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En Route II

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Digital Edition v1.0 • June 2005

On the Road Again

BY MICHELLE A. B. NEPHEW

So, you've found yourself on the road to adventure once again, without a map and with very little cover. Welcome, intrepid adventurer, to *En Route II*, the D20 System® sourcebook of short encounters.

Like the original *En Route* supplement, *En Route II: By Land or By Sea* presents fully detailed scenarios that can be placed in any published or home-grown fantasy campaign setting. GMs can easily insert *En Route II* encounters into longer adventures of their own design, or use them as transitions between published adventure modules — when your

next adventure is half a world away, this is what happens on the journey there.

En Route II features encounters suitable to sea voyages in addition to those involving land-bound travel, all of which can be played in about one hour's time with very little preparation. Here you'll find obstacles ranging from armed combat to roleplaying challenges, with new D20 material throughout.

So, turn the page and take your first step on your journey into a world of your own making.





Blood Vessel

BY KEITH BAKER • ILLUSTRATED BY GREY THORNBERRY

Encounter Level: 2

Setting: At sea

Summary: The party encounters a ship that is a duplicate of their own vessel. This mystery ship is actually an enormous mimic, crewed by immature doppelgangers that are honing their shapechanging skills.

Background

"There's a vessel dead ahead, captain," the lookout called. Curious, Sera pulled out her spyglass and peered through it. What she saw sent a shiver down her spine. She grabbed Krogar's arm. "Look at that ship," she said in a quavering voice.

Krogar complied, and grunted. "What? So it's the same make as our vessel." Sera shook her head. "Look again. The sails, the flags ... it is our vessel. And there on the foredeck ... I swear I saw myself standing next to you!"

Krogar cursed and brought up the spyglass for a second look.

Doppelgangers are infamous creatures — sinister shapeshifters who use their supernatural powers to infiltrate humanoid society, or sell their skills as spies and assassins. But where do they come from? How does a doppelganger learn the art of deception? This encounter offers one possible explanation. On an ocean voyage, the party encounters a ship that is a mirror image of their own, complete with an identical crew. The people on the mirror ship are just as confused as the player characters ...

or so it seems. In truth, the crew are young doppelgangers (called doppelkinder) trying to learn the basic skills they need to survive on their own. And the ship itself is a biological organism — a floating nursery known as a blood vessel.

There are scholars who believe that the doppelganger and the mimic are different stages in the lifecycle of a single creature — a shapeshifter might begin life as a mobile humanoid, but eventually settle down and lose the ability to assume the form of humanoid creatures. While most mimics are the size of large chests, these sages claim that a mimic could eventually grow to such a tremendous size that it could assume the form of a building. In point of fact, these vast creatures prefer to disguise themselves as ships; on the open seas, it is easier to avoid unwanted contact with humanoids. These enormous mimics are called blood vessels.

Blood vessels are living nests; they spawn doppelkinder from their own mass, provide physical shelter for their children, and guide these half-grown doppelgangers as they master their natural talents. Using its telepathic abilities, a blood vessel will locate groups of humanoids and scan their thoughts, seeking opportunities to challenge its children. A blood vessel helps its doppelkinder prepare for an encounter, and provides them with telepathic advice throughout any sort of confrontation. A blood vessel will only reveal its true nature if its children are seriously threatened; in such an event, the seemingly inanimate structure flows into life, striking out with pseudopods or swatting at its enemy with its masts.

Doppelkinder, then, are immature, inexperienced doppelgangers. A doppelkinder possesses the ability to change its shape, but it still needs to master the finer points of subterfuge and disguise. It fights in the same manner as a full-grown doppelganger, but it is physically weaker and its flesh is not as tough as that of an adult. Typically, doppelkinder will travel in groups, seeking safety in numbers as they hone their skills; they are either accompanied by an experienced doppelganger, or remain in the presence of a blood vessel. A doppelkinder troupe may assume the form of a merchant caravan, a traveling circus, a band of actors, or even a military patrol. They attempt to avoid conflict, instead using encounters with humanoids as opportunities to practice the art of subterfuge.

A Familiar Sight

This encounter can occur any time that the party is traveling at sea. They may have booked passage on a large ship, or they may be sailing in a vessel of their own. The lookout spots a ship on the horizon, headed directly for the party's vessel. As the ship closes, observers will notice a few odd things about the approaching vessel.



The precise range at which characters can observe the vessel will vary depending on whether they are using spyglasses or observing with the naked eye.



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Regardless, when the ship is close enough to be seen, a successful Spot check (DC 10) will reveal that it is an exact duplicate of the party's ship. If an observer makes the roll by 5 points, he notices that there are the same number of people on the deck of the strange vessel as there are on the character's ship; and if he makes the roll by 10 points, he is able to see that the people on deck are exact duplicates of the crew of the party's vessel, and that they are almost perfectly mimicking the actions of the crew.

If all of the characters fail the Spot check, this information will become apparent as the strange vessel draws closer; the Spot check is only required to notice these details while the ship is still far away.

The duplicate ship is headed directly towards the party's boat. As it gets closer, the PCs see their counterparts on the other ship watching them with a mixture of curiosity and trepidation. The crew of the party's ship may ask the adventurers how to handle this strange situation — but the mirror ship shows no signs of hostility. Instead, as the ship closes the duplicate crew signals a desire to talk, using semaphore, a flag of truce, or another form of naval communication common to the region. If the party chooses to attack the approaching ship, refer to the statistics later in this encounter. If the PCs choose to ignore it, the mirror ship will follow and overtake them; the blood vessel has fins beneath the waterline that supplement its sails. As soon as the vessels are close enough, the doppelkinder counterpart of the most charismatic member of the party will call out from the deck of the duplicate ship: "Who are you? Where did you come from?"

Talk to the Mirror

The goal of the doppelkinder is to get the party to stop and talk with them. They have no hostile intentions; they are practicing imperson-

ation, and want to see how long they can maintain their rather unlikely disguise. They will feign complete astonishment; they seem to be as puzzled about the situation as the player characters.

The spokesman for the doppelkinder (again, choose the counterpart of the PC most likely to assume such a role) asks the party to set anchor until they can sort things out; he is willing to continue the conversation by shouting, but suggests that the parties meet on smaller boats between the two main ships, or that they send a group over to the PCs' ship. They will not allow anyone to come aboard their ship; the blood vessel looks good from a distance, but like a mimic, its disguise cannot hold up to a close physical examination. The doppelkinder send the duplicates of the party as their representatives; they are more than willing to leave all weapons and armor on their vessel, and will ask the player characters to do the same.

When the two groups eventually come face to face, the doppelkinder leader introduces his comrades and explains the nature of their journey. As it turns out, the doppelkinder claim to be traveling to the same destination as the player characters, and for exactly the same reason!



The blood vessel acquired information about the goals of the party as it approached their ship, using its Mind Probe ability (see its stats below). Throughout the encounter, it will continue to read the thoughts of party members; it relays any important information to the doppelkinder using its telepathic abilities.

If the PCs reveal that they are traveling to the same destination, the doppelkinder act highly suspicious. "But you were traveling in the wrong direction," the leader says. "Who are you really? Is this some sort of trap?"

The goal of this encounter is to make the players question what's actually going on. The dop-

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pelkinder have no interest in getting aboard the party's ship. They are willing to lay down their weapons to talk. They seem to know all about the reason the party is traveling. Has the party slipped into some alternate reality? Is this some sort of temporal echo? Or is it some sort of elaborate prank?



There are a number of skill checks that could be relevant in this conversation:

- A successful Intuit Direction check (DC 15) allows a character to determine that her ship is headed in the correct direction to reach their destination. The doppelkinder will claim that the party's maps make no sense. "What are you talking about? The Gap of Gales is to the west, straight towards the setting sun. You're heading for Grayhaven ... we just came from there after overthrowing Baron Thorkk." Of course, the doppelkinder do not have maps to back up their stories — although the blood vessel might be able to secrete false maps from its own mass.
- Each party member should make a Spot check to penetrate the disguises of the doppelkinder. The difficulty is 35, increased to 39 if the doppelkinder is reading the thoughts of the character. However, a character gets a +6 to +8 circumstance bonus to her roll based on her familiarity with her fellow adventurers, and a +10 circumstance bonus to penetrate the disguise of the doppelkinder that has assumed her form. If a PC makes the Spot check, she notices some sort of inconsistency. The cleric's holy symbol is the wrong color. The barbarian has too many teeth on his necklace. The dwarf's front tooth is made of silver instead of gold. The bard is humming — but she *never* hums! This will give the party material for further investigation, but will not immediately reveal what's going on.
- The doppelkinder use Bluff on a regular basis. Whenever a doppelkinder makes a particularly extreme claim, PCs can oppose it with Sense Motive checks. If a character made his initial Spot check and noticed something odd, he gets a +4 circumstance bonus to his Sense Motive checks.
- After a minute of conversation, a character can make a Sense Motive check (DC 25). If successful, the character realizes that the doppelkinder are, basically, lacking any motives. (The conversation is driven by information the doppelkinder are picking up through Detect Thoughts and Mind Probe; they don't actually care about the topic of conversation.) The PC gets the sense that they are actors reading lines from a script.
- The doppelkinder have little experience dealing with real humans. A successful Intimidate check (DC 19) will unnerve the speaker; he'll say that he doesn't know what the party is up to, but he has no intention of being caught in a trap. With that, the doppelkinder will attempt to retreat to their vessel.
- *Detect thoughts* is relatively ineffective against the doppelkinder. They themselves are scanning the minds of the party, and are trained to keep their surface thoughts on topic. *Discern lies* and *zone of truth* will work normally, but if the doppelkinder become aware of the spell (via Detect Thoughts) they will do their best to speak literal truth — though careful questioning prevents this sort of prevarication. *Mind probe*

or *true seeing* are both fully effective. Other divination spells may reveal holes in a doppelkinder's disguise; spells that detect alignment will reveal the neutral nature of the doppelkinder as opposed to the actual alignments of the party members, for instance.

- Finally, the doppelkinder don't actually possess any of the equipment owned by the PCs. They can create facsimiles of these items, but their "magic items" will not possess powers or auras; so *detect magic* or *identify* will give the game away.

🌀 *New Creature: Blood Vessel*

CR 10; SZ G (aberration); HP 20d8+140 (190 hp); Init +0; Spd 10 ft., swim 60 ft.; AC 17 (–4 size, +11 natural); Atk melee +27/+22/+17 (2d8+18, slam), or ranged +15/+10/+5 (2d8, natural arbalest); Face 20 ft. x 50 ft.; Reach 15 ft.; SA Engulf, Mind Probe; SQ Body Weaponry, Darkvision 60 ft., Image Bank, Immunities, Shapeshift, Telepathy; AL N; SV Fort +13, Ref +6, Will +16; Str 35, Dex 10, Con 25, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 14

Skills: Disguise +25, Listen +14, Sense Motive +12, Spot +17

Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Iron Will, Skill Focus (Disguise), Spell Focus (Divination)

Aberration: Aberrations have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet.

Body Weaponry (Ex): A blood vessel can form weapons from its body. Its basic attack is to lash out with a powerful pseudopod, which can strike with sufficient force to shatter the hull of a ship. If it is close to its target, it can disguise this attack as a battering ram or similar weapon. It can also form an arbalest-like weapon to attack its targets at range. This attack has a range increment of 160 feet, but because it is using its own body as ammunition the vessel loses 1 hit point for

every shot it fires. While the vessel can make three attacks per round, it must concentrate entirely on ranged attacks or melee, and so cannot mix the two.

If a blood vessel strikes another ship, the target must make a Fortitude save (DC 12) to avoid a breach. A breached ship will begin to sink. The length of time it will take for the crippled vessel to sink is determined by the size of the ship: a galley or warship will last one hour, a sailing ship or longship will last for thirty minutes, a keelboat will last twenty minutes, and a rowboat will only last for five minutes. Each successive breach will cut the remaining time in half. Crewmen can temporarily mend a breach with a Profession (sailor) check (DC 20), but this will only stop the clock from running; if the ship is breached again, the damage will pick up where it left off. The ideal solution is the *make whole* spell, which will repair all damage and restore the ship to its original condition.

Engulf (Ex): It's possible that a character will voluntarily wander inside a blood vessel — going below decks on a ship, or inside one that has taken the form of a house. This is an extremely dangerous place to be, should the vessel decide to shift its internal geometry and

The doppelkinder draw out the encounter for as long as possible. They will want to compare past adventures with the party, using Detect Thoughts and Mind Probe to pick up information about the party's exploits and work it into their own stories. This is an opportunity to suggest alternate directions that party could take in the future

— “Well, we just returned the jade elephant to princess Sharina. What? How could you not realize it belonged to her?” These stories could be perfectly valid, based on deductions that the blood vessel has made after analyzing the thoughts of the adventurers, or they could be unwise suggestions

New Creature: Blood Vessel (Continued)

crush the people inside. Shifting form on this scale takes time; if a character within the vessel can make a Reflex save (DC 15), he gets one full action to try to get out of the vessel. Once the crushing starts, victims trapped within will take 2d8+12 points of damage every round. A victim trapped inside must make a successful grapple check to take any action. If the check is made, the character can move one foot for every point he made the check by, literally clawing his way out of the depths of the vessel. It takes the vessel a full action to begin to crush those within it, but after the attack has been initiated it does not take any effort to maintain.

Image Bank (Su): If a blood vessel successfully probes a humanoid mind, it may take a standard action to record a perfect image of the target's appearance and mannerisms. Using a second standard action, it may transmit a stored image to any willing doppelganger or doppelkinder within 1000 feet. The target immediately adjusts to the new form, using the Disguise skill of the blood vessel instead of its own. At any time, a vessel can store two images for every point of Intelligence it possesses.

Immunities (Ex): Blood vessels are immune to sleep and charm effects, and to any form of acid damage.

Mind Probe (Su): A blood vessel possesses powerful psychic abilities and is aware of all minds in its immediate vicinity. It can sense the presence of intelligent creatures as if using the spell *detect thoughts*; if it focuses on a single mind, it can duplicate the effects of *mind probe*. Both effects are treated as if cast by a 20th level psion (save DC 16), and have a range of 1000 feet.

Shapeshift (Ex): A blood vessel can alter its external appearance to that of any object of gargantuan size — a boat, a house, or a stone wall, for example. A blood vessel can only alter the texture of its body to a limited degree, and someone who examines it closely can notice this irregularity by making a Spot or Search check opposed by the vessel's Disguise skill. While it cannot duplicate the shapes of living creatures, a blood vessel can extrude fins for speedy aquatic movement. It is less mobile on land; it can create wheels or stubby legs, but it generally oozes along like a slug.

Telepathy (Su): Blood vessels can telepathically communicate with any creature within 1000 feet that has a language.



designed to get the party in even more trouble if they follow up on them.

The doppelkinder expect to be exposed; they are still learning their trade, and the challenge is to see how far they can push things. If the party confronts them with proof of the deception, or the doppelkinder detect a dangerous level of hostility, the leader of the delegation will smile at his counterpart. “Well, it was fun while it lasted,” he says. Then, as one, the doppelkinder spring into action.



The doppelkinder have no interest in risking their lives; they wish to escape unharmed. They dive into the water, assuming the forms of sea elves as they fall; now

possessing gills, they swim down into the depths in order to lose the party. The blood vessel will begin to move away at high speed; a successful Spot check (DC 16) reveals the presence of a vast fluke beneath the waterline, powering the motion of the ship. If the PCs give chase or engage the blood vessel with spells or ranged weaponry, it will twist in an impossible fluid manner and dive, disappearing into the depths of the water.

When the doppelkinder transform as they leap into the water, they assume their natural forms for a split second. So while the party may not understand the motives of these creatures, they will realize that they

New Creature: Doppelkinder (18)

CR 2; SZ M (shapechanger); HP 2d8 (9 hp); Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+1 Dex, +3 natural); Atk melee +1/+1 (1d4, slam), or melee +1 (by weapon); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Detect Thoughts; SQ Alter Self, Darkvision 60 ft., Immunities; AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +4; Str 11, Dex 12, Con 11, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 12

Skills: Bluff +9, Disguise +9, Listen +5, Sense Motive +5, Spot +5

Feats: Dodge

Alter Self (Su): As a standard action, a doppelkinder can assume the shape of any Small or Medium-sized humanoid. This ability works like *alter self* cast by a 15th-level sorcerer, but the doppelkinder can remain in a new form indefinitely.

Detect Thoughts (Su): A doppelkinder can continuously detect thoughts. This is identical to the spell of the same name, as if cast by a

15th-level sorcerer (save DC 13), although the range is limited to 30 feet. It can suppress or resume this ability as a free action.

Immunities (Ex): A doppelkinder is immune to sleep and charm effects.

Shapechanger: Shapechangers have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet.

Skills: A doppelkinder receives a +4 racial bonus to Bluff and Disguise. When using Alter Self, a doppelganger receives a +10 circumstance bonus to Disguise checks. If it can detect the thoughts of an opponent, it receives an additional +4 circumstance bonus to Bluff and Disguise checks.

Equipment: Armor and weaponry as possessed by the character the doppelkinder is impersonating

were dealing with some form of doppelganger.

It is possible that the adventurers will manage to engage the doppelkinder before they can reach the water, or even board the blood vessel itself; statistics for these creatures are provided on page 10. The blood vessel contains another twelve doppelkinder in addition to those disguised as party members. These doppelkinder disguise themselves as other members of the ship's crew; if the party's vessel has a smaller crew, the additional doppelkinder simply hide below decks.

Loose Ends

This encounter is more of a distraction than anything else. The doppelkinder are not looking for a fight, and there is little to be gained from battling them. But the experience may prepare the party for a more important encounter with doppelgangers in the future. Perhaps the party will encounter a land-based

blood vessel — an artificial inn that a group of doppelgangers are using as a base of operations, for example. Or maybe the adventurers will cross paths with a doppelganger later in a campaign, only to discover that the doppelganger was one of the doppelkinder they encountered at sea. A doppelganger with a sense of humor might lend the party a hand, mentioning “the valuable lessons you taught me.”

On the other hand, if the party killed any of the doppelkinder, a cadre of doppelgangers might track them down in search of vengeance. If the blood vessel itself was destroyed, related doppelgangers would go to great lengths to avenge the fallen elder. Party members could be framed for heinous crimes. Friends or allies might be killed and replaced, turning against the party at the worst possible time. Lovers could be seduced by impossibly perfect paramours. For a vessel-slayer, death is too quick; punishment will be slow and painful, as the doppelgangers slowly strip everything away from their victim.





The Bubblesphere

BY BRANNON HOLLINGSWORTH & JESSE MOHN
ILLUSTRATED BY CHAD SERGESKETTER

Encounter Level: 5

Setting: At sea

Summary: While on an ocean voyage, the characters are approached by an eccentric wizard to serve as test pilots for his latest invention; the maiden voyage quickly becomes a death-trap unless the characters can avert several major crises.

