Chapter 253: The End

After a firm decontamination led by Yuthura, consisting of a long dip in the ocean to drown any of the parasites, a flame bath of their armour and a lengthy physical examination, the Rising Aces followed Commodore Tallan's fleet from a fair distance. The journey to Veridian Cliffs was only a few hours away, but by the time the island fell into view the sun had set. "We have a few hours at least," Wicke stated, leaning on the railing next to Jayce as they looked across the large Navy base and the high cliffs either side of it. "My foresight showed they struck in the afternoon tomorrow. They'll be resting, preparing - the same as us." Jayce nodded; the day had taken its toll – the horrors of Sunflower Island still wriggling inside his mind. "Then we will be waiting for them. Get some sleep, if you can."

The morning came quickly, and uneasily, to the crew. By the time Jayce had showered and dressed, the rest of the crew were already up and about – making their preparations for a day of hunting. There was no one who would be left behind on the Stacked Hand this time, not with the stakes so high. "Morning," Vexx said with a smile, giving Jayce a quick glance as he passed by before setting his eyes out towards the high green cliffs either side of the Navy base that they had docked in. He looked like he was watching something, but Jayce saw nothing.

The island was sizeable, shaped somewhat like an insect – with a pair of mandible cliffs to the east, enclosing a bay. The Navy base sat within that bay, enjoying the natural protections. The very physical highs and lows of the island were fascinating, the base built on different levels of elevation as opposed to stretching out across the island. A large city connected beyond, at the top of the cliffs, stretching back out across the island. The rest of the green expanse was woodlands and farms.

Jayce looked up at the large Navy base around them. There were dozens of ships, a large training academy and a sizeable garrison ready to defend the Gardens at a moment's notice. "Somewhere here are the remaining Warlocks. It is our job to hunt them down and put an end to them once and for all. We cannot allow them to repeat what happened at Sunflower Island," he told his crew, as they finished putting on their various custom suits of armour.

They disembarked in their entirety, with the only exceptions of Gaea and Little Witch, the ship disappearing into its container before being stashed in its slot under Jayce's backpack. Commodore Tallan was waiting for them with a sizeable squad of Marines and Navy sailors, all of them heavily armed. "The base is on

Copyright © 2026 Seize the Seas by EthanOfCam

full alert, and extra guards have been stationed around the tunnels to the Heroes' Crypts. Are you certain this will be their target, Exarga, and today at that?" Tallan questioned, his hands over his holster and scabbard. "I am. They're here and will act today."

"Sir!" came an urgent voice, a young Navy sailor running towards them. "What is it, Seaman?" Tallan questioned, dismissing the salute as the young man stood before him. "The guards you stationed at the entrance to the Crypts," he wheezed, his face red and sweaty. "They're not responding to any communications." Tallan glanced back towards Jayce. With a simple tilt of his head, Tallan and his men marched forwards. "Sailor, tell Rear-Admiral Paler that we are engaging the enemy. Come along, Exarga."

If it wasn't for the immediate threat ahead of them, the Navy base of Veridian Cliffs would have been quite a pleasant place to explore. It was lively, active, and most of the people they passed seemed to point at Jayce with an air of reverence – something that clearly irritated Tallan. "Clear the way," he commanded to his personal squad, his Marines racing ahead to ensure the pathway to the large elevators travelling up and down the cliffs were empty.

They all stood on a large wooden platform suspended from an overhanging crane, the wood creaking as it slowly rose up into the air. "Anything we should be aware of?" Bjorn questioned to Commodore Tallan, as Vexx whistled a tune in the awkward silence. "The Heroes' Crypts run wide and deep. There are multiple entrances and exits, but only one near this base. I have stationed guards at all known entry points, but if they've all gone silent then these monsters may have far more intricate knowledge than even I. They may have spent last night setting up," he said with a hint of accusation, looking towards Jayce. "You said they wouldn't act until later today." Jayce didn't respond, his eyes looking out to the green stone cliffs around them and the crystal bay beneath them.

