw a young seal basking on the rocks and drove his spear through its neck, a killing blow. *Now I have bait.* A small morsel, to be sure; it wouldn't keep the orca busy long, but might be enough to draw it in. He threw the seal into his boat and rowed again for the distant rocky shoals where he had spotted the beast's cloud, gnawing on seal jerky to keep his strength up. The chop beat lightly against his oars, and he settled the boat upon a sandbar, safe from the waves but positioned near the rocks to clamber atop. He scurried out onto the rocks, the seal calf heavy on his shoulder. He leapt to and fro like a goat, his balance honed by years on slick ship decks in storm-tossed seas. He neared the spot of sea he had noted before, picking out the shapes of rocks he had seen from his earlier perch.

The orca might still be nearby, and certainly wasn't expecting the tables to turn. A loud "pffft" as it came up for air confirmed Harik's thought, and he heaved the harpooned seal into the surf nearby. A black fin cut through the waves, and the beast's head rose up, its teeth like daggers gleaming in the faint sunlight filtering through the clouds.

Harik eyed the beast, taking its measure, and plunged the harpoon down down from his perch directly for the beast's eye. The harpoon struck true, sinking into the eye as the orca swam past. Its jaws closed on the seal and it thrashed about, Harik hurrying back to safety away from the edge. It would flee now, and he would give chase. He rushed to his boat, set oar to water and pulled after the orca as it fled.

The beast knew he was pursuing it; orcas were far from mindless, particularly this one that had so terrorized the common fisherfolk. As the chase wore on, soon it knew Harik would not be shaken off by its headlong flight to the open sea, and it doubled back, rushing toward the tiny boat to ram it. Harik grabbed up his harpoon and raised it, ready to strike true into the beast's brain, and slammed it down with all his might at the last possible moment.

The harpoon sank in deeply, crunching through flesh and bone, driven home as much the orca's ramming speed as by Harik's muscle. The orca thrashed about as it died, and the harpoon wrenched from Harik's grasp, its haft cracking in two as he tried to maintain his grip. When the death throes stopped, Harik butchered several teeth from the beast's jaw as proof of the kill, as well as its dorsal fin. Several sharks began to circle the orca's remains, and he knew he must go.

Harik glanced skyward, using what sun came through the clouds to determine the bearing toward shore. The journey would be dangerous; a storm was coming in. His jaw set in determination, He rowed into the teeth of it, and the winds and rain closed in upon him, blowing him off course and forcing him to fight to keep the boat upright and pointed toward where the shore must have been. Though the waves loomed over him, he maintained control until the storm lightened.

The way to shore was only a feeling in his bones now, rather than knowledge in his mind. He rowed onward, pausing to regain his strength as he gnawed down the last of his seal jerky near a familiar cluster of rocks.

The rowing continued, on and on. A short pause saw the end of his last boiled gull eggs, and a distant line on the horizon where the cliffs of shore finally came into view despite the dusk closing in. Thus encouraged that his journey was nearing its end, Harik found his resolve and pressed onward, rowing despite the ache of exhaustion in his bones. He finally reached the shallows near shore, praying to the gods that he hadn't been blown too far off course. His gaze swept the growing gloom for the lights of Lowhaven,

He found them. Harik was welcomed back to Lowhaven, and the villagers take the collected trophies as proof. A feast was thrown in Harik's honor, and soon the catch begins to come in again. There was more to be done: with the largest orca gone, a battle began for dominance the local food chain; several other large orcas and sharks began to make their mark, and the seas continued to be a place of danger.