Background

The submersible vehicle called the “bubble-sphere” represents several months of dedicated magical and engineering genius on the part of a gnomish inventor named Mevagissey. The only problem is that it should represent years of that same genius. Working his staggering charm to its utmost effect, he was able to convince some wealthy merchant lords that if he were to be able to develop such a craft, it would open up entirely new and previously untapped markets for them. The merchants, viewing the situation through gold-tinted lenses, heartily agreed and funded Mevagissey’s project for two entire years.

From that moment, the gnome began living like a king; whatever his charming smile and silver tongue could not get him, the coin in his purse could. Essentially, he spent the bulk of the subsequent two years traveling — conducting “field research” — and only now that the deadline is pressing (as are the aforementioned merchants) has he hastily produced the bubble-sphere. Much to his credit, if Mevagissey were any less intelligent, the thing would likely explode into a thousand bits. But luck seems to

follow the wizard, and this bubblesphere fiasco is no exception. Mevagissey knows that the principles upon which the bubblesphere is designed are sound, but he isn’t sure about the craft’s practical performance — he needs to conduct a test run before he presents it to his backers.

This is one of the reasons why he is willing to pay handsomely for the services of a few good adventurers; there is no way that the gnome is getting into the craft, but he will gladly spend the merchants’ gold for someone else to do it. But Mevagissey has encountered a problem that the gold in his purse cannot solve; the gnome scheduled passage aboard a ship several months in advance, and hired a party of “guinea pigs” as pilots for the bubblesphere’s maiden voyage. However, upon their first glimpse of the craft they were to test, these hardened adventurers jumped ship just after leaving dock. Now the gnome is left in the lurch — he’s already onboard ship, the bubblesphere is ready to be tested, but there’s no one willing to risk their lives piloting the thing. He’s willing to pay almost anything for someone aboard to do just that.

Meeting Mevagissey

At some point during their ocean voyage, the characters must meet the captivating Mevagissey. He is a gnome of average height, with short-cropped, platinum blond hair and chin whiskers. His lose-fitting robes, which seem something like a cross between a toga and the voluminous pantaloons worn by folk native

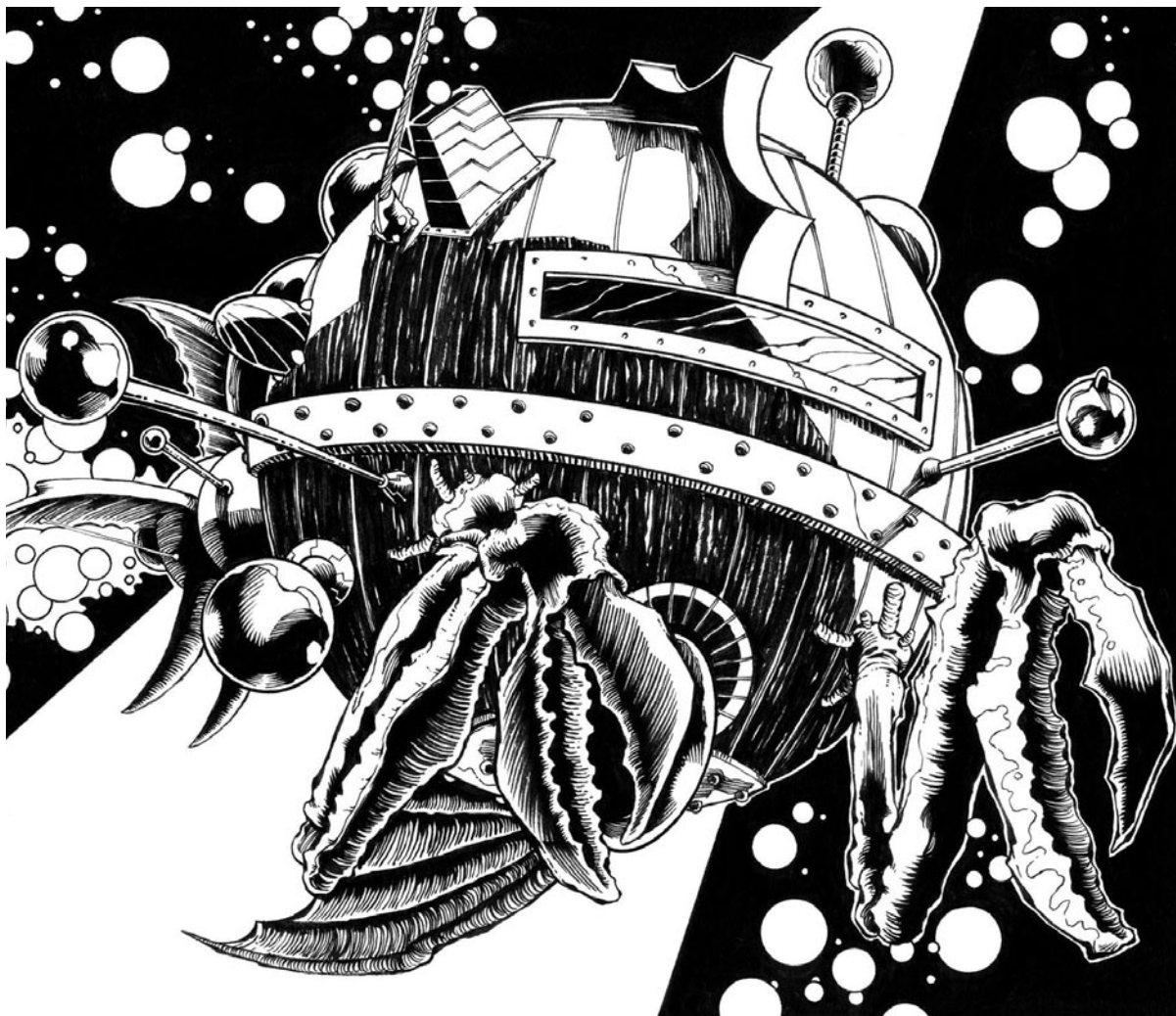
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to arid regions, catch the sea breeze and flow about him like seraphim wings. Silver and gold glint off his body: a gold hoop earring here, a gem-encrusted silver bracelet there, and occasionally a glimpse of an exotic-looking tattoo can be seen behind his fluid garments. Well-worn leather sandals of dark burnished leather adorn his feet and all about him hangs the mysterious scent of spices: cinnamon, sage, and clover.

Mevagissey is by no means a typical wizard, but he is skilled and intelligent just the same. He is also one of the most amiable, pleasant, and friendly fellows the characters are ever likely to meet. He quickly warms to the PCs, and begins chatting with them. The gnome has seen much

of the wide world; in fact, if the characters are heading to a particular area, there is a good chance that Mevagissey has been there several times. In this case, the GM can use the wizard as an exposition tool to further the campaign goals.

At some point, Mevagissey asks the characters if they can assist him with his current task; a simple thing, as he puts it, but something that would provide a much needed service both to him and to his powerful and wealthy employers. He promises to pay them each handsomely for their assistance in this matter. Mevagissey merely wants to have the characters man his new invention, the bubblesphere, on its maiden voyage and to run it



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through a battery of tests designed to check all of the craft's primary systems.

An iron chest filled with gems and some minor magical trinkets was purposefully sunk by Mevagissey's backers in the same area the ship is now. If the characters successfully retrieve the chest, they can each select one item in addition

to their promised payment. Further, Mevagissey promises to mention their names to his employers when he reports to them; he notes that having the appreciation of the leaders of some of the more prominent merchant guilds in the land is something that could bring them much work, gold, and notoriety.

Mevagissey

7th-Level Gnome Wizard

CR 7; SZ S (humanoid); HD 7d4+14; 31 hp; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 20 ft.; AC 14 (15 vs. dodge opponent) (+1 Dex, +1 size, +2 bracers); Atk melee +4 (1d6+1, staff), or ranged +4 (1d4, dart); SA Spells, Spell-like Abilities; SQ Low-light Vision, Summon Familiar; AL CG; SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +7; Str 10 Dex 12, Con 15, Int 18, Wis 12, Cha 16

Skills: Concentration +8, Hide +15, Knowledge (Aquatic Monsters) +19, Knowledge (Bubblesphere) +12, Knowledge (Engineering) +10, Listen +6, Spellcraft +10, Spot +3

Feats: Craft Wondrous Item, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Scribe Scroll, Spell Penetration

Gnome Traits (Ex): Gnomes have Low-light Vision that lets them see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, or torchlight. They also have a +2 racial bonus to saving throws against illusions, +1 racial bonus to attack rolls against kobolds and goblinoids, and +4 dodge bonus against giants. Once per day a gnome can use the spell-like ability *speak with animals* as a 1st-level druid to communicate with a burrowing mammal. Gnomes with Intelligence scores of 10 or

higher may cast *dancing lights*, *ghost sound*, and *prestidigitation*, each once per day as a 1st-level wizard (spell failure penalties for armor apply).

Spells: (4/5/4/3/2) Mevagissey knows the following spells; those prepared are marked with asterisks. The DC to resist his spells is 14 + the spell level.

0 Level — all, including *prestidigitation**, *mage hand**, *read magic**, *detect magic**

1st Level — *alarm*, *charm person**, *expeditious retreat**, *identify*, *mage armor**, *magic missile**, *sleep**, *spider climb*, *unseen servant*

2nd Level — *arcane lock**, *continual flame**, *locate object**, *glitterdust**

3rd Level — *fly**, *lightning bolt**, *secret page*, *water breathing**

4th Level — *minor creation**, *resilient sphere**

Summon Familiar: Mevagissey doesn't have a familiar, as his recent traveling prevented it.

Equipment: *Wand of daylight* (33 charges), bracers of armor, staff, *cloak of elvenkind*, 2300 gp, 5400 sp, a gold ring worth 1800 gp

The Bubblesphere

Huge Vessel

Hit Points: 200

AC: 10

Initiative: As the captain -4

Speed: 20 ft. swim

Hardness: 10

Attacks: 2 claws +9 melee, or 2 steam vents +9 melee, or slam +12

Damage: Claw 1d8+10, or steam vents 2d6, or slam 4d6

OPERATION

Operating the bubblesphere's systems is also a trick, if one is not skilled in its use. The controller needs to make an Intelligence check for several situations as follows:

Situation	DC
Turn quickly to port or starboard (move left or right)	18
Activate or deactivate the ballast system (move up or down)	18
Activate or deactivate the propulsion system (speed up or slow down)	15
Activate or deactivate the water pump (drain the leaking craft)	15
Activate or deactivate the communications system	13
Activate or deactivate anchor	10
Use the venting system for defense	16
Use the retrieving claws for attack	14
Use the horn	10
Emergency shutdown of boiler	15

Also, it's important to note that several of the bubblesphere's systems, such as the life support system, cannot be controlled or affected by the characters, no matter what action they take.

If more than one character attempts to operate the bubblesphere's various systems in concert

with one another, or if characters possess certain skills, this can affect the various Intelligence check DCs required to operate the craft. The GM is encouraged to add creatively to this list.

Situation	Modifier
Bubblesphere is manned by 2 individuals	-2 DC
Bubblesphere has less than 20 feet to avoid hazard	+4 DC
Bubblesphere has less than 10 feet to avoid hazard	+6 DC
Character has 5 ranks in Knowledge (engineering) or related skill	-2 DC
Bubblesphere has less than 3/4 hit points (174 hp or less)	+2 DC
Bubblesphere has less than 1/2 hit points (99 hp or less)	+4 DC
Bubblesphere has less than 1/4 hit points (49 hp or less)	+6 DC
Character studied the controls before launching	-2 DC

COMBAT

The bubblesphere is not a combat craft, but has been intelligently constructed to use its natural venting system and retrieving claws as a means of defense and offense, respectively. An operator can use the steam vents and claws with the bonuses listed above. There are also eight portholes through which characters may use their psionic and/or magical powers if necessary (provided they do not punch through the glass with said abilities).

The bubblesphere is by all means sea worthy and sturdy, but will break up when it reaches 0 hp. There are five *potions of waterbreathing* and five *glowrods* that can be used as emergency escape devices near the bottom hatch.

The Craft

Once the characters agree to help the gnome, he excitedly leads them through a quick tour of the craft, which is stored under a tarp on the deck of the ship, being careful to mention things such as the “emergency” *potions of water breathing* and *glowrods*.

The bubblesphere has approximately a 15-foot radius and is comprised of several materials, mostly wood with steel bandings. It has several external orbs, vents, and two retrieving claws attached to the outside, which are designed for automatically gathering environmental samples. It sports a tripod landing gear at the bottom, with three 6-foot-long legs. The entrance is also located at the bottom of the craft, and is oriented such that it can be opened while underwater without letting water in excessively. The craft has been painted with an eye-catching combination of bright orange and green markings “for maximum rescue efficiency.”

The bubblesphere is a mix of technology and magic, giving the craft an “otherworldly” look and feel to those not acclimated with both. It’s powered by a large, noisy boiler heated by a small fire elemental that the gnome, for reasons unknown, has named Roger. Roger is a typical specimen of a fire elemental of his size. Mentally, however, Roger is a complete conundrum. He has a morbid fascination with water, and readily goes into the boiler of the bubblesphere (which has a porthole so Roger can see underwater). But he’s extremely moody, and may stall the ship just to get a lingering view of something that catches his eye, though he will not willingly harm the crew or try to place them in danger.

Taking a Dip

Below are several snags that the characters, while piloting the bubblesphere, might encounter. The GM should pick the ones that seem the most interesting and appropriate to him. GMs should bear in mind that if running these events cumulatively, things could quickly become deadly for a low-level party.

Anchors Away!

When the characters are all within the bubblesphere and ready to begin the “test dive,” read the following:

Being inside the bubblesphere is simply unnerving. All around you, swarming like hungry clockwork insects, are metal conduits, wheels, pulleys, levers, dials, and hundreds of other unidentifiable contraptions. Cables and ropes spiderweb behind glass-covered doors that lack handles, and every word uttered rings hollowly in your ears. You can hear your own breathing and that of your companions, shallow, as if you’re all concerned about the lack of air within this confined space. You long for the hatch to open and to once again, if only for a moment, feel the sun and wind on your face ...

Suddenly you feel your stomach lurch into your throat and you have the horrible sense of falling. Thankfully, the sensation vanishes quickly as you hear a loud, reverberating thud and the entire craft lurches around you. There is little need to look out a porthole to know that you are beneath the surface of the waves, since everything has gone dark. Tiny lights all along the interior of the bubblesphere begin glowing with an inner fire, and your eyes slowly adjust to the gloom. All around you, the craft groans and protests under the pressure of the whole of the ocean.

EN ROUTE II: BY LAND OR BY SEA

The bubblesphere, once launched, bobs through the water like a cork, slowly sinking or rising as the controller operates the complex series of levers and dials that make the construct move.



The sphere moves at a rate of only 20 feet per round, and is motivated by several small propellers on the outside of the hull. If the controller is not proficient with the bubblesphere's method of propulsion, there is a good chance they will initially activate too many or too few propellers in a given area, making the vessel move at only a rate of 10 feet per round and in an undesired

direction as well. A few rounds spent “getting the feel” of the propulsion system (coupled with an Intelligence check of DC 15 or greater) should cure this deficiency.

As per the instructions given by Mevagissey, the characters are to direct the craft downward and retrieve the iron chest from the bottom of the ocean — it lies roughly 200 feet below, in the murk. Communication with Mevagissey on the surface is maintained through several large horn-like protrusions that are suspended within and along the top of the bubblesphere's cabin — at least until the system fails (see below).



Roger the Fire Elemental

CR 1; SZ S (elemental [fire]); HD 2d8; 9 hp; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 50 ft.; AC 15 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +3 natural); Atk melee +3 (1d4 and 1d4 fire, slam); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Burn; SQ Cold Vulnerability, Darkvision 60 ft., Immunities; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref +4, Will +0; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 4, Wis 11, Cha 11

Skills: Listen +5, Spot +5

Feats: Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse (slam)

Burn (Ex): Those hit by Roger's slam attack must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 11) or catch fire. The flame burns for 1d4 rounds, but a burning creature can take a move-equivalent action to put out the flame. Creatures hitting Roger with nat-

ural weapons or unarmed attacks take fire damage as though hit by Roger's attack, and also catch fire unless they succeed at a Reflex save.

Elemental: An elemental is immune to poison, sleep, paralysis, and stunning. Elementals are not subject to critical hits or flanking and have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. A slain elemental cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*, although a *wish* or *miracle* spell can restore it to life.

Fire Subtype: The creature is immune to fire damage. It takes double damage from cold unless the cold attack allows a saving throw for half damage, in which case it takes half damage on a successful save and double damage on a failed save.

All Tangled Up

Once the bubblesphere is below the waves, it soon becomes entangled; any number of things exist upon which the craft could become mired. Giant kelp beds, floating forests of flotsam, creatures with tentacles (such as giant jellyfish, octopi, or squid), and protruding rock or coral are just a few that could make navigating the bubblesphere a nightmare. When the characters pilot the craft into one such hazard, read the following:

A sudden jerk nearly causes you to lose your footing as the bubblesphere unexpectedly ceases its movement. Sickening sounds like shoulders being wrenched from their sockets begin rhythmically sounding around the perimeter of the craft, and you smell an acrid smoke. You suddenly realize that the craft has been caught on something, and that whatever clockwork mechanisms power the craft are likely burning themselves up under the increased strain.

 The characters may be able to free the craft as easily as by making some quick turns and fancy maneuvers (Intelligence check DC 20 or greater).

However, they very well could have to exit the craft and manually remove the offending obstacle, which could quickly become a much more complicated endeavor.

A Close Call

In addition to entanglements, the bubblesphere is also in danger of striking an underwater

object. This object could be anything from an ancient schooner hull, to a massive rock or coral outcropping, or even a creature of some sort.

 Any time that this occurs, the characters piloting the craft must attempt to avoid the hazard by going around or over/below it (Intelligence check DC 18). If at any time they fail, read the following:

Despite your best efforts to avoid the obstacle, your heart sinks and your stomach leaps as you hear a deafening, teeth-rattling gong as the hull of the bubblesphere plows into it. You dare not even breathe for the next several heartbeats, and can't help but wonder how much damage the craft has taken.

 Once the bubblesphere takes roughly 50 hit points of damage, the strain on the structure will cause it to begin to creak and groan loudly, as if in protest. GMs should emphasize this to the players, so if they want to flee the craft, they'll have ample opportunity to do so.

Further, the noise of the craft will soon (within 1d4 rounds) attract some interested (and hungry) denizen of the deep.

Sprung a Leak

Whether it's from structural damage or simply from the time spent beneath the waves, shortly after striking an object (see above), the bubblesphere begins springing leaks.



At first, these leaks may go unseen; a Spot check (DC 16) is required to notice the problem.