The lift came to a sudden stop, a large entrance to a tunnel immediately ahead of them. Tallan's men rushed forwards with their rifles raised, taking various positions before their leader – his black armour marked with a green stripe – nodded to Tallan. "There must be thousands of Navy and Marines here, is this all you could muster?" Marisha asked, as Tallan nodded to his men and they stepped into the tunnels. "This base is responsible for all operations within the Gardens – most here are recruits or employed civilians. My people are tired from dealing with that infestation, and many were injured in the blast. They are ensuring that we have reinforcements, and that across the island the people are

Copyright © 2026 Seize the Seas by EthanOfCam

protected. Other squadrons will be inserting in through the other entrances as we speak. Our priority is dealing with these cultists here and now, theirs is if we fail. Besides, I was made to believe that you were experts. So, go. Be experts. But stay behind me, and remember this: we're taking them alive."

Jayce stepped into the tunnels, following after Tallan's vanguard. Artificial lighting lined the tunnels, ensuring that any visitors could see, but it also illuminated the immediate signs of struggle around them. Jayce looked down as he trod on something, slowly lifting his boot to display a severed human finger. "Fresh," Vexx said plainly, flicking dusty blood off his gauntlet and looking ahead down the long tunnel lined with side passageways. "They're here alright."

"Commodore," stated the squad leader, his hand to his helmet. "Squad two has encountered… squads two and three are under assault." Jayce's eyes widened as the lighting in the tunnel ahead of them suddenly vanished, a hulking figure blocking the large passageway. The creature was mainly teeth, several large eyes darting around in the red mottled flesh that made up its oblong body. "Open fire!" yelled the squad leader, the Marines taking various points of elevation and firing their rifles as the creature lumbered towards them with a feral cry. "Commodore, go around! We'll deal with this fiend and follow after!" stated the squad-leader, gesturing to a side passage. Tallan nodded. "Rear guard, with me!" he commanded, leaving the vanguard behind.

Screams came from the Marines at the front as the creature tore into them, smashing them with large hammer-like arms or devouring them whole. Jayce wanted to help them, but he knew there wasn't a choice in the matter. Wicke's foresight had shown it was a race against time, and now, with their presence known, that timer had shortened significantly. "Go!" yelled the squad leader. "Come on!" Vexx stated, jogging after Tallan and his forces. Jayce and the others followed, a sizeable explosion rumbling the tunnels behind them moments later.

They passed shattered crypts and stone coffins – the bodies inside absent or little more than bones. Nothing followed, friend or foe. The tunnels eventually circled back around to the main path and almost immediately the group found themselves under siege from far more, but smaller, monsters, reminiscent of the Cannibals Jayce had faced before. "Push through!" ordered Tallan, the rifles of his men roaring as they pushed forwards.

Vexx glanced towards Jayce as the monsters ahead of them fell, but more took up their place. "These guys are too slow," he stated quietly. Jayce nodded in agreement, stepping forwards to stand next to Tallan. "Sorry Commodore," Jayce

Copyright © 2026 Seize the Seas by EthanOfCam

stated, looking at him and pushing up his visor. With a fast and intense blast of Panic, Tallan's eyes rolled back into his head and he dropped to the floor. His men didn't notice, especially as Vexx incapacitated them in swift succession from behind. "Clear those creatures out!" Jayce yelled, throwing out RK ahead of their group. The rokken let out a grumbling roar and surged forwards, his body scraping the walls in some places as he squashed anything in his path. "Doc, give them something to bring them back around," Jayce told Yuthura. She nodded and rummaged for a vial before shattering it on the floor. Blue smoke billowed out behind them as the Rising Aces pushed forwards alone.

"There will be consequences for that you know," Yuthura told Jayce, as the crew tore apart everything in their path. "Most likely, but there will be bigger consequences if we don't handle this. And especially if he forces us to go easy on them. His ego will survive. Purge them all!" he commanded. The creatures fell apart beneath his crew, and eventually they pressed out into a large and deep chamber.

