

A SESSION ZERO ADVENTURE FOR NAUTICAL CAMPAIGNS

the CURSE of *SKULL ISLAND*



written by
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ESTIMATED DURATION: 2–4 HOURS

DM OBJECTIVE: WALK PLAYERS THROUGH THE PROCESS OF
CREATING CHARACTERS FOR USE IN A NAUTICALLY-THEMED CAMPAIGN.

WHAT IS A SESSION ZERO ADVENTURE?

A session zero adventure is a mix of actual gameplay and rules discussion between you and your players as they build their first level characters. During this adventure, you will discuss the expectations of your nautical themed campaign and the guidelines for character building. At the conclusion of this adventure, each player will have a character built to your campaigns specific requirements, and you will have some story hooks to begin your campaign. It is important to recognize that this is an informal adventure. The objective is character creation and establishing expectations for your nautical themed campaign.

To facilitate character building throughout the adventure, the characters start with no memory or recollection of their past. This allows players to build their character at the table during distinct steps of the adventure.

Just to further emphasis that your players are going into this adventure playing first level characters, not zero level characters. The difference is that the players are building those characters from the ground up without the characters themselves initially knowing who or what they are.

BOLDED AND CAPITALIZED NAMES

Throughout the adventure, you will see **BOLDED AND CAPITALIZED NAMES** and **bolded names**.

BOLDED AND CAPITALIZED NAMES. Names of NPCs and notable locations.

Bolded names. Names of monsters used as stat blocks for NPCs. Each monster stat block referenced in this adventure is available using the *Basic Rules* from Wizards of the Coast, which you can [download by clicking here](#).

STORY HOOKS

The characters have washed ashore the mysterious **SKULL ISLAND**. The characters are unable to remember anything about themselves and slowly uncover who they are as they explore Skull Island and meet its inhabitants. Forgetting who they are allows the players to build their

characters throughout the adventure. Included below are some story hooks that you can use to explain why and how the characters ended up on Skull Island.

STORY HOOK: A JEALOUS SEA DEITY

The characters were once powerful adventurers well known throughout the land. Their fame and fortune drew the ire of a jealous Sea Deity who then stole away their power, memories, and fortune.

STORY HOOK: “MAN OVERBOARD!”

A violent sea storm ravaged the characters ship. The storm knocked the characters overboard. This experience caused the characters to awaken on the shore with short-term amnesia.

STORY HOOK: “WE BE PIRATES!”

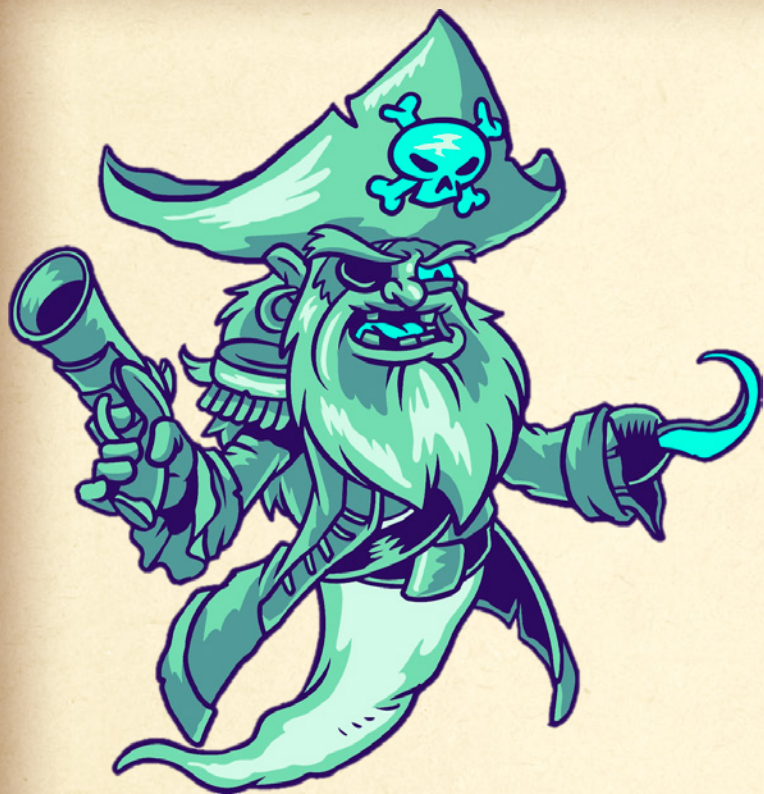
The adventurers are notorious pirates recently hunted down by an entire armada! Their ship was destroyed in an epic sea battle, all that remains is this motley crew upon the beach.