Each leak does 1 hit point of damage to the craft per minute that it's allowed to go unchecked.

Whenever the GM is ready to spring this little surprise upon the players, read the following:

Suddenly, you realize that the sweat on your neck has turned cold ... awfully cold. Knowing in the back of your mind that it is not, in fact, sweat, you slowly turn and confirm your racing suspicions. There's a leak in the hull of the bubblesphere!

Characters may be able to patch these leaks with magic or their own engineering skills; if so, let them succeed. There's always more where they came from, after all ...

Calling for Help

Once they are near their goal and are nearing the end of their harrowing undersea journey, the bubblesphere's communications system cuts out completely, leaving the characters entirely to their own devices. GMs should time this particular event so that it occurs at precisely the time when the characters need communication with Mevagissey the most, in order to provide a heightened sense of danger and impending doom. When this event occurs in game play, read the following:

With a sputtering, crackling sound, the speaking tubes of the communications system suddenly fall silent. You realize that your one and only tie with the world above just snapped.

Concluding the Encounter

Depending on the characters' decisions, there are many possible conclusions to this scenario; the two most extreme, however, are that the characters succeed at retrieving the chest and so complete the test despite the complications, or that they fail and the craft and the chest are lost in the water's depths.

If the characters succeed at their task and manage to pilot the craft back to the surface, then Mevagissey is ecstatic — this means not only additional funding for him, but it also means that the bubblesphere operates far better than he had dared hope. Even if the characters experienced several dangerous situations beneath the surface, the gnome is able to smooth them over with just some minor flexing of his charismatic muscles.

If things went poorly for the characters and the craft, then there is very likely to be a reckoning. Mevagissey will not be pleased that the bubblesphere was lost, or even severely damaged; while he still pays the characters as planned, he will also inform his employers of their "ineptitude." There's little doubt that it will not sit well with the merchants knowing that their invested gold is now sitting useless beneath the waves.





Death from Above & Below

BY F. WESLEY SCHNEIDER • ILLUSTRATED BY CHAD SERGESKETTER

Encounter Level: 14 (scalable to EL 5 or 20)

Setting: At sea

Summary: The PCs' ship is attacked by airborne sahuagin raiders.

Background

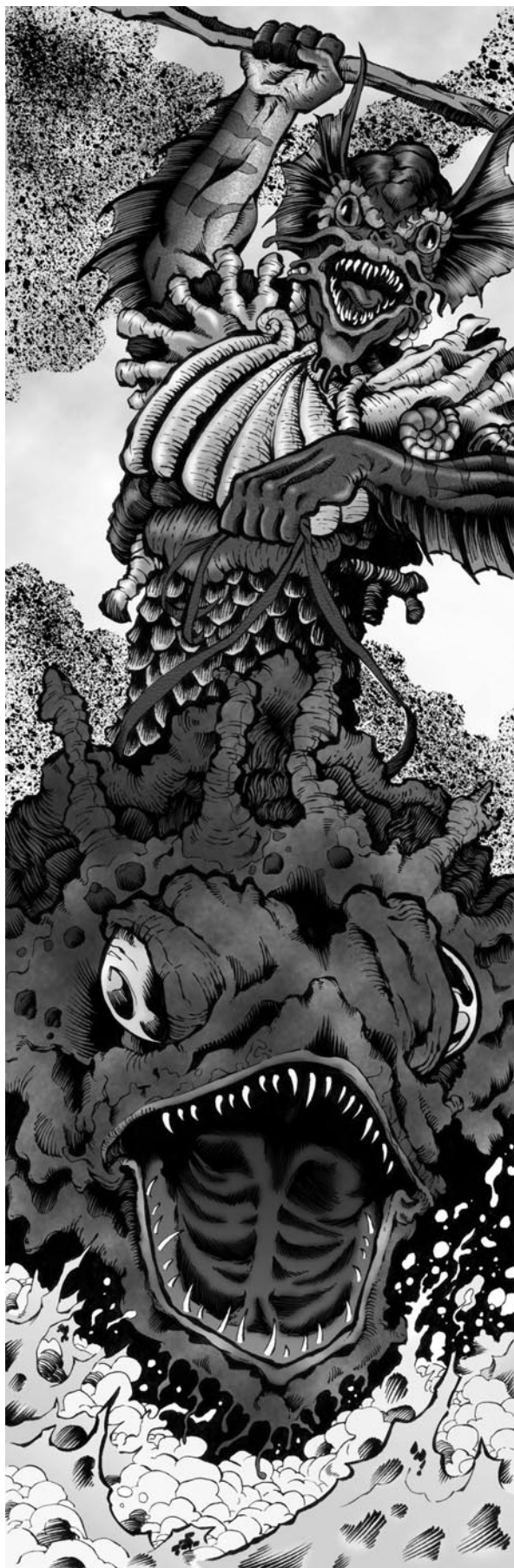
Sea travel has always been treacherous. Crushing waves, fierce storms, savage pirates, and monsters from the depths are all seemingly allied to assure that land dwellers never venture off their puny islands. Ask any who ply their trade crossing the seas how to survive, and nearly all will offer the same piece of advice, "Watch the waves, for death comes below." But recently, at least one group of the shark-like sahuagin have begun using a new tactic, turning the advice of even the saltiest sea dog into blatant lies. Now, death comes from above and below.

The attacks of sahuagin raiders have always been as ingenious as they are fierce. Relying on weapons adapted for the water, and on allies from the depths, they have turned more than one ship into a sinking stain of red on the open ocean. Though often vastly outnumbered, the sahuagin attack swiftly and remind even the largest and most experienced crew that they are ultimately out of their element — unwanted visitors to the seas. A prepared civilian crew

can usually just barely escape a brief sahuagin raid, which is usually encountered in patrols of 10 to 20 of the creatures, while most military crews can beat back the sea devils with few casualties. However, larger bands of 40 or more sahuagin can easily swamp an entire vessel, dragging entire crews into the water, where their terrifying shark allies can swiftly finish off even the most skilled sailors.

However, in recent years, traveling by sea has become considerably safer ... for air breathers. Knowing the dangers that lurk beneath the waves, canny sea captains often hire sizable groups of skilled defenders to assure that their cargo reaches its destination safely. Though this has greatly benefited air-breathing merchants, the repelled attacks have meant a loss of both goods and vital hunters to undersea communities. To combat these increased defenses, raiders from below have recently sought to augment their own effectiveness in combat, creating unique new armor to maximize the skill and longevity of each combatant. In doing so, battles with defending crews have meant fewer casualties, assuring that the skills of a hunter, raider, and potential parent have been retained to benefit the population.

Though many failed attempts were initially made to better defend these aquatic marauders, a melding of magic and the ocean's bounty has finally proved successful, producing a wholly new type of armor. This new deep shell armor assures its wearer heightened protection while



allowing him to maintain his formidable underwater skills. Also, the armor's slick surfaces assure that few ambitious crews succeed in bringing back captives as curiosities from the sea, as it allows the wearer to escape even the most complex bonds with relative ease.

While use of deep shell armor has aided many species of undersea raiders, the cunning sahuagin have adapted their strategies a step farther. Throughout their history, the sahuagin have relied on sharks as kindred hunters, holding a special place in their community and worship for the sea wolves. But with changing times, new allies have been sought out and integrated into the savage raids of the sea devils.

Though rare, flying fierce have long been known to the peoples of both the land and sea. Massive fish with wing-like fins, these carnivores can propel themselves from the water to great heights, snatching unwary sea birds in their wide maws. Fortunately though, these great fish have largely ignored sentient creatures; even when confronted underwater, their chosen prey seems to be birds and smaller fish. Where land dwellers have seen the benign nature of these creatures as a blessing, the sahuagin perceive it as a waste, and have sought to rectify the situation.

Using their understanding of other sea creatures, their natural savagery, and the magics of other races, the sahuagin have gathered whole schools of flying fierce into their communities, treating them not like their allies the sharks, but as mounts to broken and ridden into battle.

The use of flying fierce as mounts has benefited sahuagin raids amazingly. With their most skilled warriors now mounted, the sahuagin can launch swift surprise attacks from above, distracting a defending crew while their kin scale the ship's sides. By the time defenders have realized that the mounted sahuagin are merely distractions, several crewmen have already been mauled by the immense fish or

Standard Sahuagin Raider (20)

CR 2; SZ M (humanoid [aquatic]); HD 2d8+2; hp 11; Init +1 (Dex), Spd 30 ft., swim 60 ft.; AC 16 (+1 Dex, +5 natural); Atk melee +3 (1d8+2, trident), or melee +3 (1d4+2, 2 claws) and melee +1 (1d4+1, bite); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Blood Frenzy; SQ Amphibious, Freshwater Sensitivity, Light Blindness, Speak with Sharks, Underwater Sense; AL LE; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 9

Skills: Animal Empathy +2, Hide +6, Listen +7, Profession (hunt) +2, Spot +7, Wilderness Lore +1

Feats: Multiattack

Amphibious (Ex): Sahuagin can breathe outside water for 1 hour per 2 points of Constitution. After that, refer to the standard D20 System rules for drowning.

Blood Frenzy: Once per day a wounded sahuagin may fly in to a Blood Frenzy on the following round, attacking until it or its opponent is dead. The sahuagin gains +2 Strength and +2 Constitution, but suffers a -2 AC penalty. The sahuagin cannot end its frenzy voluntarily.

Freshwater Sensitivity (Ex): A sahuagin fully immersed in freshwater must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 15) or leave the water

immediately. If the sahuagin fails the roll but can't escape, it suffers a -4 morale penalty to all attack penalties, saves, and checks. Even on a success, it must repeat the save attempt every 10 minutes it remains immersed.

Light Blindness (Ex): Sudden exposure to light blinds sahuagin for 1 round and affects them with a -1 moral penalty to all attacks, saves, and checks while operating in the bright light.

Skills: Sahuagin gain a +4 racial bonus to Hide, Listen, and Spot checks; this bonus increases to +8 underwater. They also gain a +8 bonus to Wilderness Lore and Profession (hunt) when within 50 miles of their home; this bonus applies to the sahuagin in this encounter.

Speak with Sharks (Ex): A sahuagin can telepathically communicate with sharks less than 150 feet away, and can use Animal Empathy to befriend and train sharks.

Underwater Sense (Ex): Sahuagin can locate any living creature underwater within 30 feet, regardless of visibility. Undead, oozes, and constructs, which lack central nervous systems, can be located within 15 feet. Sahuagin underwater are not affected by figment illusions.

Equipment: A trident



Standard Shark (3)

CR 1; SZ M (animal [aquatic]); HD 8d8+3; hp 16; Init +2 (Dex), Spd swim 60 ft.; AC 15 (+2 Dex, +3 natural); Atk melee +4 (1d6+1, bite); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Keen Scent, Low-light Vision; AL N; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +2; Str 13, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2

Animal: All animals have Low-light Vision.

Keen Scent (Ex): Sharks can detect creatures within a 180-foot radius by scent, and can detect blood at a range of 1 mile.

skewered by the long coral lances of their riders. The remaining defenders are often unable to defend their craft from the swarm of unmounted sahuagin who have scaled the hull.

Sahuagin success in these rapid aerial raids has lent an unexpected distinction and honor to the skilled flying combatants, known among their people as sky scourge raiders. With saddles of shells and seaweed mounted behind the wings of their mounts, a single flying fierce can hold one rider and two passengers. The tactic of leaping low to a ship's deck and dropping two armed warriors upon an unsuspecting crew is swiftly gaining popularity among sahuagin marauders.

As raiding campaigns have successfully progressed, the most skilled sky scourge raiders have developed a respect for their mounts that

rivals their reverence for sharks. Heavily armed and armored, with the strongest and best-defended flying fierce, these sahuagin often become commanders of whole war bands — deadly and swift sky scourge knights.

The Sky Scourge Raid

This encounter can be used whenever the PCs are traveling through deep waters inhabited by sahuagin. Rather than coming under siege by the usual band of hull-crawling attackers, the PCs find themselves literally *under* attack by sahuagin sky scourge raiders and their knight leader.

New Creature: Flying Fierce (4)

CR 3; SZ L (animal [aquatic]); HD 4d8+2; hp 26; Init +3 (Dex), Spd swim 80 ft.; AC 17 (+3 Dex, +5 natural, -1 size); Atk melee +6 (1d8+3, bite); Face 5 ft. x 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Jump; SQ Amphibious, Low-light Vision; AL N; SV Fort +7, Ref +2, Will +1; Str 16, Dex 16, Con 17, Int 2, Wis 4, Cha 3

Skills: Jump +7, Listen +1, Spot +1

Flying fierce are essentially dire versions of Large flying fish. Just past their gills sprout long, thin fins used to propel their bodies through the water at great speeds and “fly” to heights reaching 40 feet. Though significantly more savage than their smaller cousins, flying fierce are often tamed by sahuagin to serve as mounts for their elite sky scourge raiders.

Amphibious (Ex): Flying fierce can breathe outside of water for 1 minute per 4 points of Constitution. After that consult the standard D20 System rules for drowning.

Animal: All animals have Low-light Vision.

Carrying Capacity: A light load for a flying fierce is 230 pounds, a medium load is 231 to 460 pounds, and a heavy load 461 to 4,690 pounds. It can also potentially drag 3,450 pounds.

Jump (Ex): If a flying fierce makes an upward underwater move action of 80 feet, it may jump as its next immediate action. This action requires a Jump check and has a minimum height of 20 feet and minimum distance of 60 feet. For every point the Jump roll exceeds 10, the flying fierce goes 1 foot higher and farther, to a maximum of 50 feet high and 90 feet in distance. During this jump, the flying fierce can make a bite attack as if it were charging. Any rider who has held his action may make an attack as per the Ride-By Attack feat mid-jump.

Skills: Flying fierce gain a +4 racial bonus to Jump checks.



EN ROUTE II: BY LAND OR BY SEA

The attacking war band consists of 20 standard sahuagin, 4 flying fierce, 3 sky scourge raiders, 3 sharks, and 1 sky scourge knight. At the beginning of the encounter the raiding party is about 100 feet to starboard from the PCs' ship. The 3 sky scourge raiders and their mounts each have 2 standard sahuagin with them as

passengers, while the sky scourge knight carries no passengers.

ROUND ONE



The attack begins with all 4 flying fierce moving 80 feet then jumping the PCs' vessel in one line, led by the sky scourge knight. The knight will attempt to

Sahuagin Sky Scourge Raider (3)

CR 3; SZ M (humanoid [aquatic]); HD 4d8+2; hp 26; Init +1 (Dex), Spd 30 ft., swim 60 ft.; AC 20 (+1 Dex, +4 scalemail deep shell armor, +5 natural); Atk melee +5 (1d8+2, heavy lance), or melee +5 (1d4+2, 2 claws) and melee +3 (1d4+1, bite); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Blood Frenzy; SQ Amphibious, Freshwater Sensitivity, Light Blindness, Speak with Sharks, Underwater Sense; AL LE; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 9

Skills: Animal Empathy +3, Hide +6, Listen +6, Profession (hunt) +3, Ride +4, Spot +3, Wilderness Lore +1

Feats: Mounted Combat, Multiattack

Note: All other abilities are as per standard sahuagin stats, which are given earlier in this encounter.

Equipment: A heavy lance, scalemail deep shell armor, and a flying fierce steed with a *saddle of the sea steed*



Sahuagin Sky Scourge Knight

CR 4; SZ M (humanoid [aquatic]); HD 6d8+3; hp 45; Init +2 (Dex), Spd 30 ft., swim 60 ft.; AC 22 (+2 Dex, +4 scalemail deep shell armor, +1 small deep shell shield, +5 natural); Atk melee +7 (1d8+3, heavy lance), or melee +7 (1d4+3, 2 claws) and melee +5 (1d4+2, bite); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Blood Frenzy; SQ Amphibious, Freshwater Sensitivity, Light Blindness, Speak with Sharks, Underwater Sense; AL LE; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 17, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 17, Wis 14, Cha 13

Skills: Animal Empathy +3, Hide +6, Listen +6, Profession (hunt) +4, Ride +6, Spot +3, Wilderness Lore +2

Feats: Mounted Combat, Multiattack, Spirited Charge

Note: All other abilities are as per standard sahuagin stats, which are given earlier in this encounter. The flying fierce this sahuagin rides has a +4 AC bonus from deep shell armor barding.

Equipment: A heavy lance, scalemail deep shell armor, small deep shell shield, and a flying fierce steed with a *saddle of the sea steed*

pick off opponents near the ship's center or near the most open space on deck. The sky scourge raiders following behind each drop

their 2 passengers to the deck below and make their own charge attacks. As the flying

🌀 *New Armor Special Quality: Deep Shell*

Battle-ready deep shell armor is not a fanciful, multicolored collection of decorative shells. Instead, it is a functional suit of armor, most often of the scale-mail, breastplate, or half-plate variety, created from the extremely dense shells of massive deep-sea clams and oysters. This armor functions as having the *slick* quality (+10 to Escape Artist checks) and imposes no penalties to swimming or skill checks regarding weight, speed, etc., while underwater. Thus, someone wearing even 50-pound deep shell half-plate could swim as though unarmored.

It imposes normal penalties while out of the water. However, if the deep shell armor is removed from water for more than a week it becomes brittle and fragile. If this occurs, the armor's AC bonus is reduced by -3 and it loses all magical properties.

Caster Level: 7th; *Prerequisites:* 2 deep-sea clam shells (both at least 2 ft. in diameter), Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *grease*, *floating disk*; *Market Price:* +2 bonus



🌀 *New Magic Item: Saddle of the Sea Steed*

Originally crafted by merfolk to aid them in taming their more feisty seahorse mounts, this useful magical item has been adopted by many sea dwelling races, but most notoriously by the sahuagin.

This item appears to be nothing more than an over-sized saddle, made from massive shells and long strands of seaweed. However, when attached to a non-sentient sea-dwelling animal, the creature must make a Will save (DC 16) or be affected as per the spell *charm person or animal* towards the first person to take a seat in the saddle. Seagoing mammals gain a +6 bonus to their Will saves versus this item. Land animals are completely unaffected by the saddle. An animal

affected by the saddle thus serves as an effective mount, though Ride checks are still required to perform most complex maneuvers. The mount is charmed until the saddle is removed, but receives another Will save to negate the saddle's power once per week.

Though the saddle does tame a creature, it is only effective if fully fastened. Getting a wild seagoing creature to stay still long enough to be saddled is often a feat in its own right.

Caster Level: 4th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *charm person or animal*; *Market Price:* 3,500; *Cost to Create:* 1750 gp + 140 XP; *Weight:* 27 lbs.

EN ROUTE II: BY LAND OR BY SEA

fierce initially move in a straight line, only the knight's fish may attack.

The standard sahuagin dropped to the deck each get a partial action upon landing.