Faint light fell down from the ceiling high above, a large visible crack made in the rock. They stood on a large wooden platform connected to a ring that surrounded the top of a huge egg-like chunk of rock. The rock was marked with countless metal lids: covers to the stone coffins containing dead heroes of the past. Most had been torn open, and far below Jayce could hear chanting and see a mass of corpses dragged from their resting places and piled on top of one another.

"Exarga!" came a bellow from behind. The chanting immediately stopped. "Wicke, Wam, deal with the bodies." Wicke began to chant, flames rolling around in her hands before she threw it down along with Wam's lava. Screeching followed and then the mass of bodies began to climb the stone monument and walls. "Destroy them all!" yelled a voice from below, the very bridge underneath them collapsing and sending the entire crew falling down into the mass. A quintet of Warlocks flew up and past Jayce as he and the others fell, only for Vexx to grab one of them from behind.

"Predictable," Vexx whispered, a loud crunch following as he crushed the Warlock's skull before leaping at the leader. "Get to the ship!" the leader yelled, the four remaining Warlocks splitting up. The leader and another darted into one of the connecting tunnels with Vexx close behind whilst the other two charged out of the hole and into the open air. "Jayce, I've got these two," came Vexx's voice through Jayce's communicator, as he and the others formed a ring and

Copyright © 2026 Seize the Seas by EthanOfCam

fought against the swarm of infested corpses. “Then that leaves two to us!” Jayce stated, looking at Wicke and Bjorn. She nodded and chanted quickly, her feet lifting off the floor as Bjorn stowed his weapons and formed a pair of large claws using ice. “Marisha, you’re in charge – wipe these out and then join the hunt!” Jayce ordered, dashing up into the air with Bjorn and Wicke close behind. “Roger!” she yelled, bolts of Tempest’s lightning filling the area, streams of lava melting flesh and a mass of skeletons dropping in from above to fight the monsters. “Damian, where are you going?” Marisha yelled, as he leapt upwards towards the nearest wall.

“You’re not leaving me behind!” Damian cried, dashing after Jayce and the others as they ascended the chamber quickly and broke out into open air. The Warlocks were flying quickly with their flesh wings towards the nearby city of Evergreen, but as the houses came into view a loud bellow shook the air. “Open fire!” yelled a bald man with a thick moustache in military fatigues, a sizeable army ready and waiting. The skies erupted into gunfire and explosions, causing Jayce, Wicke, Bjorn and Damian to all immediately drop towards the floor to avoid the bombardment. “Run monsters! Run! My city is closed to you today!” cackled Rear-Admiral Paler.

Jayce spat out grass, his armour rattling periodically as he was shot, scowling as the pair of Warlocks flew over him before tumbling over the side of the cliff towards the Navy base. “Dammit Tallan!” Jayce yelled, punching the floor and standing up. “They used us. They knew we’d force them out and that their first destination would be the city,” Bjorn stated, somewhat in admiration of the boldness. Cheers rolled across the outskirts of the city, but Jayce didn’t have time to give his dues – he dashed forwards after the Warlocks, with the others right behind. “Jayce, they arrived here by boat,” came Vexx’s voice. “They’re heading back towards the base.”

“They’re trying to regroup! Don’t let them!” Jayce warned, dropping down with a heavy crash onto an elevator just as Commodore Tallan and his men came rushing out of the tunnels. “Exarga, you’re under arrest!” he yelled, drawing a pistol. “Not now!” Jayce yelled, glancing around before dropping further down. A pair of crimson cloaks lay discarded on the floor, but there were no bodies, no corpses, nothing to indicate that the Warlocks were anything other than stark naked somewhere. It didn’t make sense. The whole island knew they were present… yet.