STEP 1. HANGMAN’S TREE: RACE SELECTION

It is a beautiful warm sunny midmorning on Skull Island. Read or paraphrase the following:

The breeze dances along this sandy sun soaked beach as palm trees sway gently from side to side. You can hear seagulls cawing overhead and ocean waves rolling washing ashore of this majestic dune.

Several hundred feet from the characters is a large dead tree known as **HANGMAN’S TREE**. A human skeleton wearing tattered pirate clothing sways in the wind as it hangs by a noose. The skeleton is all that remains of **CAPTAIN BARTLEBY SEABEARD** (CG male human ghost) (*Monster Manual*, page 147) who is now a friendly pirate ghost roaming the beach looking for some new friends to help lift his curse. Due to his curse, his spirit is unable to enter the afterlife, where he hopes to meet up with his family. Captain Seabeard’s hopes the characters can recover his right eyeball, which is within an ivory chest in **SKULL CAVE**, and lift his curse so he can enter the afterlife (reference the “Curse of Skull Island: Pirate Eyeballs” below).



THE CURSE OF SKULL ISLAND: PIRATE EYEBALLS

Captain Seabeard's former first mate, "Snake Eyes," stole his right eyeball and placed in a chest here on Skull Island. Any pirate whose eyeball remains in a chest on Skull Island wanders the Material Plane for eternity in undeath. If the cursed individual is a ghost, they cannot go within 100 feet of the chest containing their eyeball. Any attempt to do so causes excruciating pain and temporary paralysis until they move away from the eyeball. Due to the nautical nature of the curse, placing the eyeball in the sea lifts the curse.

Ancient scholars believe the large skull on Skull Island belonged to an ancient Sea Giant warlock who worshiped sea demons. The Sea Giant was ultimately defeated by a group of heroic adventurers but not before its spirit infused with the Island and cursed the land for eternity.

Captain Seabeard as a Narrative Tool. Captain Seabeard is a tool for you to use to walk players through the character creation process. Roleplaying introduces the players to the social interaction pillar of adventure and helps guide them through this session zero adventure. Captain Seabeard is funny, full of energy, and a joyful spirit. After the players select their characters race, proceed to Step 2.

THE THREE PILLARS OF ADVENTURE

Dungeons and Dragons Fifth Edition introduces "The Three Pillars of Adventure" in the introduction of the Player's Handbook. Below is a short summary of each pillar:

Exploration. Involves the adventurers' moving, interacting, and discovering their world. The players describe what they do and you tell them what happens. Your players experience the world their characters inhabit through your descriptions adjudication of results.

Social interaction. Features your players speaking with creatures in your world. Characters develop friendships, rivalries, and more based off their social interactions with NPCs in your world.

Combat. Focuses on characters jumping into battle to slay their foes with cold steel or powerful magical fireballs. As characters level, they will become more powerful and likely face more deadly foes in combat.

SELECTING A RACE

Take this time to discuss any racial restrictions with your players for your campaign. Inform your players what official or unofficial races they can choose for their characters.

Explain the nautical theme of your campaign so your players can consider the benefits of choosing races closely associated with this theme.

Where to find Official Racial Character Options.