The water-bound standard sahuagin make double swim moves (120 feet), half gathering on the port and half on the starboard side of the ship. The sharks follow and begin to circle.

ROUND TWO

The flying fierce circle away and back to make another jump.



The 6 standard sahuagin on deck engage the ship's defenders. They are aware of their vulnerability to light and their role as distractions, thus they will attack magic users or the lightest armored fighters first.

At this point, the 14 standard sahuagin remaining in the water attempt to scale the ship's sides. A common wooden hull has a climb DC of 18; if the sahuagin are unable to climb the ship by themselves, 2 grappling hooks (with 50-foot lengths of seaweed rope attached) will be thrown onto either side of the deck by 4 of the sahuagin, while the rest begin climbing up that same round. It will take them 2 rounds to scale a ship with a 20-foot-high hull; if all goes well, the first of the water-bound sahuagin will enter combat on the 4th round.

Defenders on the ship may notice the grappling hooks with a Spot check (DC 16) or Listen check (DC 14).

ROUND THREE

The knight and raiders each make their second leap, charging the most heavily armored defenders.



All 3 flying fierce also get 1 charge bite attack each. Remember to use the sky scourge sahuagin's ability to avoid damage using their Mounted Combat feat. Also, all riders must make Ride checks (DC 10) to attack; if they fail they are unable to attack on this pass.

The 6 sahuagin that were dropped on deck continue attacking, but do everything in their power to prevent the defenders from throwing off their allies' grappling hooks.



The first of the sahuagin from below (10 of the creatures) reach the deck but may not attack until next round.

The remaining 4 sahuagin in the water begin scaling the ship.

ROUND FOUR

The mounted sahuagin again circle for another jump. The main force of the unmounted sahuagin (10 creatures) enters combat alongside the 6 already engaged.



Whenever possible, bull rushes and grapples will be made to force the ship's defenders into the water. The sahuagin have no problem with diving back into the water if it means dragging an opponent with them.

By this point the rest of the standard sahuagin (4 creatures) should have scaled the ship but can't attack until the next round.

The sharks continue to wait impatiently or snack on any crewmen that have been knocked off the ship thus far.

ROUND FIVE

The sky scourge sahuagin again charge with their mounts.



The knight and raiders attack normally, but the flying fierce will maneuver to bull rush the most heavily armored or seemingly dangerous of the ship's defenders.

EN ROUTE II: BY LAND OR BY SEA

Their intention is to push these opponents into the water and let their armor or the sharks take care of them.

All the 20 standard sahuagin should now be able to make melee attacks and, with luck, are overwhelming the ship's defenders. Their sahuagin Blood Rage ability has probably come into effect by this point.

ROUND SIX

The flying fierce again circle the ship.

The sahuagin on deck should be overwhelming their attackers.

The sharks are getting the beginnings of a fine meal.

ROUND SEVEN



The sahuagin continue their assault with the sky scourge warriors mak-

ing their leaps on every odd-numbered round. The deck assault will continue until the ship's crew is defeated, or once three quarters of the attackers (15 sahuagin) have been slain.

Even if the primary assault fails, the mounted sahuagin may still make several leaps over the ship, picking off defenders to carry back as food. This hit-and-run assault continues until 2 flying fierce take half damage or 2 riders are slain.

If the sky scourge knight is defeated, there is a 10 percent x the current round of combat chance that the raiders are demoralized and the attack breaks down. If this happens, all sahuagin and their allies break off combat and retreat.

Scaling the Encounter

This encounter presents a well-planned sahuagin raid with an average number of attackers and, as such, is suitable as a 14th-to 16th-level encounter. However, not every raid is this well strategized, nor has this many attackers. Of course, some raiders are even better prepared or have even more man/fish power than is presented here.

If you want to use this encounter for a lower-level group of PCs, merely lower the number of raiders or their allies. Reducing the encounter down to one flying fierce, one mounted sky scourge raider, and his patrol of six sahuagin makes the encounter suitable for parties as low as 5th or 6th level.

On the other hand, by doubling the amount of sky scourge raiders, with appropriate flying fierce mounts, adding ten more sahuagin warriors, and making the sharks Large, this encounter could easily be raised to a challenge for PCs of levels 18 to 20.

Whether added to, subtracted from, or left alone, the encounter should leave the PCs with the same message. On the savage seas, not even the skies are safe.



Devil's Breath

BY MATT SPRENGELER • ILLUSTRATED BY GREY THORNBERRY

Encounter Level: 10

Setting: At sea

Summary: A ghost ship appears, its devil-possessed crew howling for release as they bear down on the characters' vessel. Can the PCs end this nightmare voyage before it claims their lives?

This adventure is intended as a spooky interlude, and should be played for effect and atmosphere. The creaky *Wylde Nept* contrasts with the dead silence of her crew, and the unnatural wind surrounding them sounds like dozens of souls moaning in horror. Although they committed grave crimes in life, the *Wylde Nept's* crew has paid its due, but the players may end up deciding whether to release them from the spectral ship.

Background

Ghost ships are a staple of sailor mythology. To see one is dreadful, and to approach one or even cross its wake is a sign that death is at hand. These ships are believed to be crewed by the damned — pirates and mutineers condemned to haunt the seven seas until they have paid for their crimes. Such was the fate of the *Wylde Nept* and her crew. Once normal mariners, they staged a desperate mutiny against a harsh captain and found themselves outlaws. From there, they descended into piracy and infamy despite the efforts of their new captain, Westan — a fate they couldn't escape even in death.

For the last 100 years the *Wylde Nept* has prowled the waters as a ghost ship, devils at the helm, driving mortal sailors to madness and ships to ruin with the terror of her presence. Now the term of penance for the ship's crew is ended and they can be released from their hateful unlife, but the fiends who enforce their punishment aren't willing to relinquish the crew's souls. Coincidentally or not, the awful wind that drives them has brought them into contact with the PCs' ship this very evening.

Dead in the Water

The party is aboard a ship that sits motionless in the ocean under the stars. The wind failed at sunset, and the spirits of the crew are failing as well. To sit waiting for the wind is a nerve-racking business, and the superstitious murmurs of the crew don't help. When a huge flock of gulls comes screeching out of the west, the captain mutters darkly about these being haunted waters and retreats to his cabin. Shortly thereafter, the lookout shouts in amazement — a ship is heading towards them, coming out of the west under full sail despite the total lack of wind.

This panics the crew, and consequently any NPC passengers. The strange ship is moving quickly across the glass-smooth ocean, and seems to be on a collision course with the PCs' ship. As the sun sets dramatically behind the oncoming vessel, a heavy mist rises from the water, obscuring the intruder before details can be seen. It can be heard, though, with the sound rising as darkness falls. This strange ship has more than its share of creaks

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and groans, as if it's barely holding together, but absolutely no human voices come from it. Not a shout, not a wail, not a song — only an ominous sound like a moan coming from many throats. This pushes the crew from nervous to downright terrified.

 The PCs can attempt a Diplomacy or Charisma check on crew members to find out what troubles them; the crew is considered Unfriendly, as having strangers on board is always unlucky, and the DC is 18. Success here, or a Bardic Knowledge check at DC 20, will reveal that a ship crewed by dead men is said to haunt these waters and that several ships have vanished in this area.

Then the captain emerges, with a face flushed with rum, and demands that the “strangest of

my strange passengers” take action about the “haunted ship.”

As if on cue, a heavy bell tolls dead ahead. The *Wylde Nept* has come into sight.

 If the players don't wait for the *Wylde Nept* to catch up to their ship, movement spells like *flight* and *dimension door* can get them there early, or they could commandeer a dinghy and row across the water to attempt a preemptive boarding.

The encounter will be largely the same if the players do take action early, with events beginning as if the PCs had crossed over the boarding planks (see below). The horde of skeletons will probably impede the characters' mobility, while the osyluths have no trouble moving around or over them.



Skulls and Crossbones

She's a tall ship, the equal of any currently sailing the oceans, and in her day she was likely a thing of beauty. But she's spent her last century captained by fiends and crewed by the dead, and it shows. Even through the mist, the *Wylde Nept* gives off a faint unwholesome glow that illuminates her splintered masts, faded nameplate, and torn sails. However, those sails are swelled with wind despite the still air, and the moaning sound is the devils' breath filling them. It keens like a hundred men in pain, and half-heard pleas for mercy and rest can be heard in its undertones. This is the sound of the souls of the *Wylde Nept's* crew, cursed to propel the ship across the hells and back just as their bodies toil unendingly to keep the craft afloat.

The dim light thrown by the *Wylde Nept's* twisted lanterns is enough to see the shambling skeletal forms of her crew. Once the proud crew of a beautiful ship, and later a band of desperate cutthroats who saw themselves trapped by fate, the men and women of the *Wylde Nept* are now fleshless horrors who prowl the oceans to terrorize mortals. Their captain, a young man named Westan, tried to rein them in from their worst crimes, but when their ship sank in a storm their souls were dragged back from the afterlife to pay for their actions. For the last century, they have been performing a mockery of their previous duties.

It also shows a quartet of 9-foot-tall, gaunt, inhuman creatures with barbed tails and chalky skin is pulled tight over an inhuman bone structure.



Three of the creatures stride across the upper decks snarling curses at the crew in the Infernal tongue.

The fourth and largest is at the wheel on the aft deck (the rear one, for landlubbers), steering with one hand and a ponderous black book in the other.

This pack of osyluths have been placed on the *Wylde Nept* by dark powers in order to keep the crew at their duties and make certain that they suffer for their mortal crimes by forcing them to commit them over and over, denying them their eternal rest. Devils from another plane of existence, they live to cause suffering. They are more than willing to force the crew to commit atrocities past the end of their penance. The *Wylde Nept* sails itself under the direction of the osyluths and is powered by the inner torment of the crew, whose spirits are aware of the terrible things their bodies now do.



These osyluths also know the Common tongue, the better to remind the *Wylde Nept's* crew of their sins.

Although it seems likely to ram the PCs' ship, at the last moment the *Wylde Nept's* rudder creaks into action and the ghost ship passes not 30 feet off the port bow (left side). Everyone sees that their pursuer is an unholy wreck, a ship that should have gone to its grave decades ago, with a fleshless crew sporting rotted nautical garb. All the sailors and any passengers who aren't part of the party flee belowdecks in horror if they don't faint first.

The *Wylde Nept* passes out of sight, the moaning wind ruffling the becalmed ship's sails, then can be heard circling around for another run. This time it pulls alongside and its skeletal crew throws over boarding planks and begins crossing over, cutting down every living thing they find with rusty cutlasses.

If the players have not acted yet, this is the time. They should have no trouble dispatching the skeletons as they cross, but every round the fiend holding the book reads aloud from it in the common tongue, and the skeletons spring

back again. Its three companions shout and hiss as they pace across the three upper decks, but they don't cross the planks.

The four strange creatures are osyluths, a breed of devil, and they have been placed in charge of punishing the *Wylde Nept's* crew for old sins.

 Their *animate dead* ability is augmented when one of them holds this black book, which is the ship's old log.

From its battered pages the creature calls out the names and misdeeds of fallen crewmen — “Jonas Tindrel, you must yet atone for murder on the high seas!” and “Faith Flandrau, you shall do penance for keelhauling!” and so on — and a shattered skeleton rises again at any range as the moaning wind wails in complaint.

About 50 skeletons are present, and they head belowdecks if they can, intending to slaughter everyone and then smash through the hull to sink it. Any NPCs who passed out abovedecks are in danger as well. The only way to stop the assault is to get the logbook from the osyluth captain, which means crossing onto the dead ship's rotten deck.

Captain Westan's Doom

 As the PCs board the ghost ship, a Listen check (DC 23) lets them hear a scream cutting through the howling devil-wind.

Looking up at the source, they see a haggard man lashed to the forward mast 30 feet overhead, just below a crow's nest. This is Captain Westan, former captain of the *Wylde Nept*, who has been forced to hang here for the past century and watch his crew commit endless horrors.

 He can relay the ship's story to anyone who gets near him; this takes a Climb checks with a DC of 20, as the tree-like mast is wet and slippery.

If nobody does, he'll shout pieces of it hoarsely over the wind. Westan can tell them that the *Wylde Nept's* voyage will finally be ended if the logbook can be destroyed — today is the day their penance is fulfilled, so their souls will be free if this happens. After everything he's seen,

New Wondrous Item. Fiendish Logbook

The fiendish logbook can be used at a range of 760 feet to revive fallen skeletons as if by the *animate dead* spell (ignoring the usual caveat that *animate dead* cannot animate fallen skeletons). The user must be an evil outsider or undead character, and must be holding the logbook and read from it to activate the effect — the passage read invariably includes the name that the

fallen skeleton had in life and that person's greatest sin. The book can revive 100 HD of undead at one time. If the book is destroyed, any skeleton animated by it is also destroyed.

Caster Level: 9th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *animate dead*; *Market Price:* 81,000 gp; *Weight:* 1 lb.

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though, he isn't much of a conversationalist. His energy is focused on ending his undying suffering.

The osyluths, meanwhile, are not pleased when mortals set foot on their ship.

 Their *fly* and *teleport without error* abilities make them mobile combatants, and they will use their *fear aura* abilities to drive anyone they can over the rail and into the water.

The osyluth captain will leave his post only if the other three are in trouble; otherwise he

stays at the wheel, calling out the crimes of dead men.

 Recognizing the players as a threat, the fiends will try to kill them or drive them off, attempting to Summon other osyluths if one or more of their number are dispatched.

They have done well for themselves tormenting the crew of this ship, and are unwilling to give up even though the term of penance ended at sundown.

Osyluth (4)

CR 6; SZ L (outsider [evil, lawful]); HD 5d8+10; hp 32; Init +4 (Improved Initiative); Spd 40 ft.; AC 17 (–1 size, +8 natural); Atk melee +9 (1d8+5, bite), melee +4 (1d4+2, 2 claws), melee +4 (3d4+2 and poison, sting); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 10 ft.; SA Fear Aura, Poison, Spell-like Abilities, Summon Baatezu; SQ Acid and Cold Resistance 20, Damage Reduction 10/+1, Darkvision 60 ft., Fire and Poison Immunity, Know Alignment, See in Darkness, SR 22, Telepathy; AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +6; Str 21, Dex 10, Con 15, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 14

Skills: Concentration +8, Hide +3, Listen +11, Move Silently +8, Search +8, Sense Motive +10, Spot +12

Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative

Languages: Infernal, Celestial, Draconian, Common

Baatezu Subtype: Baatezu are immune to fire and poison, their resistances let them ignore the first 20 points of acid and cold damage done to them each round, they

can see perfectly in all darkness (including magical) with their See in Darkness ability, and they can communicate telepathically with any creature within 100 feet that has a language.

Damage Reduction (Su): The creature ignores 10 hit points from most weapons and natural attacks. A +1 weapon or better negates the ability.

Fear Aura (Su): Osyluths can radiate a 5-foot-radius fear aura as a free action. Affected creatures must succeed at a Will save (DC 14) or be affected as though by a *fear* spell cast by a 7th-level sorcerer. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same osyluth's aura for one day. Other baatezu are immune to the aura.

Know Alignment (Su): Osyluths always know the alignment of any creature they look upon.

Outsider: Outsiders have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. Osyluths are proficient with all simple weapons and those

 They snarl at the players in Common and chatter to each other in Infernal, coordinating their attacks. If the players seem to understand Infernal, they will use their Telepathy abilities instead, but they prefer to speak their hellish tongue aloud for its intimidation value.

Whether or not the devils are vanquished, the crew of the *Wylde Nept* is doomed to resume wandering until the record of their crimes has been destroyed.

 As a wondrous item, the logbook receives a save against attacks and

spells that deal damage. Its save bonus is +6. It also has the following stats: Hardness 0, 12 hit points, Strength DC 10 to break.

The osyluths don't have to be eliminated for this to work, but the book must be out of their possession. Players in a hurry can simply set it on fire or throw it into the ocean; it disintegrates rapidly in such cases.

Those who take a moment see that the leather-covered book is caked with brine and the pages are cracked. Captain Westan's spidery penmanship charts the crew's course in life, from their mutiny to their flight from the law, and then into

Osyluth (Continued)

mentioned in their entries, and with martial weapons. A slain outsider cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*, although a *wish* or *miracle* spell can restore it to life.

Poison (Ex): The osyluth's sting attack delivers a potent poison: Fortitude save (DC 14), initial damage 1d6 temporary Strength, secondary damage 2d6 temporary Strength.

Spell Resistance (Ex): To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works against the creature, the spellcaster makes a level check (1d20 + caster level). If the result equals or exceeds 22, the spell works normally, though the creature still gets a saving throw if the spell allows such.

Spell-Like Abilities: Osyluths can use the following spells as if cast by a 7th-level caster. The DC to resist these abilities is 12 + the spell level.

At Will — *animate dead*, *charm person*, *dimensional anchor*, *doom*, *fly*, *invisibility* (self only), *major image*, *suggestion*, *wall of ice*.

An osyluth can also use the following spell as if cast by a 12th-level sorcerer. It can teleport itself plus 50 pounds of objects only.

At Will — *teleport without error*

Note that these osyluths can also use *animate dead* at a range of 760 feet to revive fallen crewmen from the *Wylde Nept*, if holding the *fiendish logbook*.

Summon Baatezu (Sp): Once per day an osyluth can attempt to summon 2d10 lemures with a 50 percent chance of success, or another osyluth with a 35 percent chance of success.

Equipment: The captian of the osyluths has the *fiendish logbook*.

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piracy and evil. His final entry is dated 100 years ago and simply reads, “Our doom is upon us. May the gods forgive our souls.” Westan implores the characters to destroy the book so the crew can be freed of the mortal plane.

If the devils are destroyed but the book is not, the crew mechanically sheathe their swords and return to their duty stations aboard the *Wylde Nept*. Unless the PCs destroy the book, the tattered sails will swell with the moaning wind and the *Wylde Nept* passes into the darkness. If the players destroy the book, any remaining osyluths shriek and vanish instantly, returning to their infernal home as the skeletons fall to pieces where they stand. The devil-wind is finally stilled.

In the sudden silence, a natural wind picks up. As the ghost ship lurches forward, Westan warns the characters to disembark before the ship makes its final crossing. The crew and passengers of the PCs’ ship venture abovedecks cautiously to take advantage of the wind themselves.

As they do, the mist breaks up and the departing *Wylde Nept* slowly turns transparent, finally vanishing as it reaches the edge of sight. Any characters on board when the *Wylde Nept* leaves these mortal seas will find themselves dropped into the briny deep, gaining valuable firsthand knowledge of the rules that govern swimming.

Ⓢ *Skeletal Crew (50)*

CR 1; SZ M (undead); HD 2d12; hp 13; Init +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (+1 Dex, +2 natural); Atk melee +0 (1d6/crit 18–20/x2, cutlass), or melee +0 (1d4, 2 claws); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Immunities, +1 Turn Resistance; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 10, Dex 12, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 11

Skills: None

Feats: Improved Initiative

Immunities (Ex): Skeletons have cold immunity. Because they lack flesh or internal organs, they take only half damage from piercing or slashing weapons.