Copyright © 2026 Seize the Seas by EthanOfCam

A pair of Navy sailors wielding large automatic weapons darted out into the empty street, aiming their rifles straight at Jayce and opening fire. Sola and Luna transformed into a pair of large tower shields, the streams of bullets rattling off them as Jayce channelled his Focus through them. “Stand down!” Jayce yelled, but they continued firing, each of them laden with small crates of bullets that ran on belts into the large weapons.

Jayce darted to the side, taking cover behind a building. The gunfire stopped, but Jayce could hear more above him – where Wicke, Bjorn and Damian had been left behind. Jayce’s eyes widened, more Navy, and even Marines, began to surround him. He spotted grins amongst several confused expressions, and then far at the back he spotted two pale faces with runes carved into their skin. “Kill him! Kill the traitor!” ordered the Warlock wearing a Captain’s uniform. “For the Republic,” yelled several Marines.

“For the Empire!” said the rest, gunning down their allies first before aiming at Jayce.

“What’s going on?” Tallan questioned in horror, as he hung in the air above the gunfight below, an explosion illuminating his face. Bjorn was holding him by his arm, his men defeated as Wicke and Damian stood nearby. Jayce was carving his way through the remaining Navy and Marines as the two Warlocks fled towards the cliffs. “You have traitors in your midst. This location was no coincidence,” Bjorn stated, pulling Tallan back up as he shook his head in disbelief. “Tell your people to stand down, anyone who disobeys will be ousted as a traitor,” Bjorn stated. Tallan fumbled for his communicator. “Fall back! All forces, fall back to the port and guard the ships! Protect Jayce Exarga!”

A woman’s voice repeated his words across a series of loudspeakers across the base. Tallan panted heavily before getting back to his feet and looking towards his disabled squad. He shook his head and held his hands to his head. “This can’t be happening, not again!” he cried, forcing himself to his feet and looking out at the one-man warfare in panic. He gulped and then looked across the base before slowly scanning left to the cliff. “There,” he stated to Bjorn, taking control of himself. “Their allies will try to pick them up there, on the other side of that cliff face. They won’t risk going into the bay, not now.” Bjorn glanced outwards, a lone Navy warship sailing out of the harbour. “There, that one,” he stated. Tallan nodded in agreement. “This way. We can cut them off this way.”

Jayce didn’t have time to question who was on his side and who wasn’t, he just assumed that anyone running with the pair of Warlocks was an enemy – and

Copyright © 2026 Seize the Seas by EthanOfCam

there were plenty of those and even more of them rushing out to join them from across the base. He carved his way through them, the Warlocks suddenly turning and running away from the harbour rather than towards it. They were headed for a set of elevators climbing up the cliffs. “Slow him down,” ordered one of the Warlocks, several of their Acolytes turning swiftly and charging at Jayce with a new purpose as he placed a bloody hand on their backs. The other chanted, a bolt of green energy flying off one of the Warlock’s extended fingers, hitting a sailor Jayce threw in its path. The sailor screamed and crumbled to dust as the others surged towards him.

Each one seemed tougher than the last, his blades sticking in their flesh as their bodies turned monstrous. Bones twisted and snapped into claws, muscles tore through skin, blood vessels popped and turned their eyes red. Jayce took them on, their strikes and blows tearing away at his armour and cutting his skin beneath. He unleashed blasts of Panic, combining Sola and Luna into a huge greatsword that he used to carve his way through. But by the time the last Acolyte had fallen, the elevators had swiftly begun to climb.

Jayce dashed up to the top, Bjorn, Wicke, Damian and Tallan arriving a moment later from a different direction. Jayce turned away from the enemies and grabbed Tallan by his throat, large pieces of his armour, including his gauntlet, gone. “Explain,” Jayce growled. “And quickly. Why are your men aiding the Warlocks?” he questioned, a firm squeeze silently warning Tallan to be truthful. “They… are not… my men!” Tallan growled, Jayce dropping him to the floor. “Traitors! The lot of them!” he yelled, forcing himself upright and swaying unsteadily on his feet. “And they’re not the only ones!” he then added, pushing Jayce - who stumbled backwards towards the edge of the cliff but caught himself.