The following list contains official sources of racial character options from Wizards of the Coast:

- *Player's Handbook* (PHB)
- *Dungeon Master's Guide* (DMG)
- *Elemental Evil Player's Companion* (EEPC)
- *Volo's Guide to Monsters* (VGtM)
- *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide* (SCAG)
- *The Turtle Package* (TTP)
- *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* (MTof)
- *Wayfinder's Guide to Eberron* (WGtE)
- *Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica* (GGtR)

Official Races with Nautical/Aquatic Benefits.

- Lizardfolk (VGtM)
- Sea elf (MTof)
- Simic hybrid (GGtR)
- Tortle (TTP)
- Triton (VGtM)
- Vedalken (GGtR)
- Water genasi (EEPC)

TREASURE

Captain Seabeard gives the characters a map of Skull Island (see appendix A for Map of Skull Island)!



STEP 2. CANNIBAL COAST: CLASS, ABILITY SCORE, AND BACKGROUND SELECTION

Captain Seabeard wants to learn more about the characters, so he asks them to accompany him to a nearby goblin village of cannibals located on the **CANNIBAL COAST** (see Cannibal Coast: Goblin Village below). Captain Seabeard explains that these cannibals are actually goblins who believe they are fish and therefore only eat fish.

THE CURSE OF UMBERLEE

Many centuries ago, these goblins offered goblin flesh to a Priest of Umberlee who washed ashore Skull Island. The Priest, insulted by this offer, called upon Umberlee to curse the goblins. Umberlee answered his prayer and cursed the goblins, making them believe they themselves were fish instead of goblins. Under the curse, many goblins fled into the ocean fearing they would die on dry land. Many goblins drowned in the ocean that day, but those that could swim survived. The goblins continue to believe they are fish but have become proficient swimmers and underwater hunters as a result.

The journey from Hangman's Tree to the Cannibal Coast is relatively short. Along the way, Captain Seabeard manifests an accordion and begins singing a tale about his days as a notorious pirate. Read or paraphrase the following:

Captain Seabeard begins to sing a dark tale of his trusted first mate, "Snake Eyes." Snake Eyes led a mutiny against Captain Seabeard and left him hanging on Hangman's Tree to die. The crew removed Captain Seabeard's right eyeball and placed it in an ivory chest, forever cursing him to wander the Material Plane. As he ends his pirate song, a single ghostly tear rolls down his cheek from his eye patch.

CANNIBAL COAST: GOBLIN VILLAGE

The small goblin village comes into view just as Captain Seabeard finishes his song. Read or paraphrase the following:

Before you stands a small village teeming with life. The sound of drums beating reverberate from the village. You notice several goblin sized huts made of bamboo and straw and a large fire where goblins are gathering to eat and celebrate.

The goblins are friendly and will gladly welcome the characters to partake in their fish feast. Due to the time the Captain has spent on the island in his jovial and friendly ghostly state, they recognize Captain Seabeard and are good friends with him. As the characters enter the village, they are greeted by the village elder, **MAMA MUCK DUCK** (CG female **goblin**) (*Monster Manual*, page 166).

Mama Muck Duck is the oldest goblin in the village at over 100 years old! She is a very wise and powerful druid and is eager to help the characters learn more about themselves, but she has a hard time hearing so the characters will have to speak up to be heard. She offers them a natural drink made from local herbs to help the characters recall their past.



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Narrative Tool. Mama Muck Duck and her tea are tools for you to use to walk players through the character creation process of selecting their class, background, and determine ability scores. Inform your players not to concern themselves about their starting equipment during this step as this will occur later (in Step 3). After the players complete this process, proceed to Step 3.