Turn Resistance (Ex): When resolving a Turn, Rebuke, Command, or Bolster attempt, add +1 to the creature’s Hit Dice total.

Undead: Undead are immune to poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, necromantic effects, and mind-influencing effects. Undead are not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage or drain, or energy drain. They have no Constitution scores and are therefore immune to any effect requiring a Fortitude save (unless it affects objects). Undead have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. Negative energy can heal undead creatures. An undead creature is not at risk of death from massive damage, but when reduced to 0 hit points or less it is immediately destroyed. Undead cannot be *raised*. *Resurrection* can affect them, but generally fails because they’re unwilling to return to life.

Equipment: A rusty cutlass

Ditty Bag

BY CHRIS AYLOTT • ILLUSTRATED BY GREY THORNBERRY

Encounter Level: 9

Setting: A seaport

Summary: After renting a room in a new town, the PCs discover that one of their bags has been confused with that of a sailor in another room. They soon learn that the sailor has been smuggling troll bones, and that two trolls want the bones back!

Background

It's been a long journey in stormy weather. Getting off the ship was a relief, but for the last hour you've been searching for a room in pouring rain. It hasn't been easy — the port is crowded and the inns are full.

Finally, you try a ramshackle house at the very end of Trout Lane. You stamp and shake yourselves as you come in the door, and a sour-looking old innkeeper looks up from the hearth. "I've got nobbut one more room," he says, poking at the fire. "Take it or leave it."

This encounter can be run any time the PCs arrive in a new town. The details of the town aren't important, but it should have plenty of sailors and not enough rooms. The weather should be bad, and the characters should be cold, wet, and hungry. After an hour of squelching through muddy streets with rain running down their necks, even a second-rate inn looks good.

The Singing Salmon

The Singing Salmon has seen better days. It was once a cheerful inn run by Bernard and Isabella Steward, but Isabella died four years ago and Bernard has never recovered. Each day he does what's necessary to get by, and each night he sits drinking in the inn's near-empty pub.

Tonight is a good night for Bernard. He's surly but relatively sober, and the town is so full of sailors that he's almost booked up. In another hour, he'll be busy serving cheap wine and burned sausages to his guests, but right now he's enjoying a moment's quiet and a glass of red.

The front of the Singing Salmon is a long, low barroom. The room is dim — lanterns are hung all around, but none of them have been cleaned recently and they're stained with smoke. The door is stuck and hard to pull open, the ceiling sags. It's not a seedy place, just neglected.

There are six guest rooms in the back of the building. Five are rented out for the week, but the sixth is still available. It's the largest room, big enough for the entire party to stay in. Bernard charges 5 gold pieces per night for it, which is slightly outrageous for the quality of the accommodations. On a night like this, though, who's going to argue?

 If the PCs wish to bargain with Bernard, they may make a Diplomacy check (DC 15) to lower the price to a reasonable 3 gold pieces per night. Bernard bargains listlessly; any character who makes a Sense Motive check (DC 12) will see that



his heart just isn't in the give and take of commerce. He won't go below 3 gp, though — if the PCs push him farther he will simply send them back out into the night.

After taking payment for the night, Bernard tells the characters, “You might as well sit by the fire and warm up a few minutes. Can't have you dripping all over the rushes, I just changed them last week. I'll take your bags to your rooms.” He does just that, waving off any assistance. (If the PCs really want to help, he won't stop them, but he will grab a couple of bags to carry himself.)

Oops

What the PCs don't know is that there is one extra bag. A sailor named Clever Sven took a room about half an hour before the characters arrived, then ducked out to meet a contact. He

left his bag with Bernard, who decided to stop for a glass of wine before hauling the bag to the room. One glass led to another, and Bernard was halfway through the bottle when the characters walked in.

Bernard has mostly forgotten the sailor's bag, which is, in one of those coincidences beloved to game masters and comic playwrights, almost identical to a piece of luggage or saddle pack belonging to one of the PCs. He simply gathers all the bags up and carries them to the player characters' room. Sven's bag ends up in the pile with the rest of the PCs' gear.



Any PC who pays special attention to Bernard while he's doing this, or who helps him with the luggage, may make a Spot check (DC 20) to notice the extra bag.

If someone calls the bag to Bernard's attention, he remembers the sailor and puts what he

thinks is the right bag (actually the near-identical bag belonging to one of the PCs) in the sailor's room. Unless the players open and inspect the bags then and there — in which case you can skip to “So What's in the Bag?” below — the inexorable laws of melodrama ensure that the bags get switched.

After putting the bags away, Bernard returns and fixes a simple supper of bread, fried sausages, stewed peas, and wine. He responds to most questions or comments with “hmp,” occasionally pointing out that “Things t'ain't what they used to be.” Five or six sailors drift downstairs to join the meal, then go out to see the town and spend their pay.

The player characters may wish to join the sailors. If so, there are several lively bars in the neighborhood, but travel fatigue and the pouring rain should encourage an early night. There are warm beds awaiting the PCs' return, and they might not want to go out at all.

Old Bones & Goose-Down Pillows

The misplaced bag becomes obvious whenever the player characters go to their bedroom. If there's an extra bag, they notice it. If Bernard put one bag in the sailor's room, then a PC notices that her bag looks just a little bit “wrong.”

Once a character examines the wrong bag more closely, she finds a few runes stitched into one end. The runes read, simply, “Sven.” Even if there's a character named Sven in the party, it should be obvious that a mistake has been made.

If the characters want to bring in Bernard, he's cleaning up the barroom. He's drunk by now, and even surlier than he was before. He vaguely remembers the sailor named Sven and that the sailor had a bag. Sven hasn't returned, but if the characters want to take Sven's bag to his room and retrieve any misplaced bags of their own, Bernard will oblige. (It will, however, take several minutes to get this idea across to the innkeeper. He's not thinking at all clearly.)

Waiting around for Sven doesn't do any good. He's in an alley not far from the inn, sleeping off a nasty knock to the head, and won't return until morning. The gentlemen who gave him that knock to the head are now in his bedroom, as is detailed below. If the PCs insist on sitting around waiting for Sven, those gentlemen come looking for them.

So What's in the Bag?

Unless the player characters are dangerously incurious, they'll want to know what's in Sven's bag. There are no traps or wards on it, though any character foolish enough to open it without checking for traps probably deserves a good scare. A puff of harmless dust as the bag's flaps are undone should do nicely.

What's inside the bag are bones. Finger bones, vertebrae, a few long bones, all bigger than human-sized. They're dusty, cracked, blackened by fire. They look brittle. They are troll bones, and old ones at that.



Any character may make a Heal check (DC 15) or Knowledge (nature) check (DC 12) to determine that the bones are troll bones. If the results of the check are greater than 20, the character deduces that the bones are probably over a century old.

Any character may make a Spellcraft or Alchemy skill check (DC 10) to realize

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that troll bones are useless as magical ingredients.

Any character may make a Knowledge (geography) check (DC 15) to know the information about troll customs given below.

There's no reason for there to be troll bones in a sailor's ditty bag. They have little value; they're useless for spells and no humanoid collects them. The only people who would have any interest in troll bones are trolls.

It is a little-known fact that trolls worship old trolls. Ancestors are particularly venerated, but trolls are so hardy and live so long that any old troll gains great respect among his kind. The hardiest become shamans, and when a great shaman dies he is ceremonially burned. The bones are given to the next shaman to be cared for and used in divination.

Somehow, Sven the sailor has gotten hold of something that most humanoids have never even seen. How? Where did he get them? And what is he planning to do with them?

The Rest of the Story

Not every tribe of trolls has its own bones — great troll shamans are rare, and the bones are brittle and hard to care for. (Just creating them is difficult, since they have to be burned at just the right temperature for just the right length of time. The slightest mistake results in ashes instead of ceremonial bones.) Those tribes that don't have bones want them, and a smart tribe recently hit on the idea of getting their bones from somewhere else.

The trolls paid a group of adventurers to raid another tribe up the coast and make off with their holy bones. The adventurers paid Clever Sven to carry the bones back to the tribe.

Everything was going swimmingly until a fourth party decided to take over the deal.

That party is Gurgh and Gronk, two trolls who have made a career out of being large and bad-tempered. They helped broker the original deal to get the bones, but now they're getting greedy. Gurgh (the smart one) has convinced Gronk (the big one) that if they take the bones for themselves, they'll be able to command a higher price by soliciting bids from other tribes of trolls. They may even be able to con payment out of several tribes, then flee with the bones and a fortune in treasure.

Gurgh and Gronk have a problem, though. The trolls who ordered the bones are coming to pick them up in the morning. Gurgh and Gronk have to get the bones and hide them away tonight. They've already intercepted Sven, found out where he was staying, and thumped him over the head. Now they're in Sven's room trying to figure out where the bones are.

What Happens Next?

Either the PCs enter Sven's room to return his bag, or the trolls leave Sven's room to find it. One way or another, the PCs and the trolls meet.

Showdown at the Singing Salmon

Most of the rest of this encounter assumes that the PCs meet the trolls in Sven's room. However, any other location in the inn works just as well.

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If the trolls go looking for their bag, they start by going from room to room. The other rooms are currently empty — as mentioned above, the sailors occupying them are out on the town.

There are two rooms between the PCs' room and Sven's room, and the trolls check each of them. The rooms are locked, but the locks are only meant to keep normal humans out. Gronk simply pulls the knob and lock mechanism out of the door.



Each door Gronk opens cracks and splinters with a loud snap. Any PC in the inn may make a Listen check (DC 12) each time to hear the noise and figure out that it's coming from the back hall.

Bernard hears the noises but ignores them unless the PCs call them to his attention. He comes with the party if they ask him to help investigate.

If the PCs are not in their room and they don't investigate the noises the trolls are making, Gurch and Gronk search the PCs' room. They don't check for traps and trigger any the PCs have set.

If the bones are in plain view, the trolls take them and leave through the window. If the bones are hidden (or elsewhere), the trolls search the room. If they find the bones before the PCs investigate, they again take the bones and leave. If they don't find the bones, the trolls check the other three guest rooms and then the front room of the inn.

Gronk

2nd-Level Troll Fighter

CR 7; SZ L (giant); HD 6d8+36 + 2d10+12; hp 86; Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (−1 size, +2 Dex, +7 natural); Atk melee +12 (1d6+7, 2 claws), and melee +7 (1d6+3, bite); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 10 ft.; SA Rend 2d6+10; SQ Darkvision 90 ft., Regeneration 5, Scent; AL CE; SV Fort +14, Ref +5, Will +4; Str 25, Dex 14, Con 23, Int 5, Wis 9, Cha 6

Skills: Climb +8, Jump +8, Listen +5, Spot +5

Feats: Alertness, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Power Attack

Giant: Giants are proficient with all simple weapons and with any weapons listed in their entries. Trolls have Darkvision with a range of 90 feet.

Rend (Ex): If Gronk hits with both claw attacks, he latches on to the opponent's body and tears the flesh. This attack automatically deals an additional 2d6+10 points of damage.

Regeneration (Ex): Fire and acid deal normal damage to a troll. If a troll loses a limb or body part, the lost portion regrows in 3d6 minutes. The creature can reattach the severed member instantly by holding it to the stump.

Scent (Ex): Creatures with Scent can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell, and can pinpoint the source of a scent if it is within 5 feet. They can follow tracks by smell, making a Wisdom check DC 10 + 2 per hour that the trail is cold.

Equipment: A purse with 100 sp and a shiny rock

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If the PCs have hidden the bag, then Gurgh and Gronk each get a Search check, opposed by the Hide check of the PC who hid the bag.

Sven's Room

If the PCs go into Sven's room, they see a 10-foot-wide by 15-foot-long room furnished with a musty bed, a footstool, and a chamber pot.

Two trolls nearly fill the room, stooping under the 8-foot-high ceiling. Behind them, the PCs can see an open window looking out into a rear courtyard. One shutter hangs off a single hinge; Gronk broke it when the trolls squeezed through the window.

Gronk looks like a typical troll. He's large, green, muscular, and wears only a loincloth and a bone necklace. He talks rarely and uses short words slowly. He's not quite sure what

Gurgh

2nd-Level Troll Rogue

CR 7; SZ L (giant); HD 6d8+36 + 2d6+12; hp 82; Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (–1 size, +2 Dex, +7 natural); Atk melee +8 (1d6+4, 2 claws), and melee +3 (1d6+2, bite); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 10 ft.; SA Evasion, Rend 2d6+6, Sneak Attack +1d6; SQ Darkvision 90 ft., Regeneration 5, Scent; AL CE; SV Fort +11, Ref +7, Will +3; Str 19, Dex 14, Con 23, Int 11, Wis 9, Cha 8

Skills: Appraise +2, Bluff +4, Diplomacy +2, Intimidate +2, Listen +5, Spot +5, Search +2, Sense Motive +2

Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative, Iron Will

Evasion (Ex): If exposed to any effect that normally allows Gurgh to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half damage, the troll takes no damage with a successful saving throw. Evasion can only be used if the rogue is wearing light armor or no armor.

Giant: Giants are proficient with all simple weapons and with any weapons listed in their entries. Trolls have Darkvision with a range of 90 feet.

Rend (Ex): If Gurgh hits with both claw attacks, he latches on to the opponent's body and tears the flesh. This attack automatically deals an additional 2d6+6 points of damage.

Regeneration (Ex): Fire and acid deal normal damage to a troll. If a troll loses a limb or body part, the lost portion regrows in 3d6 minutes. The creature can reattach the severed member instantly by holding it to the stump.

Scent (Ex): Creatures with Scent can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell, and can pinpoint the source of a scent if it is within 5 feet. They can follow tracks by smell, making a Wisdom check DC 10 + 2 per hour that the trail is cold.

Sneak Attack: Any time Gurgh's target would be denied a Dexterity bonus to AC (whether the target actually has a Dexterity bonus or not), or when the troll flanks the target, Gurgh's attack deals extra damage. The extra damage is +1d6. Ranged attacks can only count as Sneak Attacks if the target is within 30 feet.

Equipment: 50 gp in small gems and a set of masterwork thieves' tools.

Gurgh's plan is, but he knows he's supposed to keep quiet and look big.

Gurgh is a city slicker troll. He's a genius for his kind, and figured out years ago that it's better to be a big troll in a town than a small troll in a tribe. As trolls go, he's short — just seven feet tall. He has light green skin and yellow eyes. Under his traveling cloak, he is snappily dressed in a ruffled pink shirt and tight purple hose that leave far too little to the imagination. He talks fast and oozes charm (along with a few unsavory body oils).

Gurgh will take the bones by force if he has to, but he doesn't want to cause a ruckus that might attract the city guard. If the PCs have the bones, then he'd much rather get what he wants by trickery. Fortunately, Gurgh has already worked out a pitch that might work, and he launches into his spiel as soon as he encounters the PCs.

"Well hello, hello, hello!" he says. "We're looking for something very important, and we need your help!"

Gurgh's Story

Assuming the players don't attack the trolls on general principle — which is a good idea, but Gurgh will do his best to convince them not to — Gurgh tries to talk the PCs into giving him the troll bones. He asks them if they have seen "a typical sailor's ditty bag, belonging to a shifty lad named Sven." He watches their reactions carefully to learn if they're telling the truth or not.



As usual, any lies and attempts to figure out the truth are handled with opposed Bluff and Sense Motive checks. Any bargaining or dickering is handled with opposed Diplomacy checks.

If the PCs convince him that they do not have the bag, he asks their permission to search the rest of the inn for it, justifying his right to do so with the tale below. If they refuse permission, he tries to bribe them and then to threaten them.

Bernard is willing to accept the bribes and is easily intimidated. However, the PCs can just as easily convince him to stand up to the trolls with their backing. If forced to choose, Bernard casts his lot with the player characters.

Gurgh is nobody's fool, and he knows that while he may be able to defeat the PCs, he will not have time to search the rest of the inn before the town watch arrives. If he's not completely certain the PCs have Sven's bag close to hand, he gives his scheme up and leaves, but he will not remember the party fondly.

If Gurgh is convinced that the party does have the bag, he "explains" why he should have it with this story:

"So you see, here's the deal," he says. "My name is Gurgh, and I am an independent agent working for several fine gentlemen here in the city. I've never forgotten my home tribe, though, and that is where my old friend Gronk here comes in. He's the shaman of the Twisted Staff tribe, and he came to me looking for his ancestral bones."

"You know about troll bones? They're very potent, very important for troll mojo, and a few weeks ago somebody stole Gronk's bones. I did some asking around, you see, and after a couple of days the trail led to this Sven the sailor. He's got my tribe's bones and he's looking to sell them to the highest bidder. We want them back, and Gronk here is prepared to pay a significant finder's fee."

If pressed for more details, Gurgh produces a hastily scrawled "letter of introduction" in Giant that seems to verify his claims, and offers



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a finder's fee of 500 gold pieces. He pays with a faked letter of credit from Lord Ashley, who Gurgh claims is "a good friend of local trolls." Gurgh hopes the PCs are greedy and won't ask questions. If the PCs want more money, he feigns great reluctance but agrees to whatever price they ask.



Any character who succeeds at a Forgery check (DC 15) recognizes the letter of credit as a crude imitation.

Any character who succeeds at a Knowledge (local) check (DC12) has heard of Lord Ashley, who has no reputation for liking trolls. (He doesn't. Gurgh is lying.)

The story is thin at best. The letter of introduction is laughable, and if the trolls' claim were legitimate they wouldn't have to sneak around. However, some parties may let greed get the better of them. If so, the trolls get the bones and the PCs get to be embarrassed when they try to cash in their fraudulent letter of credit.

Other parties may refuse the trolls outright or delay them to check their story. That's when Gurgh and Gronk try to take the bones by force. Their goal is to get the bones and escape, but they don't mind knocking a few player characters through the walls along the way.

The fight that follows should cause maximum destruction of property. The floors are weak, the walls are thin, and there's plenty of breakable furniture and old decorations to smash. When two trolls mix it up with a party of player characters, it shouldn't be hard to bring the whole house down. This should be a mostly comic fight — get into the spirit of the things, avoid killing any PCs, and encourage the players to cut loose with their wackiest spells and abilities.

The town watch arrives just as the fight ends. By then, Gurgh and Gronk should have escaped (preferably without the bones) or been captured. Hopefully they haven't been killed,

but if they are they won't be missed. Once any fires or spells are put out, the town watch will clean up the mess and thank the PCs for stopping these "dangerous criminals."

The inn should be devastated. Surprisingly, Bernard doesn't mind a bit. In fact, he looks happy for the first time in years. He thanks the characters, telling them, "I needed this. I needed a change. Now I can do something with my life again."

