

*Abnuzu* is a crustacean-esque demon that resides in the depths surrounding Crown Island... and perhaps elsewhere.

It is known only by a few accounts that range wildly in their descriptions. Because of this, scholars used to believe *Abunuzu* to be a shared hoax, or some sort of result of mass hysteria, but that changed when a renowned monster scholar shared their own account; their ethos turned heads, and the academic focus was now on finding the similarities between the accounts to paint a full picture of the demon.

It is presumed, at least, that the demon possesses a few consistent characteristics, like a clam-esque mouth and a large eye that lacks a pupil, as well as a generally crustacean appearance. It is also presumed that the demon possesses strong magical powers that cause a sort of hallucination in the mind of its victims, and this may be how it hunts; though it is unknown why it does not consume humans after performing this behavior on them.

The following is one of a few “verified” accounts of *Abnuzu* by a former crabber who lived on the west coast of Crown Island.

“There exists a deep abyssal trench not far from the shore, where the surrounding waters are shallow and safe from the Epheal. It’s good for crabbing. We lower our traps down in the morning, and pull up a cage full of small crabs in the evening. It’s not much to eat, but it’s easy, and they taste alright, and we can sell them. Not many people catching crabs around here. Besides, we all share the same curiosity: what lies in the furthest reaches of the trench?

One morning, on a day that felt like centuries ago, when the sun was just peeking over the horizon, and the air was still and cold, we lowered our traps as usual. And when the evening came, we started to bring them up. The first thing we noticed was that all but one of the traps was as light as air, and the one that wasn’t was as heavy as a still corpse. None of this struck us as odd. We were preoccupied with imagining what was in this trap. Our minds ran wild. Perhaps it was a giant prehistoric fish that survived the reign of the monsters. Or a powerful monster that no one has ever seen before. Maybe it sorta looked like a crab, or an octopus, or a clam. Before we even had the thing up and under the twilight, we all had an idea of what we were gonna see.

We were all wrong.

I remember the moment the cage broke the surface. There wasn't enough light to see it until it broke through the waves. There was our lively chatter, the scattered twilight giving everyone a soft glow, the last squawking of airborne monsters in the sky above, the crash of waves against our boat, a brisk but enriching wind.

Then it came into view, standing on top of the cage, and all of that stopped, like a gramophone abruptly halting the turning of its disc. I don't even recall hearing the sound of the ropes being pulled up. I just remember seeing it.

Immediately, it struck me as something that I *almost* imagined. I could make out *almost* all of it. It was like I was seeing it without my glasses on. Like a crab, or a clam, or an octopus, or something else. Like the images of a dream, it changed before your eyes, slowly morphing as if the imagination was running wild. But it kept the vague idea. A creature from the deep.

Some things about it never changed. Its tendril-like backside. Its crown of claws. Its hooked feet. Its gaping maw, lined with thin teeth and eyes with slit pupils. And especially its central, pearl-like eye. From the moment I comprehended it, and perhaps far before, that eye was staring into me. It had no pupil, and yet I knew. When I met that eye, the world stopped – even the wind. The sky darkened and out came the stars. The waves froze and the water became still. And then I heard music.

It was something my grandmother used to play on our piano when I was only a newborn. A memory I never knew I had. I was now in that memory. I saw her playing as I rocked back and forth in my mother's arms. I couldn't manage to see anyone's face. My eyes drifted to the shadowy corner of the room. For a split second, I swear. I swear I saw it. I began to cry.

And then I was in other memories. Running through my house in the dark. Exploring the woods at night. Peering into caves. Every time I had encountered a dark shadow, a dank, black corner, it was there. Just barely there, looking at me, as if it had always been there, as if it was waiting my entire life to be pulled up out of the depths.

My memories began to play faster and faster, like the pages of a book whirling by. It was in every single one. Every dark crack between the walls, every passing shadow, every blind spot. And that music still

played, a calm sonata as the backing for a terror growing within the furthest depths of my soul.

I didn't know what it meant. I didn't know what it wanted. I didn't know if it was real. As my life sped by me in front of my own eyes, I began to weep. I felt as if I had been mistaken about my existence. I was only half-awake this entire time, wasn't I? I was peering through the thin gossamer at what lay beyond, but I never pulled back the veil. I was seeing a taste of what reality was in full. Everything, *everything* was just a shadow on the wall.

And then the memories stopped, and the creature was gone, a faint splash below the only trace of its existence. My crew surrounded me, in much a similar state as I. Frozen in the places we were when the creature emerged, but our eyes now widened and laden with tears.

We never spoke of what happened. Not even to each other. On my best days, my most delusional days, I remember it as a strange shared nightmare. On my worst days I remember that it really did happen. I still see the after-image of its foggy silhouette burned into my eyes.

We stopped wondering what lies in the furthest reaches of the trench."