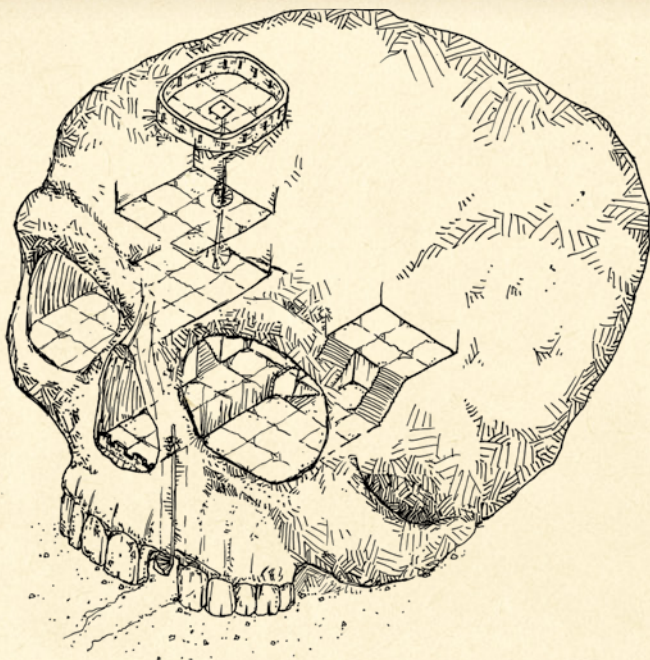
SELECTING A CLASS AND SUBCLASS

Take this time to discuss any class and/or subclass restrictions with your players for your campaign. Inform your players what official or unofficial classes and/or subclasses they can choose for their characters.

Explain the nautical theme of your campaign so your players can consider the benefits of subclasses closely associated with this theme.

Where to find Official Class Options. The following list contains official sources of class options from Wizards of the Coast:

- *Player's Handbook* (PHB)
- *Dungeon Master's Guide* (DMG)
- *Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica* (GGtR)
- *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide* (SCAG)
- *Xanathar's Guide to Everything* (XGtE)



STEP 4. SKULL CAVE: EXPLORATION AND COMBAT

Captain Seaboard accompanies the characters to Skull Cave but stops 100 feet from the entrance. He reminds the characters that his curse prevents him from going any further but asks for the characters to explore Skull Cave and attempt to retrieve his eyeball. He truly believes if his eyeball is returned, his spirit will be set free from the curse that binds him to Skull Island.

Skull Cave (see appendix C for map) is a natural rock shaped like a human skull. No one knows why or how Skull Cave came into existence; it has been here as long as anyone can remember. At the base of the skull, one of the teeth opens to a spiral staircase (Area 1). Should the characters explore Skull Cave and lift the curse of Captain Seaboard, proceed to Step 5. Conclusion.

AREA 1: SPIRAL STAIRCASE

The skull is missing a front tooth; inside this cavity is a small spiral staircase that leads up to Area 2. Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 10 or higher will notice a rat gnawing on a bone underneath the spiral staircase. If a character examines the bone and succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check, they will learn that this is a finger bone belonging to a human; success by 5 or more also reveals that the owner of the bone has been dead for over 50 years.

AREA 2: NASAL CAVITY

The nasal cavity is a small 10-foot wide by 30-foot long room with open doorways leading to Area 3 and Area 5. The characters can look out of the nasal hole and see most of Skull Island from where they stand. Soft gusts of wind flow in and out of the nasal cavity. Characters who succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check spot small blood stains on the floor. The blood stains are not fresh and appear to be many years old.

AREA 3: LEFT EYE CAVITY

The left eye cavity is a 15-foot wide by 20-foot long room with stairs at the north end leading up to Area 4. This is where the cursed chest containing Captain Seaboard's eyeball resides. This room overlooks Skull Island.

If it is daytime: Captain Seaboard is easily noticeable as he paces back and forth in the distance.

If it is nighttime: the characters see campfires from the Goblin Village off in the distance.

AREA 4: CURSED CHEST

A small ivory chest occupies the center of Area 4. Standing next to the ivory chest is a **zombie** (*Monster Manual*, page 316). The zombie wearing a weathered pirate captain's uniform. This zombie is all that remains of some unknown pirate captain unfortunate enough to wash ashore Skull Island. The zombie attacks the characters if they move up the stairs or approach the chest.

Ivory chest. The ivory chest is locked; a character who makes a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Thieves Tools) check unlocks the chest. The chest has an AC of 15 and 10 (3d6) hit points. There are 28 eyeballs inside the chest, one of which belongs to Captain Seaboard.