The Return of Sven

Sven staggers back to the inn at dawn and explains the true story behind the bones. If the bones survived, he is profusely thankful. If not, he shrugs their loss off as a bit of bad luck. "The trolls will be sad," he says, "but these things do happen. They'll understand."

(Sven is an optimist. The trolls may understand — eventually — if the bones are stolen or destroyed, but convincing them will probably require the assistance of the town watch. It's up to the PCs whether they want to stick around and deal with this as a follow-up encounter.)

As far as the town is concerned, Sven is the legitimate owner of the bones. The PCs could take the bones — possibly to return them to their original owners — but the law would not side with the party, and the characters would earn the wrath of the local trolls. After facing Gurgh and Gronk, the prospect of angering an entire tribe should be unappealing. The best course of action is to let Sven deliver his goods.

The real leaders of the Twisted Staff tribe arrive after breakfast. Sven delivers the bones if he can, then introduces the PCs and tells the trolls of the party's efforts in keeping the bones safe. The trolls grunt in appreciation, pay Sven for his troubles, and present the PCs with a gift before departing for home: 100 gp and a handful of shiny river stones.

[illegible]

BY MICHAEL BURNS • ILLUSTRATED BY CHAD SERGESKETTER

Encounter Level: 2

Setting: A forest road

Summary: The PCs attempt to break into a vault protected by a “heavily” trapped and multi-locked door.

Background

While travelling along a road, not far from the nearest town or city, the characters pass a small, wooden sign. Red letters on a black background, it reads simply: “Are you worthy of the challenge?” Minutes later, they pass another similarly colored sign: “The test awaits!” Below the writing is a red arrow pointing to a small dirt trail that branches from the main road and leads off through the wilderness.

Following the Signs

The trail, which seems relatively well-tended considering its location, weaves about a quarter of a mile through the trees to a 20-foot-wide clearing at the bottom of a steep hill. Nailed to a tree near the clearing's entrance is a plaque that says: "Proceed at your own risk! The owners of this property will accept no responsibility for injuries or damages incurred by those that pass this point." As if to drive the point home, a small skull and crossbones follows the warning.

Set into the sheer rock wall at the base of the hill is an ornate iron door. Though unprotected from the elements, it seems to be in good condition and is covered with elaborate carvings of mythical and natural beasts. It gives the impression of having been here a long time, although the engravings haven't been worn down in the least by the elements. Even a lengthy examination of the door's surface reveals not a trace of rust. Centered in the door and protruding a few inches is the likeness of a fierce wolf's head. The handle for the door, a straight iron bar, is grasped between the wolf's teeth and cannot be turned.

 The first character to come within ten feet of the door triggers a *glyph of warding* and its *cause fear* spell.

When (and if) the characters inspect the door more closely, they see that it has three locks: one in the upper left corner of the door, one in the center just to the side of the wolf's head, and one in the bottom right corner.

 Detecting the locks requires a successful Search check (DC 20). The locks must be picked with Open Lock checks in the following order: bottom (DC 30), top (DC 30), center (DC 32).

If a lock is opened out of order, all the locks reset as soon as the next lock is attempted and the character must begin the process again. The traps, described below, will not reset after being sprung or disarmed. Damaging or removing the hinges doesn't work, as the locking mechanism consists of steel bolts that extend into the door frame on either side. All attempts to force the door fail, for reasons that will soon become apparent.



 The first (bottom) lock contains a needle trap (Search DC 21, Disarm Device DC 25). It is not poisoned and will do no damage other than a painful sting to the character who fails the Disarm Device check or attempts to open the lock without disarming it.

(The PCs, of course, won't know that this trap isn't poisoned; the needle has been deliberately dyed with a harmless brown liquid to appear deadlier than it actually is.)

 When the second (top) lock is successfully picked, a *magic mouth* spell is triggered (Search DC 27 for rogues only, Disable Device DC 27).

If this trap is triggered, the mouth of one of the engravings on the door — a pixie with long, flowing hair — becomes animated and screams in a shrill voice: “Intruders! Intruders at the south gate! Guardians awaken!” The cry will then be repeated, this time in Draconic.

Successfully opening the second lock also arms a gas trap. It's located in the nostrils of the wolf head and is not discernible until armed.

 If not disarmed (Search DC 23, Disarm Device 20) prior to the lock pick attempt on the third lock, or if the Disarm Device check is unsuccessful, a foul-smelling greenish smoke sprays from the wolf's nostrils into the face of the PC making the attempt. As was the case with the needle trap, the smoke is relatively harmless;

it will, however, cause nausea for 2d6 minutes, preventing the affected character from doing anything requiring concentration while the effect lasts.

(Note: the trap will only be armed if the locks have been opened in the proper sequence until this point.)



When the third (center) lock is defeated, the mechanical jaws of the wolf snap open. This triggers a *programmed image*: behind the door, the PCs hear the roar of some massive creature and hot, black smoke slips through the cracks at the top, bottom, and sides of the door. No Search or Disable Device check is allowed to prevent this.

The bar, previously inside the wolf's mouth, can now be pulled straight out a few inches and then turned counter-clockwise. This will draw in the bolts that had been protruding from the door into the doorframe.



While not as interesting (or frustrating, depending upon the players' mood), *knock spells* could also be used to open the door. Two spells would be necessary to complete the job, although a single *knock spell* would open the first two locks. The spellcaster must specify exactly which two locks to open first. If the center lock is not the last one to be opened, the locks reset and the spells were wasted. Opening the locks via magic will still arm the gas trap and trigger the *programmed image*.

Success!

Once open, the heavy door swings back on well-oiled hinges ... revealing only the smooth rock face of the hill and a small shelf cut into the stone. Painted on the wall is an advertise-

ment in gold letters on a dark blue background: "You've spent years and spilt precious blood to amass your fortune. If it isn't protected by a vault designed by the Von Durrin brothers, is it really protected at all? Von Durrin Vaults and Security, proudly serving the kingdom's royalty and privileged for over 200 years!"

A small scroll is on the shelf. Written with a graceful hand in silver ink, it says: "Congratulations! You are among the few to have bested the Sentinel, the latest masterpiece in the Von Durrin line. Redundant locks, needle and gas treacheries (with a selection of over 20 poisons), and the finest enchanted warning systems are all standard features on the Sentinel. Please present this scroll at your nearest Von Durrin shop for a complimentary meal and a demonstration of our entire line of vaults and options!"

If the characters decide to give up before the door is opened, they pass a sign a short distance past the place where the small trail departed from the main road. It says: "Were you not up to the challenge? Have no shame! Von Durrin doors are meant to be opened by only one person ... the owner! For a complete demonstration of our vaults, suitable for even a king's fortune, visit your nearest Von Durrin Vaults and Security shop. Proudly serving the kingdom's royalty and privileged for over 200 years!"

Variations

This "test" could also be used as an adventure hook for a longer session. Instead of the Von Durrin advertisement, the name and contact information for an NPC looking for competent adventurers could be given. The NPC is using the door to weed out those unsuitable for his task.



Figurehead

BY KEITH BAKER WITH LEE MOYER

ILLUSTRATED BY CHAD SERGESKETTER

Encounter Level: 7 or 12

Setting: At sea

Summary: The party discovers that their ship is the prison of a mermaid queen — and her kin have come in search of vengeance.

Background

She was a beautiful ship — she would have seemed more fitting in the service of a king than in the company of this band of weary sailors and former freebooters. The mahogany deck was freshly polished, the railing shimmered in the sun, and the sails were almost blindingly white. And then there was the figurehead — a stunningly beautiful mermaid. The dark wood used on the image was flawless; I examined it more closely, but couldn't find the slightest sign of wear or weather damage. Studying the figure I noticed that she was depicted as being chained to the bow, her arms spread-eagled against the side of the ship and links of chain wrapped about her waist. But her most striking feature was her expression — pure despair, perfectly captured by the artist's hand. As I gazed into her eyes, a wave crashed up against the bow; water splashed against the face of the mermaid, and as it dripped down it seemed that torrents of tears were flowing down her cheeks.

A few tales can be heard in any seaside tavern when the ale starts to flow. One of these is the story of Andre and the mermaid. Andre Corban was a privateer who sailed the seas in search of gold and glory. But his greatest achievement was winning the heart of the mer-

maid queen Solange. Some say that Solange took her heart from her chest and gave it to Corban. Others say she commanded the wind to carry his voice to her, so that she could come to his aid whenever he was in danger. With the mermaid's help, Andre's career flourished; he explored forgotten waters and fought those who sought to spread tyranny across the sea. But nothing lasts forever, and one day Captain Corban's ship failed to return to port. Some claim that Corban chose to join his queen beneath the waves. But most believe that Andre met his match on the water, and that he shares his ocean bed with worms. They say that Solange still mourns for her lost love; when the storm winds howl against the hull of a ship, the sailors call it "Solange's Tears."

As sea tales go, there is a surprising amount of truth to this one. Solange did not pull her heart from her chest, but she did give Captain Corban a magical pearl that allowed him to touch her mind and her spirit. When a treacherous crewman learned of this talisman, he murdered the captain and used the pearl to imprison the mermaid. The erstwhile queen of the sea was transformed into wood and bound to the bow of her lover's ship. Since then she has been forced to use her powers in the service of the murderer, protecting the vessel and ensuring good winds and fair weather. For years, the new captain was careful to avoid the waters of Solange's kingdom; but it has been over a decade since Corban was killed, and the murderer has finally let down his guard and returned to his home port. But the merfolk have not forgotten, and they intend to rescue their tortured queen ...

In "Figurehead," the party is caught in the resolution of this tale. This can happen any time



that the adventurers are crossing a body of water large enough to support merfolk. As long as the party doesn't have a reason to travel on a specific ship, they end up on the *Queen of Tears*.

The Queen of Tears

The *Queen of Tears* can be adapted to fit the needs of the story. She could be a merchant galley or a lighter sailing ship. Whatever the design, she has one prominent feature. On the bow, a figurehead in the shape of a mermaid gazes out to sea; this spread-eagled figure is amazingly lifelike and seems poised to leap off of the ship.



Anyone who makes a Spot check (DC 25) notices that the mermaid seems bound to the ship; there are manacles around her wrists, and a heavy chain is wrapped around her waist. These restraints are wood — part of the figurehead — and are easily overlooked. The mermaid's face is beautiful, but filled with sorrow; if rain or wind blows water against her face, it looks like tears are running down her cheeks. If a character specifically says that he is examining the figurehead, the Difficulty of the check drops to 15.

A bard who makes a Bardic Lore check (DC 20) will recognize the carving as an image of the mermaid queen Solange, and recall the story given at the start of the encounter.

Should a character cast *detect magic*, the entire ship has a faint Universal aura that is strongest around the figurehead.

Anyone who studies the ship also notices that every surface of the ship is flawless — there are no signs of wear or weather damage. If a char-

Captain Hroth Leones

3rd-Level Human Expert (Sailor)

CR 2; SZ M (humanoid); HD 3d6+3; hp 13; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex); Atk melee +3 (1d6+1/crit 18-20/x2, rapier), missile +3 (1d4+1, thrown dagger); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL NE; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +3; Str 12, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 11, Cha 13

Skills: Appraise +5, Balance +5, Bluff +5, Climb +6, Intuit Direction +6, Knowledge (geography) +5, Listen +5, Profession (sailor) +8, Swimming +7, Use Rope +6

Feats: Dodge, Expertise, Skill Focus (Profession — sailor)



Dover

3rd-Level Halfling Rogue/

2nd-Level Expert (Sailor)

CR 4; SZ S (humanoid); HD 3d6+3 + 2d6+2; hp 23; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 20 ft.; AC 14 (+3 Dex, +1 size); Atk melee +5 (1d4+1/crit 19-20/x2, +1 dagger of returning), ranged +8 (1d4+1, +1 dagger of returning); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Evasion, Sneak Attack +2d6, Uncanny Dodge; AL NE; SV Fort +2, Ref +7, Will +3; Str 10, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 16, Wis 9, Cha 14

Skills: Appraise +11, Balance +11, Bluff +9, Climb +9, Hide +10, Listen +7, Move Silently +10, Profession (quartermaster) +4, Sense Motive +6, Swim +8, Use Magic Device +9, Use Rope +7

Feats: Dodge, Expertise

Evasion (Ex): If exposed to any effect that normally allows a character to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half

damage, Dover takes no damage with a successful saving throw. Evasion can only be used if the rogue is wearing light armor or no armor.

Halfling Traits (Ex): Halflings receive a +2 morale bonus to saving throws against fear.

Sneak Attack: Any time Dover's target would be denied a Dexterity bonus to AC (whether the target actually has a Dexterity bonus or not), or when the rogue flanks the target, the rogue's attack deals extra damage. The extra damage is +2d6. Ranged attacks can only count as Sneak Attacks if the target is within 30 feet.

Uncanny Dodge: Dover retains any Dexterity bonus to AC if caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker.

Equipment: *Solange's pearl*, +1 dagger of returning

acter scratches the wood the blemish will vanish within thirty minutes. Over the course of a long voyage, characters notice that the ship remains spotless without any effort on the part of the crew.

The captain of the *Queen of Tears* is a middle-aged human named Hroth Leones. Leones is a foppish gentleman. His shoulder-length dark hair is oiled and scented, his dark mustache is carefully waxed, and his salt-and-pepper beard is perfectly groomed. He is always dressed as if for a dinner party, with extravagant outfits of black silk and velvet, and ruffled sleeves and collars. His fingers are covered with rings, and the hilts of his matching rapier and dagger are encrusted with rubies.

 Anyone who gets into a long conversation with the captain can make a Sense Motive check (DC 20). If successful, the character will get a sense of the fear and insecurity lurking beneath the captain's genial demeanor. Leones is a ruthless opportunist, capable of cruelty and brutality when a situation calls for it.

Most of the time, however, the party should deal with the quartermaster, a red-haired halfling named Dover. The quartermaster seems harmless — but he is the one who actually killed Andre Corban and imprisoned Solange. Dover controls the ship through the mermaid queen's pearl — and as a result, he controls the captain.

Dover has an exuberant personality and an infectious smile, as well as a preference for bright clothing. He seems to be about thirty years old, slightly younger than the rest of the crew; halflings live longer than humans, but the fact of the matter is that *Solange's pearl* has slowed his aging.

 Dover has embedded the pearl in the socket of his left eye; anyone who speaks to him for at least a minute and

makes a Spot Check (DC 15) will notice that he has a lazy eye, and *detect magic* will reveal a strong Enchantment aura in the area of his left eye.

Dover will do whatever he can to ingratiate himself with strangers, trying to draw stories out of the passengers. He enjoys the finer things in life, and an observant person may notice that he has rather expensive tastes for a quartermaster, often eating better than the captain; if questioned, he will explain that his luck with dice has helped to finance his lifestyle.

 He has a silver tongue, but if a character spends an evening in his company she can make a Sense Motive check (DC 20); if successful, she senses that his warm demeanor hides a cold heart, and that he is sizing the party up to see if they have anything to offer.

The rest of the crew are old sailors — weathered and worn by years upon the water, this dingy bunch of sea dogs are a strange match for the beautiful ship. Most of them will ignore the passengers, responding to any attempts at interaction with grunts or shrugs.

Voices on the Wind

It's a perfect day as the *Queen of Tears* cuts through the waters with the wind behind it. Then, without warning, the wind suddenly dies. The currents fade and a weak whirlpool forms, slowly spinning the ship about. On deck of the ship, there is a momentary breeze; it carries words in a soft, strangely accented voice: "Free her or perish."

In the water, five merfolk are slowly circling the ship, including one of Solange's nephews. The prince Osanda has used his magic to calm the

wind and water. He is furious at the land-dwellers who have kidnapped his aunt, but he is a merman of peace and will try to resolve the situation without violence. Between his powers and the ship's proximity to the kingdom of the striped merfolk, he is able to negate Dover's control over the mermaid queen — he cannot free Solange, but he can keep the halfling from using her powers.

The other four merfolk are noble guards; the voice on the wind belongs to one of these guards. The merfolk have formed a wide circle around the ship and are swimming around it, approximately 600 feet away. They do not know how to free their queen, so they are simply holding the ship in place, hoping that the land-dwellers will turn on each other.

 With a successful Spot check (DC 15), a character will catch a glimpse of dark-skinned figure swimming out in the water; there is only a flash of motion before the figure disappears beneath the waves.

If the character makes the check by at least five points, he will recognize the swimmer as a merman. If none of the characters makes the check, one of the sailors shouts "I see something moving out there!"

A FEW WORDS FROM THE CAPTAIN

On the *Queen of Tears*, the crew clamors about the captain, demanding that he do something. Leones orders the crew to return to their posts and turns to the adventurers. "Can't you do something about this? I'll refund your fee!"

New Minor Artifact: Solange's Pearl

The mermaid queen Solange gave this pearl as a gift to her lover. Using the pearl, Captain Corban could contact the queen; Solange would use her powers over the sea to aid him in his voyages. After he murdered Corban, the halfling Dover paid a powerful wizard to corrupt the pearl so that it could be used to imprison and control the queen.

Solange's pearl has a number of powers. It binds the mermaid to the *Queen of Tears* and holds her in her wooden state. The bearer of the pearl can sense the state of the local weather and water as if using *commune with nature*; this can be performed at will, but requires ten minutes of meditation to take effect. The bearer can also spend ten minutes to cast *control weather*; the effects of the spell are centered on the *Queen of Tears*. Finally, the bearer can cast *control water* or *control winds* at will; the maximum range is 1,200 feet from the *Queen of Tears*. All of these effects are treated as if cast by a 20th-level bard.

The presence of the mermaid queen keeps the *Queen of Tears* in perfect condition and allows the ship to travel 2 miles per hour over the usual speed of a ship of its size. Every thirty minutes, any damage to the ship is instantly repaired, as if through use of the spell *make whole*. The bearer of the pearl shares in these benefits; every thirty minutes, he is cured as if by a *heal* spell.

Dover has embedded the pearl in his left eye socket. He has had it enchanted with a glamour that makes it look like an eye, although it does not perfectly match the movements of his true eye. If it is removed from his head, this glamour will be broken and it will resume its true form. While the pearl is a minor artifact, it is actually quite fragile and can be broken with a minimal amount of force.

Caster Level: 20th; *Weight:* —

You've got to save us!" He denies any knowledge of the reasons behind this mystical attack. Dover is conspicuous in his absence.



A successful Sense Motive check (DC 15) reveals that Leones is lying.

Detect thoughts will turn up Leones' thought: "I knew we shouldn't have come back here — damn that halfling!"

Intimidation (DC 15) can force a confession out of the captain; with proper justification, Diplomacy will also work (DC 16). Spells like *zone of truth* and *discern lies* are also effective; if placed under magical scrutiny, Leones will break down and confess.