“They’re dissidents,” Tallan stated, holding his hands up as Jayce stepped towards him. “Rebels who your family failed to rout out in their purge. No one…” he looked warily towards Damian. “No one in your family’s gaze survived, no one around your family went unharmed.” Wicke glanced towards Bjorn who nodded and stepped between Tallan and Jayce. “This sounds personal, Commodore.”

“Because it is!” Tallan yelled up at Bjorn. “The Empire suffered because of him, because of his actions! And now the Republic is suffering too! The Sovereign brought a balance to the chaos he started and he… he’s thrown us back into anarchy! Pirate Emperors! An entire region of ancient weaponry that is flooding out across the world! Look around you! These cultists were hidden for three years

Copyright © 2026 Seize the Seas by EthanOfCam

and you think they've come back now of all times by coincidence. It's him! That Pirate!"

Jayce met Tallan's pained face. "Who did I kill?" Jayce asked quietly. The colour faded from Tallan's red face and he looked down at the floor. "Who?" Jayce questioned more forcefully, noticing a metal band on Tallan's left hand. Tallan looked down at it and yanked it off, throwing it off the cliff before levying a finger at Jayce. "There was peace before you!" he growled, clutching the finger he had broken. "I gave you a chance to work with me and you bullied me aside at the first chance!"

Tallan shook his head in frustration. "I hate traitors… We're bringing these Warlocks in alive; do you hear me?" he growled. "We're doing things the right way! Not… your way!" Jayce met his pain-filled eyes and then looked towards the path leading along the cliff top. "They're getting away," he stated, running forwards and activating the enchantments on his broken armour to make it disappear. The others followed, Damian bringing up the rear after throwing off his ill-fitting armour.

They caught the group just as they neared the very tip of the long and tall cliffs. "Go my Lords!" yelled one of the Navy, the group turning and firing at Jayce as he darted in a zig-zag towards them with his blades out. The Warlocks looked exhausted, like they hadn't slept in days and were physically ill. One tried to extend wings out of his back, only to drop a knee and cough up blood. "Stop them before they get down to their ship!" Wicke yelled, as Damian and Tallan darted past her.

Tallan swung with his sabre, cutting down a sailor before firing a precise shot into the knee of another. Sensing little other option, the two Warlocks began to chant, one picking up a sword with a dishevelled scabby arm and surging towards Jayce. A Marine melted into ash as Wicke incinerated him, whilst Bjorn threw another screaming over the edge to a swift demise. Jayce clashes blades with the closer Warlock as the other threw spell after spell at Bjorn, Damian, Wicke and Tallan.

Jayce feinted with one blade and embedded the other through the Warlocks chest before cutting him down. He fell with a groan to the floor. "Alive! We need them alive!" Tallan yelled, Damian rushing past Jayce and the fallen Warlock towards the final foe standing. He leapt and drove a knee into the Warlock's many mouths, swinging down an iron gauntlet and knocking the cultist to the floor before grabbing his stolen uniform and throwing metal fist after metal fist into

Copyright © 2026 Seize the Seas by EthanOfCam

his skull. “Damian, stop,” Jayce stated, his eyes widening as Damian growled at the Warlock with an unblinking glare. Bone crunched under metal as he stood at the edge of the cliff. “No!” Tallan yelled, as the Warlock’s skull broke open with a sickening crunch. “Damian!” Jayce yelled, his brother turning and looking at him with a pair of cold eyes.

“I asked for one thing!” Tallan yelled, striding forwards past the fallen Warlock and aiming his pistol at Damian whilst extending his sword towards Wicke and Bjorn. “That was our only lead! There could be more of them! Other plots, other targets! Now every island is as vulnerable as Sunflower Island was!” Tallan yelled. “Enough is enough! You’re all under arrest for your countless crimes, and this time it will not be swept aside by your parents!”