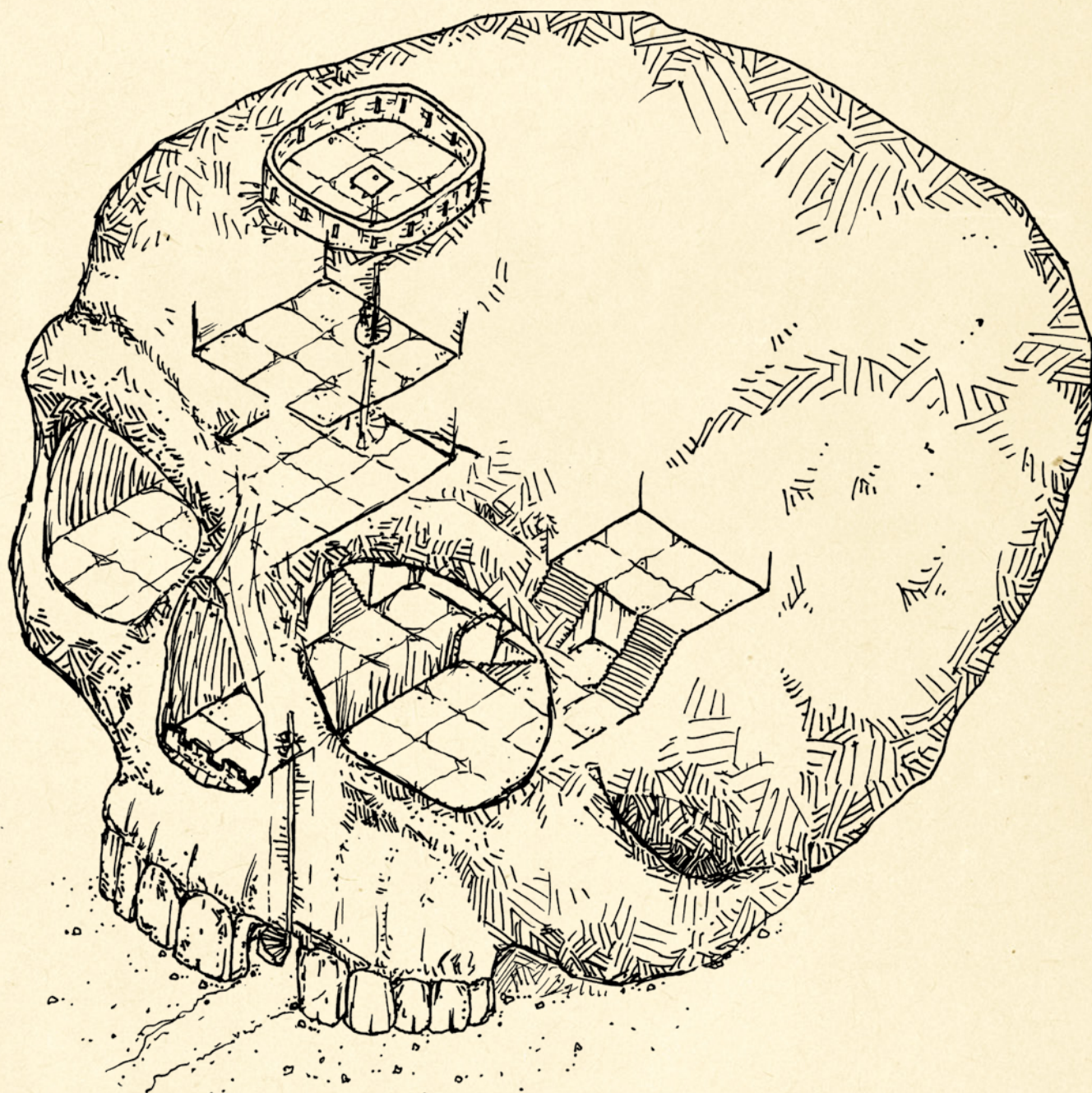
Characters that succeed on a DC 12 Intelligence (History) check will recognize the chest as the chest from Captain Seaboard's tale. If the chest is open, characters that succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check will recognize Captain Seaboard's right eyeball; success by 2 or more also reveals that 18 of the remaining eyeballs belong to humans, and 9 belong to a non-human creature.