If the party fails to push the captain, one of the sailors — a burly half-orc named Bjorn — fills this role. "This is all your fault!" he bellows. "It was you who murdered Captain Corban! I should have killed you years ago, but now is as good a time as any!"

Whether he is interrogated by the adventurers or threatened by Bjorn, Leones' resolve collapses. "It wasn't my fault!" he moans. "Dover ... it was Dover. He found a way to imprison the mermaid. He killed Andre and let me take over as captain ... he never was much of a sailor. I hated Andre, I did, and a man has no place mingling with those fish ... but I swear, I didn't kill him!"



New Creature. Striped Merfolk

Striped merfolk have an affinity for magic and elemental forces. Their torsos are dark-skinned, with stripes of darker color running along arms and back. They are graceful and beautiful creatures, with voices that carry great distances across the waves. As a race they are insular and avoid contact with humanoids, whom they consider to be violent and dangerous. They abhor physical violence, and study the paths of magic and music instead of the art of war. If forced into battle they will defend themselves with their claws, but they prefer to use subterfuge and magic to avoid combat.

Striped merfolk possess claws; in melee combat, they can make two claw attacks at full attack value, striking for 1d4 points of damage. A merman warrior does not receive a second attack if he fights with a weapon. The noble guards are the elite forces of the merfolk kingdom. Swift messengers and silent scouts, they steer sailors

away from the waters of the merfolk with illusion and enchantment.

Like other merfolk, striped merfolk speak Aquan and Common.

All striped merfolk possess the following special qualities:

Low-Light Vision (Ex): Striped merfolk can see twice as far as humans in starlight, moonlight, torchlight, ocean depths, and similar conditions of poor illumination. They retain the ability to distinguish color and detail under these conditions.

Ocean Bond (Ex): A striped merfolk spellcaster can obtain *control water* as a 3rd-level spell, *commune with nature* or *control winds* as 4th-level spells, and *control weather* as a 5th-level spell. *Control weather*, *control winds*, and *commune with nature* can only affect bodies of water or areas directly adjacent to them.

EN ROUTE II: BY LAND OR BY SEA

If pressed for details, Leones explains how the old captain was cavorting with a mermaid witch. He knows that Dover stole a pearl from Andre and used it to turn the mermaid to wood, and that ever since Dover has been able to control the weather. But he doesn't know where the halfling keeps the pearl.

On hearing that Dover was responsible for the death of his captain, Bjorn is furious. He leads the way to Dover's quarters and helps to smash down the door. Dover is standing inside with

his teeth gritted; blood is streaming from his left eye. Dover flings his dagger at Bjorn, dropping the sailor with his first attack. "They'll never take me!" he cries. He leaps into battle.



Dover's statistics are provided on page 48. At the beginning of the fourth round of this combat scene, Dover's left eye bursts out of its socket; if he is not dead already, he dies at this moment. The "eye" falls to the floor; slowly its appearance changes, revealing a bloody pearl.

Striped Merfolk Noble Guard (4)

6th-Level Merfolk Bard

CR 6; SZ M (humanoid); HD 6d6+6; hp 26; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 5 ft, swim 50 ft; AC 12 (+2 Dex); Atk melee +4/+4 (1d4, claws); Face 5 ft. X 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft; SA Spells; SQ Bardic Music, Bardic Knowledge; AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +7, Will +5; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 15

Skills: Intuit Direction +6, Hide +10, Listen +7, Move Silently +10, Perform +11, Spot +7

Feats: Dodge, Endurance, Spell Focus (Enchantment)

Bardic Music: Six times per day, a noble guard may use the Inspire Courage, Countersong, Fascinate, Inspire Competence, or Suggestion abilities. A deaf bard suffers a 20% chance to fail with bardic music. If the bard fails, the attempt still counts against the daily limit.

Bardic Knowledge: A noble guard may make a special Bardic Knowledge check with a +7 bonus to see whether he knows some relevant information about local notable people, legendary items, or noteworthy places. The DC is 10 for common knowledge, 20 for uncommon, 25 for obscure, and 30 for extremely obscure knowledge.

Spells: (3/4/3) A noble guard knows the following spells. The DC to resist his spells is 12 + the spell level, or 14 + the spell level for Enchantments.

0 level — *daze, detect magic, light mage hand, mending, prestidigitation*

1st level — *charm person, cure light wounds, message, sleep*

2nd level — *minor image, suggestion, whispering wind*

To free the mermaid queen the adventurers must crush the pearl or throw it to the merfolk. If they try to talk to the merfolk, a voice will return on the wind: "Free her from the pearl." The merfolk do not trust the humans and will not get close to the ship unless they have to; they are content to hold it in place and wait for the sailors to submit.

SHOOTING FISH

It is always possible that a party will side with the captain and fight the merfolk. This will be

difficult, since the merfolk stay far away from the ship and hide below the water; however, statistics are provided in case combat occurs.



In straight-out combat, the merfolk party has a combined Encounter Level of 12. If you expect that your players will refuse to look into the mystery and will instead progress directly to combat with the merfolk, bear this higher EL in mind.

Osanda, Prince of Wind and Water

10th-Level Merfolk Cleric

CR 10; SZ M (humanoid); HD 10d8+10; hp 56; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 5 ft., swim 50 ft.; AC 16 (+2 Dex, +3 *amulet of natural armor*); Atk melee +8/+8/+3 (1d4+1, claws); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Spells, Turn Elementals, Turn Undead; SQ Spontaneous Casting; AL N; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +10; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 14

Skills: Concentration +5, Diplomacy +9, Heal +5, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (religion) +9, Sense Motive +9, Spellcraft +5

Feats: Craft Wondrous Item, Dodge, Endurance, Leadership

Spells: (6/5+1/5+1/4+1/3+1/2+1) The striped merfolk worship the forces of wind and water; Osanda has chosen the Air and Water domains. These domains allow him to Turn or Destroy earth and fire creatures as a good cleric Turns undead, and to Rebuke or Command air and water creatures as an evil cleric Rebukes undead, each five times per day. The DC to resist his spells is 14 + the spell level. Osanda has the following spells already

prepared; domain spells are marked with an asterisk.

0 level — *create water*, *detect magic*, *guidance* (x2), *light*, *resistance*

1st level — *bless*, *bless water*, *divine favor*, *obscuring mist**, *sanctuary*, *shield of faith*

2nd level — *enthrall*, *fog cloud**, *hold person*, *shield other*, *silence*, *zone of truth*

3rd level — *control water* (x2), *dispel magic*, *water breathing**, *wind wall*

4th level — *air walk**, *commune with nature*, *control winds* (x2)

5th level — *control weather* (x2), *ice storm**

Spontaneous Casting: Osanda may lose any prepared spell to cast a *cure* spell of the same level.

Turn Elementals: Osanda can attempt to Turn fire or earth elementals or Rebuke water or air elementals. He may perform either action five times per day.

Turn Undead: Osanda may attempt to Turn undead five times per day.

Equipment: *amulet of natural armor* +3, *ring of minor elemental resistance* (fire)

The merfolk are handicapped by the fact that they cannot risk damaging the ship. If they are engaged in combat, they will try to enchant aggressive characters; if this fails, they will threaten the ship by increasing the power of the whirlpool — but this is a bluff, and they will back down before the danger becomes serious. If the party holds off the merfolk and outlasts the duration of Osanda's spells — approximately four hours — the merfolk will reluctantly retreat and the *Queen of Tears* can resume its voyage.

As the sailors run about, doing their best to hold the ship together, a figure breaks the surface of the water. It is Solange, the mermaid from the figurehead. She is holding a crystal sphere in one hand. "You have my thanks," she says, in a musical voice. "Take this ... perhaps you may use it to visit us in the future, so we may thank you properly." She tosses the sphere to one of the characters, and then disappears beneath the waves.

Restoration & Reward

If the pearl is destroyed or thrown into the ocean, the figurehead will come to life. The wooden chains and manacles shatter, and Solange dives into the water and disappears. The moment she leaves the ship it begins to decay. Beams began to rot and sails fall into tatters. Within moments the ship is a shadow of its former self. It is just barely sailable — although the last leg of the journey will go more slowly, as the *Queen of Tears* crawls to its final destination.

Aftermath

One way or another, the party will reach their destination. If the characters defended the ship, the sailors will be friendly towards them; otherwise the remainder of the trip will be strained. If the characters fought the merfolk, they have made an enemy that can haunt them in future water crossings; if they saved the queen, they might receive help from the striped merfolk in days to come.

🌀 *New Minor Artifact: Beacon of the Sea*

This amber-colored sphere is about the size of an orange. The bearer of the sphere gains *water breathing* as long as the sphere is in his possession, and his swimming speed is increased by 10 feet. More importantly, the sphere sends a signal to all striped merfolk within one mile, identifying the bearer as an ally of the royal family. This will result in good weather

any time the character travels through striped merfolk territory, as the merfolk will cast *control weather* and *control water* on their behalf. Any striped merfolk encounter by the bearer will have an initial attitude of Helpful.

Caster Level: 20th; *Weight:* 1 lb.



⊗ *Swedgewick "Swedgie" Sweet-tooth*

2nd-Level Halfling Expert (Merchant)

CR1; SZ S (humanoid); HD 2d6–4; hp 4 (currently 3); Init +1 (Dex); Speed 20 ft.; AC 12 (+1 Dex, +1 size); Atk melee +2 (1d6, x2, club); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL N; SV Fort –1, Ref +2, Will +4; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 7, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 13

Skills: Appraise +9, Bluff +6, Diplomacy +6, Gather Information +6, Handle Animal +6, Innuendo +5, Profession (merchant) +5, Sense Motive +5

Feats: Skill Focus (Appraise)

Halfling Traits (Ex): Halflings receive a +2 morale bonus to saving throws against fear.

Equipment: Robes, club, key to lock box, several gaudy trinkets worth 180 gp total, and a metal lockbox (Open DC 20) with 140 gp

They are all I have. I'll reward you for each rabbit capt ..." As the halfling reaches his hand to brush back his curly waves of hair, he pulls back in shock, peering at his hand, now soaked with the crimson stain of blood. His eyes gloss over and he passes out.

Meanwhile, numerous two-foot-long rabbits, some yellow, some brown, one even purple, meander from the wreckage. Each rabbit sports a spiraled black horn on its forehead. All seem confused, but soon begin to hop in random directions, scattering into the woods.

The PCs have just run into an enterprising young merchant named Swedgewick Sweettooth, or just "Swedgie" to his friends. Swedgie is a portly halfling with curly blonde hair and large blue eyes. He wears brightly colored robes and numerous gaudy finger rings and baubles around his neck.

Swedgie is outgoing and friendly, and treats strangers as long-time associates. When excited, he almost squeals and forgets words when speaking. He has a weakness for sweets and often nibbles on a cookie or sweet cake. He's

squeamish when it comes to the sight of blood and tends to whine incessantly about his latest boo-boo until someone wastes a healing spell on him.

Swedgie deals in unusual, hard-to-find merchandise in the hope of striking it rich on a passing fad. A few weeks ago, Swedgie was selling triple-nibbed feather pens that wrote in three shades of ink using the same pen, and last week it was wooden bead-lined saddles for a massaging ride. This week, it's blink bunnies and Swedgie is certain they'll be the latest craze among the nobility. Just one problem: his entire inventory is hopping away!



The magical rabbits were being held in an *antimagic cage* (see description below), which suppresses their *blink* ability. The crash dislodged the mithral pin from the lock and 1d3 rabbits exit the cage each round until all eight are free.

After the rabbits exit the cage, they spend three rounds hopping about randomly. Once they get their bearings, they head for the underbrush of the woods.

New Magic Item: Antimagic Cage

This cage is 8 feet long by 4 feet wide by 4 feet high, and is composed of darkwood bars (Hardness 5, 10 hp). The darkwood bars are masterwork quality, so the cage only weighs half its normal weight. Mithral screws and clasps secure the bars and one end has a hinged door. An enchanted, rune-engraved pin fits snugly into a slot to lock the door.

When the mithral pin is slid into place, an *antimagic field* covers the interior of the cage. As per the spell description, this suppresses any spell or spell-like effect in the cage, although it does not dispel it. An

invisible object is visible within the cage, but disappears when removed.

The cage was originally commissioned by a bounty hunter to transport wizards and magical creatures. However, the bounty hunter met an untimely demise and the wizard who created the item unloaded it on the first buyer (Swedgie) to at least break even on his expenses.

Caster level: 11th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *antimagic field*; *Market value:* 132,000 gp; *Weight:* 30 lbs.

It requires a successful Spot check (DC 15) to notice the mithral pin for the cage on the grass. By replacing the pin, the PCs can reactivate the antimagic effects of the cage.

The rabbits' only intent is escape. They attack if threatened, but would prefer to elude the PCs instead. It's up to the PCs to subdue or capture the rabbits, although certain nature-orientated PCs might decide to actually aid the rabbits in their escape. This is fine, but has its own problems. See "To Make Matters Worse" and "To Make Matters Even More Worse" below for complications, and "Concluding the Adventure" for repercussions of the PCs' actions.

Capturing a Blink Bunny

Capturing a blink bunny without harming it (or becoming impaled on its horn) is not as easy as it sounds. The PCs have several options, some of which are discussed below. However, the GM should be prepared to reward creativity and make adjustments on the fly.



A PC can attempt to grab a rabbit with his bare hands. This requires a successful grapple attack, which provokes an attack of opportunity. A PC gets a -4 to hit on this roll due to the target's Small size. If successful, the PC must continue to make an

Blink Bunnies (12)

CR1/2; SZ S (magical beast); HD 1d10; 5 hp each; Init +4 (Dex); Speed 30 ft.; AC 17 (+4 Dex, +1 size, +2 natural); Atk melee +6 (1d6-2, horn), or melee +2 (1d3-2, bite); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Blink, Darkvision 60 ft., Low-light Vision, Scent, SR 12; AL N; SV Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +1; Str 7, Dex 18, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 12

Skills: Escape Artist +8, Hide +12, Listen +5, Spot +5

Feats: Weapon Finesse (horn)

Blink bunnies are two-foot-long rabbits with soft fur. Typical coloration includes white, yellow, purple, and light gray. An adult blink bunny has a single black spiral horn on its head that's about a foot long.

Blink (Su): Once per every five rounds, a blink bunny can *blink*, as per the spell, as a 6th-level sorcerer. The *blink* is invoked as a free action and lasts for one round. The destination is a random location, five feet

away. When a rabbit blinks away from a PC, roll a 1d8 and consult the table below. The rabbit appears five feet away from its former position in the direction rolled.

d8	New Location
1	In Front
2	Left Front
3	Left
4	Left Rear
5	Behind
6	Right Rear
7	Right
8	Right Front

Magical Beast: Magical beasts have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet and Low-light Vision.

Scent (Ex): Creatures with Scent can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell, and can pinpoint the source of a scent if it is within 5 feet. They can follow tracks by smell, making a Wisdom check DC 10 + 2 per hour that the trail is cold.

opposed grapple roll each round to hold onto the rabbit. If possible, a blink bunny attempts to teleport away (see the chart below for random destinations), if it can't escape by wriggling.

Situated on the wagon are a pair of dip nets that have seven-foot-long handles. A successful Spot check (DC 15) reveals these nets in the wreckage. If PCs paid attention, they can recall that the nets were mentioned during the crash scene. To use a dip net, a successful grapple attempt is necessary. Since the net has reach, this action does not provoke an attack of opportunity. Once successful, no further grapple attempts are needed to hold the rabbit as it gets entangled in the net. If possible, a blink bunny attempts to teleport out of the net, though.

A PC can attempt to scoop a blink bunny into a large empty sack. This requires a successful melee touch attack at a -4 penalty due to the awkwardness of using a sack in this manner. A rabbit trapped in a sack is held fast, but attempts to teleport as soon as possible, or use its horn attack to cut through the sack. The sack has 0 Hardness and takes 3 hit points of damage before a rabbit-sized hole appears.

Certain spells could also be very useful in corralling the spooked rabbits. *Animal friendship*, *sleep*, *color spray*, or *web* all are effective, but keep in mind the blink bunnies' inherent Spell Resistance.

Chasing Down the Horses

After breaking free of the wagon, the horses continue to flee for several minutes before finally settling down for a drink at a small stream.



If a PC approaches, the horses spook again for a few more rounds using a run move, unless the PC uses an Animal Empathy check (DC 15), or a spell such as *animal friendship* or *sleep*, to calm them down. Otherwise, a PC needs to wildly grab the reins, requiring a successful melee touch attack. This provokes an attack of opportunity, so PCs should be wary of a stray kick — a +2 melee attack with 1d4+1 points of damage. Use the standard D20 System statistics for these horses.

Goblins (6)

CR1/4; SZ S (humanoid); HD 1d8; 5 hp each; Init +1 (Dex); Speed 30 ft.; AC 15 (+1 Dex, +1 size, +3 studded leather); Atk melee +1 (1d6-1, crit 19-20/x2, short-sword), or ranged +3 (1d6-1, crit x2, javelin); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Darkvision 60 ft.; AL NE; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 8, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 8.

Skills: Hide +6, Listen +3, Move Silently +4, Spot +3

Feats: Alertness

Darkvision (Ex): Goblins can see with no light source at all, to a range of 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white only.

Equipment: Shortsword, studded leather armor, javelin, leather sack, 3d6 sp each

To Make Matters Worse

A small band of six goblins have recently left their tribe and are searching the area for easy prey in the form of travelers. They hope to make a foul reputation for themselves and form their own tribe. They came across Swedgie and his wagon about a mile back and attempted to waylay the merchant. The ensuing “battle” resulted in the horses being spooked and the goblins making a vain effort to follow. The goblins have seen the blink bunnies and guess (correctly) that they are valuable and think (incorrectly) that they are perhaps tasty as well!



The goblins arrive five rounds after the PCs begin rounding up the rabbits. The goblins prefer to use the forest as

cover and require a successful Spot check vs. the goblins’ Hide rolls to locate. They observe the PCs for a few rounds before they begin chasing after rabbits that have escaped into the forest. They attempt to subdue them with clubs or scoop them into sacks. One even has a large cooking pot that he tries to drop over a rabbit. They prefer to attack the small furry rabbits as opposed to well-armed PCs.

To Make Matters Even Worse

All of the activity in this section of the forest has attracted the attention of a local predator. A dire weasel that lairs in a nearby hollow log investigates the commotion. It deduces the rab-

Dire Weasel

CR2; SZ M (animal); HD 3d8; hp 18; Init +4 (Dex); Speed 40 ft.; AC 16 (+4 Dex, +2 natural); Atk melee +6 (1d6+3, bite); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Attach, Blood Drain; SQ Low-light Vision, Scent; AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +7, Will +4; Str 14, Dex 19, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 11

Skills: Hide +9, Move Silently +10, Spot +5

Feats: Weapon Finesse (bite)

Animal: All animals have Low-light Vision.