“Tallan,” Jayce said softly, putting his weapons away and holding his hands up. Damian, however, took a step forward towards the Commodore. Tallan fired a single Focus-empowered shot that embedded itself next to Damian’s foot. “Do not move!” he growled, tilting his head towards his communicator. “This is Commodore Tallan. I have four suspects with me and need immediate reinforcements at the top of Haylen’s Ridge.” Jayce didn’t hear the response, but he could see reinforcements coming. “Tallan,” Jayce said somewhat pleadingly.

The conclusion of a quiet chant crossed all their ears. Jayce’s eyes widened as he spotted a green glow from the cut-down Warlock’s finger, the spell aimed plainly at his brother. The green bolt flew through the air towards him, only to hit Jayce’s arm as he knocked Damian down to the floor. Jayce staggered backwards towards the cliff edge, Bjorn slamming his axe down into the Warlock’s skull. They all looked at him as he held his left arm, his face pale and in clear pain as he stumbled, his heels on the far edge. “Jayce?” Damian questioned, looking up at his brother in confusion.

Jayce’s arm turned grey, cracks spreading throughout his flesh before it crumbled apart – the grey spreading upwards past his elbow and towards his shoulder. His mouth opened and then closed as he looked at Wicke before tumbling backwards over the edge in trail of dust. “Jayce!” she screamed. Damian crawled forwards to the edge and looked over, staring in devastation at the dust floating away on the wind.

That devastation disappeared in a heartbeat as Wicke and Bjorn ran up to him and looked over the edge at the water far below. A pained grunt followed along with a gunshot, the pair of them turning to find Damian standing over Commodore Tallan throwing bloody fist after bloody fist into his face in a blind

Copyright © 2026 Seize the Seas by EthanOfCam

rage. “It’s your fault! You did this! You did this! You killed him!” Damian cried, his words breaking in his throat as Tallan lay limply in his grasp, his face broken in. “Damian!” Bjorn yelled, looking between Wicke as she howled on the floor and Damian as he continued to pound the corpse of Tallan.

“Everyone freeze!” yelled a deep voice, as Rear-Admiral Paler arrived with a small army of Marines. Damian looked up from Tallan’s corpse, tears blurring his eyes and his face twisted in pain. He then staggered backwards, looking down at his stomach in confusion before turning to Bjorn. A spurt of blood escaped the bullet hole inside him, his eyes rolling back into his head as he slumped to the floor. “Fuck!” Bjorn growled, caught on the edge of the cliff with an inconsolable Wicke and Damian bleeding out several metres away from him.

It was bad. There was no way about it. Jayce was gone, and with him the Stacked Hand too. Damian had murdered a Commodore, and had taken a bullet for it. And now it was all on him to get them out of the situation with a Rear-Admiral right in front of him. So, Bjorn did the only thing he could imagine Jayce doing if the roles were reversed.

He grabbed Wicke and leapt off the cliff.

Seize the Seas Tales: Suspicious Circumstances

The reports from Veridian Cliffs flooded across the Republic in swift and vast supply. In every way Alara could see it the entire incident was a disaster, which, following the destruction of Sunflower Island, was hardly a good look for anyone involved. The fact that the Warlocks of the Blind Mother persisted even now, several years after their supposed extermination was problematic. The reality that they had escaped… even worse. Yet there was one repetition that caught her eye more than anything.

“Is it true?” Alara questioned quietly, as Astris stepped silently into her office with a grey expression on her face. “I don’t know. Bjorn… he said that…” Astris answered, the words catching in her throat. “They don’t know,” she concluded. “Then he’s not,” Alara stated adamantly, picking up the files on her desks and arranging them neatly before getting to her feet and putting on her military jacket. Astris couldn’t meet Alara’s eyes. “Where are you going?” she questioned. “Where else? I’m going to find out where he is. Cover for me.”

Copyright © 2026 Seize the Seas by EthanOfCam