APPENDIX A: PLAYER MAP OF SKULL ISLAND



APPENDIX C: PLAYER MAP OF SKULL CAVE



NAUTICAL CHARACTER OPTIONS

by Jeremy Forbing



The Path of the Ravager as described here comes from *Unearthed Archetypes: Heroes for the Ages*.

RAVAGING WAYS

At 3rd level when you choose this path, you gain proficiency with your choice of navigator's tools, one type of artisan's tools, or one type of vehicle (land or water). Alternatively, you can choose to gain proficiency with the Animal Handling skill instead of one of the listed tool proficiencies.

In addition, when you are not wearing medium or heavy armor, you gain a climbing speed equal to your walking speed.

SWIFT RAIDER

Starting at 3rd level, when you hit a creature with a melee weapon attack while raging, if you moved at least 10 feet in a straight line immediately before making that attack, you can use your bonus action to force the target to make a Wisdom saving throw (DC is equal to 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Charisma modifier). On a failure, it is frightened of you until the end of your next turn.

DEFIANT GAZE

Starting at 6th level, you can see up to 1 mile away with no difficulty, and are able to discern even fine details as though looking at something no more than 100 feet away from you. In addition, when you would roll a Wisdom (Perception) check or Wisdom saving throw at disadvantage, you roll normally instead.

BRUTAL REPRISAL

Starting at 10th level, when a creature fails its saving throw against your Swift Raider feature, it takes 1d10 psychic damage, in addition to becoming frightened of you until the end of your next turn.

In addition, while you are raging, if a creature has attacked you within the last minute, you can use the bonus action granted by your Swift Raider feature on that creature when you hit it with a melee weapon attack, even if you did not move at least 10 feet in a straight line before the attack.

INESCAPABLE FEAR

Beginning at 14th level, while you are raging, frightened creatures within 5 feet of you have disadvantage on Wisdom saving throws that are not against spells. Whether you are raging or not, you make opportunity attacks against frightened creatures with advantage.

NEW RANGER CONCLAVE: MARINERS

Mariners are rangers born not to the forest or mountains, but to the sea. You are the daring merchant-princess, the cunning freebooter, or the bold explorer. As a traveler between the great seaports, with no single home, you exist on the borders of society. When your luck or patience runs out in one port, you move on, seeking out new adventures. Your fighting style reflects the common

traits of sailors everywhere, prizing freedom, mobility, and swift reciprocity.

The lanes you travel are choked with pirates (who may be your enemies or rivals, depending on your own activities), mysterious monsters, and other strangeness. And lately, these threats seem to be growing darker. Sailors will tell their tales, of course, but you've heard too many rumors of signs and omens repeated in different ports to dismiss these dire predictions out of hand.

Upon retiring, mariners often become simple merchants, following common routes and carrying traditional cargos. Yet even in the hearts of these old buccaneers a fire burns—a passion that may lead them to accept one “last” great adventure. Your fighting style reflects the common traits of such sailors everywhere, prizing freedom, mobility, and swift vengeance.

This version of the Mariner first appeared in *Raiders of the Lost Tomb: Chult Adventurer's Guide*.

CORSAIR FIGHTING STYLE

When you choose this archetype at 3rd level, you receive a second fighting style, which can only be chosen from the following special options: Harrying, Ship-to-Ship Warfare, Mobility, or Two-Weapon Fighting. You can never take the same Fighting Style option more than once.

HARRYING

When you hit a creature with an unarmed strike or a melee attack using a weapon that doesn't have the two-handed or heavy property, the creature's speed is reduced by half until the end of its next turn.

SHIP-TO-SHIP WARFARE

When you have cover against an attack, if it still hits, you have resistance against that attack's damage.