Attach (Ex): A dire weasel that hits becomes attached and begins to drain blood on the next round. While attached, it loses its Dex bonus to AC.

Blood Drain (Ex): A dire weasel drains 2d4 points of temporary Constitution each round.

Scent (Ex): Creatures with Scent can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell, and can pinpoint the source of a scent if it is within 5 feet. They can follow tracks by smell, making a Wisdom check DC 10 + 2 per hour that the trail is cold.

bits are easy prey and decides to stalk a few for dinner.



The dire weasel stalks the rabbits for a few rounds, hiding in the underbrush. A PC needs to make a successful Spot check vs. the dire weasel's Hide roll to spot the predator. Otherwise, the dire weasel attacks from cover while a PC chases after a rabbit, probably surprising the PC unless a successful Listen check vs. the dire weasel's Move Silently roll is made.

The weasel attempts to chase down a rabbit, but will confront any PC preventing it from obtaining a snack. If reduced to 7 or fewer hit points, the dire weasel flees into the woods.

Rewards

True to his word, Swedgie rewards the PCs with 10 gp per rabbit recovered. A blink bunny would make a suitable familiar for a wizard PC. If the PCs recover all the rabbits, Swedgie can give a PC a rabbit as payment instead. Each goblin carries 3d6 sp, and one has a blue topaz worth 75 gp hidden in his left boot. The dire weasel's pelt is worth 1,000 gp, less 50 gp for each point of damage inflicted with a slashing weapon.



For each blink bunny safely recovered, the PCs should receive a CR 1/2 experience award. Each goblin defeated or driven off is worth 1/4 CR experience, and the dire weasel is worth

CR 2 if the PCs prevent it from capturing a rabbit. If the PCs assist Swedgie above and beyond the call of duty (for example, casting a *cure* spell on him or retrieving the horses), they should receive another CR 1 or CR 2 bonus reward.

Concluding the Adventure

If the PCs recover all of the rabbits, Swedgie thanks them profusely and soon leaves to make his fortune. The PCs are free to continue on their way.

However, if at least one breeding pair escapes (especially if the PCs aided their escape), an interesting complication results. Blink bunnies are not indigenous to this forest, but it can support a thriving population of the magical beasts. In a few months, they have decimated the local vegetation, displaced other small herbivores, and disrupted the local ecosystem. A druid could enlist the PCs aid in capturing and relocating the rabbits and their offspring. If the PCs let the rabbits escape in the first place, the druid could hold them accountable for their actions. Swedgie would be more than happy to rat on the PCs or a little bird could inform the druid of what happened. Or the druid could simply hire the PCs to gather up the rabbits.



Hellcows

BY KEITH BAKER • ILLUSTRATED BY CHAD SERGESKETTER

Encounter Level: 5

Setting: Countryside or village

Summary: The party encounters a farmer whose cattle have been possessed by dangerous spirits. But the herd is the farmer's livelihood — can they save the cows without killing them?

Background

Dafyd blinked and rubbed his eyes. The valley below was filled with cattle — behaving in a most uncharacteristic manner. Cows were chasing farmers around the fields, kicking in the doors of buildings, and apparently writing curses in the dirt with their hooves. As Dafyd watched, one cow snorted flames out of its nostrils and set fire to a bale of hay. “What do you make of this?” he asked Rain.

The druid shrugged. “There’s going to be a hot time in the old town tonight.”

“Hellcows” can occur any time the party is passing through a farming village or rural environment. The major challenge of the encounter is to find a way to drive the spirits out of the cows without killing them. If the farmer Owen and his family are the only people at risk, the party is more likely to accede to his request to save the cows; if the demon cattle are threatening an entire village, adventurers may be less willing to take the time to find a peaceful solution.

Farmer Owen's Folly

While wandering through the woods, a cattle farmer named Glyn Owen came upon the ruins of an ancient tomb. The crypt was almost completely disintegrated; the only thing that was intact was a single sarcophagus. Seeing as how the tomb was on his land, Owen felt perfectly justified in putting it to some sort of good use; he got one of his boys to help him pry the lid off the sarcophagus and carry it back to his farm, where he set it up as a new water trough for his cows. Needless to say, this was an extremely stupid idea.

Some cultures believe that all evil comes from the influence of demons — that the heart of an evil man is a gateway to hell, and that over the course of his life tiny demons grow within him. When he dies these spirits may live on; they can possess the minds of simple creatures, and seek to spread fear and misery wherever they go. Once created, an inner demon cannot be easily destroyed. But a holy priest can bind the demon to a specific location when its “parent” is buried; if this prison is sealed with sacred symbols, the demon will be contained. Should the seals ever be removed, the demon can escape into another host body. If the seal is restored, the demon will be drawn back to its prison.

The crypt, of course, held several inner demons, and while this ancient evil is too weak to manifest itself physically, it managed to enter into the cows when they drank from the “trough.” Within hours, Owen's herd of cattle had been possessed by the power from the tomb. It's a good thing a party of adventurers was just down the road ...



Enter the Hellcow

As the party is traveling down a rustic road, they see a few clouds of smoke on the horizon.

 Anyone who makes a Listen check (DC 18) will hear human voices in the distance — two or three people, crying out in fear or pain. If he makes the check by at least two points, the character will notice the lowing of cattle in the background.

Going around a bend or over a hill, the party comes upon a scene of pure chaos. Twelve cows are lumbering around — chasing children and farmhands, munching on burning hay, kicking down fences and gates, smashing windows, and writing insults in the dirt with their hooves. As the adventurers take in the scene, they may notice a cow setting fire to a

shrub or outbuilding with a burst of flames from its nostrils. Clearly something ain't right with these critters.



Have the characters make Spot checks. Anyone who hits a DC of at least 15 will notice the fire-breathing cows; anyone who makes an 18 or better also will notice the cow writing in the dirt (an act that implies that the creatures are intelligent).

As the party considers this situation, a gangly man in peasant garb comes running towards them. "Help! You've got to help me!" he calls out in a reedy voice. This is Glyn Owen — a human in his late thirties, a little over six feet in height, whose blonde hair and beard have mostly been singed off by abyssal cow flames. "The cows have gone mad ... mad! Please, if you can calm them, I can reward you well. Just don't kill them ... they're all we've got!"

Depending on the personality of the party, they may pause to grill the farmer for more information — or they may simply charge into the fray.

Owen's Story

Sensible characters will want more information about the situation before charging in. Greedy ones will want to know more about the nature of

🐉 *New Creature: Demonic Hellcow (9)*

CR 2; SZ L (Outsider [Chaotic, Evil]); HD 3d8+9; hp 22; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (−1 size, +2 natural); Atk melee +7 (1d6+6, gore); Face 5 ft. x 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Animate Leather, Breath Weapon; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Unclean Spirit; AL CE; SV Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +4, Str 20, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 10

Skills: Intimidate +6, Listen +7, Search +4, Spot +7

Feats: Power Attack, Improved Bull Rush

A demonic hellcow is a normal cow that has been possessed by an inner demon. Most of the time, it looks just like a normal cow; however, if it is attempting to intimidate its enemies, its eyes will glow with red light and flames will lick out of its mouth and nostrils. Hellcows do not speak, but they understand Abyssal and Common. They can write with their hooves, and are fond of spelling bad words in the dirt.

Animate Leather (Su): A demonic hellcow can imbue leather objects with a semblance of life. This is identical to the spell *animate object* as if cast by a 12th-level cleric, except that the hellcow *can* target objects worn by other creatures. If someone is wearing animated leather armor, he must make a Strength check (DC 17 for leather or studded leather, DC 20 for hide armor) at the start of each round; if he fails the check, his armor immobilizes him for the duration of the round. An animated belt will automatically inflict 1d6 points of

subdual damage each round until it is removed; this requires a Strength check (DC 17). A hellcow can perform this action at will, but it can only have one object animated at any given time.

Breath Weapon (Ex): Once every 1d4 rounds, a demonic hellcow can snort a burst of flame out of its nostrils in addition to its normal attack. This is a touch attack with a range of five feet. If successful, it inflicts 1d6 points of fire damage. Flammable materials such as cloth, paper, parchment, and thin wood will burn if struck by the flames. See the standard D20 System rules for catching on fire.

Outsider: Outsiders have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. Hellcows are not proficient with weapons. A slain outsider cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*, although a *wish* or *miracle* spell can restore it to life.

Unclean Spirit (Ex): While not undead, the demon within a hellcow can be influenced by a cleric or paladin. Those who channel positive energy can attempt to Turn or Destroy a demonic hellcow, while negative-aligned clerics can Rebuke or Control the creature. For these purposes, a hellcow is considered to be an undead creature with 3 HD. If a demonic hellcow is “destroyed,” the inner demon is driven from the creature and it becomes a completely normal cow. Likewise, if a hellcow is targeted with *holy word*, *dismissal*, *dispel evil*, or a similar effect, it is only the possessing spirit that is harmed; the cow simply returns to its natural state.

the reward. Owen picked up a few odds and ends from the tomb, and these are what he has to offer.



The main thing that Owen has is “a book with magic writings and such in it.” This is a wizard’s spellbook containing the spells *chill touch*, *ghoul touch*, *protection from good*, and *spectral hand*. He also has a *potion of protection from good*. Feel free to replace or alter these to fit the needs of the campaign. Needless to say, Owen has no idea what the powers of these items are.

If questioned about the cows, Owen says “I can’t explain it. I’ve never had trouble with ‘em before. But this afternoon we was having our meal and we heard this racket out in the field. They was all gathered about the trough tusslin’ with one another ... and then they went chargin’ about the field. You can see the sort of antics they’re up to. Bessy, she set fire to the granary with flames from ‘er nose, although I think Garth has that quieted for now. But I don’t know what’s goin’ t’ happen if we can’t get ‘em calmed down. I was just goin’ for help ... thank the gods I found you!”

Owen honestly hasn’t connected the behavior of the cows with the new water trough. He doesn’t really understand what the “trough” actually is. A curious character might think to ask where Owen found his magic book, or otherwise press for details about any recent strange occurrences. In this case, Owen will talk about finding the tomb.

“Well, last night the old trough finally gave way. I was thinkin’ I’d need to go and get my brother, Shon Owen, to make me a new one, but then I remembered that rock patch up by the northern line. Some time back I almost broke my foot on a piece of stone, and when I looked, it was this big slab, all curved and embedded in the dirt. So I got to thinking that this stone might make a fine water trough, and I got Garth to go up with me and drag it back. I found the book in this hollow beneath it, and I don’t read magic writings, so

you’re welcome to it if you can help me get the cows back in order.”

If the party wants to see the trough, Owen points to a spot in the field where two cows are standing by a stone slab filled with water.

If the characters don’t press Owen for more details, there are a few ways that they may come up with this information on their own:



If a character with Knowledge (religion) makes a successful check (DC 20), he will recognize the scene as the sign of a demonic infestation — something that usually occurs when trapped spirits are released from some form of imprisonment. Given the time-frame, the spirits would have to have been released quite recently. Further, the possessed creatures usually need to have some form of direct physical contact with the spirits — often the demons must actually ride along with infected food or drink.

A bard can get this same information by making a Bardic Knowledge check (DC 24). She will have heard stories of other similar events — the bishop who dug a well and released trapped spirits into his herd of goats, for example.

Herdin Hellcows

There are nine hellcows scattered about the area. The possessed cows are quite dangerous, but they are not particularly interested in hurting people; they want to spread fear and terror, and enjoy using their hooves and mystical powers to inflict property damage. If the party chooses to engage the cattle in combat, the first few hellcows will fight alone and will not fight to the death; if a cow immobilizes a character in leather armor, for example, it will wander off, not even bothering to move in for the kill. However, after a few cattle are killed, the hellcows will become more cautious and begin to band together.



🌀 *New Creature: Inner Demon (9)*

CR 1; SZ D (Outsider [Chaotic, Evil, Incorporeal]); HD 3d8–3; hp 10; Init +7 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 0 ft.; AC 11 (+4 size, +4 Dex); Atk none; Face 1 ft. x 1 ft.; Reach 1 ft.; SA Animal Possession; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Imprisoned, Unclean Spirit; AL CE; SV Fort +3, Ref +7, Will +4, Str —, Dex 18, Con —, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 10

Skills: Intimidate +6, Listen +7, Search +4, Spot +7

Feats: Improved Initiative

An inner demon is more interested in causing fear and suffering than death; it prefers spreading terror to actually killing people. Inner demons have little patience for group tactics; even when there is a group of the demons, they tend to respond to threats as individuals. In this adventure, the demons are actually bound to the sarcophagus itself; if they are destroyed they return to the sarcophagus lid.

An inner demon appears as a tiny serpent formed out of smoke; it is generally embedded within the object that serves as its prison, and as such cannot be seen. It understands Abyssal and Common, but cannot speak.

Animal Possession (Ex): An inner demon cannot leave its prison. However, it can take control of any animal with an Intelligence of 2 or less that comes into contact with its prison (provided any seals have been removed). Once it has attached itself to a creature, the demon can only leave if its host dies or if the seals covering its prison are restored. If the host is slain, the inner demon is forced back to its prison. A creature possessed by an inner demon uses the demon's mental statistics, gains access to its skills, and receives the

Breath Weapon ability described under the demonic hellcow. The Animate Leather ability is unique to the demonic hellcow; other types of possessed creatures might have their own unique powers.

Incorporeal Subtype: Incorporeal creatures can only be harmed by other incorporeal creatures, by +1 or better weapons, or by spells, spell-like effects, or supernatural effects. They are immune to all non-magical attack forms, and cannot be tripped or grappled by corporeal creatures. They cannot fall or suffer falling damage. An incorporeal creature has a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. The physical attacks of incorporeal creatures ignore material armor. Incorporeal creatures are not burned by normal fires, affected by natural cold, or harmed by mundane acids. They do not leave footprints, have no scent, make no noise, and can pass through solid objects at will.

Outsider: Outsiders have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. Inner demons are not proficient with weapons. A slain outsider cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*, although a *wish* or *miracle* spell can restore it to life.

Imprisoned (Ex): An inner demon cannot be permanently destroyed by taking damage. If it is “killed,” it is instead forced back into its prison.

Unclean Spirit (Ex): While it is not undead, an inner demon can be affected by paladins or clerics who channel positive energy. Turning has no effect unless the demon is in a host body. If it is Destroyed, it is forced back into its prison.

If he sees the party kill one of his cows, Glyn Owen will rush over in a panic. “Isn’t there somethin’ else you can do?” he will cry. “That was ol’ Bess, the best creamer o’ the herd! You’ll ruin me if you can’t just get ‘em calmed!”



There are a number of ways to deal with the hellish herd without resorting to deadly force:

- A cleric with enough Turning power can force the spirits out of the cattle.
- *Holy word, dismissal, or banishment* will force the spirits out of the cows. *Planar binding* or *magic circle against chaos/evil* can be used to prevent the hellcows from causing trouble while the players deal with the water trough.
- The cows are more interested in frightening people than hurting them. As a result, a character who pretends to be afraid and flees from a cow can easily get the beast to chase him for as long as he feels like running. Dedicated parties might try to create pit traps or to lure the cows into corrals; this is certainly possible, but the cows aren’t *that* stupid. Use their Spot skills to see if they notice traps. This is only a temporary solution, but can help to keep cows contained.

The best way to save the cattle is to drag the sarcophagus lid back to the tomb. The “water trough” has a palpable aura of evil to any who is remotely sensitive to such things, even without the use of magic. A pair of hellcows are stationed by the trough, and will try to chase off anyone who gets close to it. The trough itself weighs 200 pounds, once the water has been dumped out.

Once the party has obtained the trough, it’s not difficult to reach the ruins of the tomb; either Glyn Owen or his eldest son Garth can guide the party to the area. There is a large, shallow hole in the ground where the lid was pulled from the

earth. Within the cavity, there are the shattered remnants of ancient bones mixed together with dirt and shreds of rotted cloth; Owen has already recovered everything of interest from the coffin. If the lid is placed on the coffin, there is a long, drawn-out cry — the sound of whispered curses as the evil spirits are drawn back into their prison.

Conclusion & Reward

When the party returns to the farm, the cattle have settled down and are complacently munching on grass or chewing cud. A few of them may be in unusual locations as a result of their recent rampage; the farmers may have trouble cajoling cows down the stairs in the farmhouse. Owen will thank the party; his degree of gratitude will depend on how many of the cattle were saved. If at least some of the cows are still alive, he will give them the spellbook and the potion that he found in the coffin.

If the entire herd was killed, Owen will be furious; he will order the party to get off his land. Of course, if the hellcows were terrorizing a village, the other inhabitants may be a more grateful to the adventurers.



The experience reward for this encounter will depend on the party’s approach to the situation. If the characters simply fought the cows, the EL should be based on the number of cows that they killed (CR 2 apiece, but consider that the cows will not fight as a group). If they went to some effort to avoid killing the cows and to get the lid back on the coffin, they should receive a story award equal to 1/2 the average level of the party. If they manage to complete the encounter without killing a single cow, the reward should be increased to be equal to the average level of the party.

Lure of the Serpent

BY JUSTIN BACON • ILLUSTRATED BY CHAD SERGESKETTER

Encounter Level: 10

Setting: At sea

Summary: The PCs' ship comes across the dead body of a sea serpent. While the PCs attempt to retrieve the treasure that legend claims lays in the belly of the serpent, the carcass draws the attention of a kraken from the deep. The PCs must save the ship, or be drawn down into the deep.

Background

Just as the action of this encounter begins, a sea serpent is killed by a kraken — one of the most vicious and intelligent behemoths of the seas. Before the kraken can feast, though, it senses an approaching ship. Rather than dragging the carcass into the depths where it can feed in peace, the kraken quickly devises a more cunning plan: it uses the serpent's body as a lure to draw the ship in so that it can be destroyed.

The Serpent

The PCs are onboard a ship far at sea, on their way from one port to another. Suddenly a great commotion starts up near the prow of the ship. Sailors begin running by, headed for the railing to get a look at whatever's causing the uproar.

PCs who go up to take a look for themselves see the long, stretched-out body of a sea serpent — dead and floating upon the waves.

 PCs who make a Spot check (DC 15) notice that the body of the sea serpent is marked in several places by large, suckered blemishes or welts. In several other places, long, raking claw marks also mar the body.

A Gather Information or Bardic Knowledge check (DC 10) reveals the following information: it seems that there's a legend that sea serpents carry great treasures within their bellies. Finding the body of a serpent like this is like falling into a mithril mine. All of the sailors onboard believe they've just struck riches, and insist that the ship stop.

Assuming that the PCs aren't in command, the captain agrees to halt the ship's progress, guiding the ship in alongside the serpent's carcass.

Treasure Hunt

Getting into the belly of the sea serpent is easier said than done. Its hide is thick and tough, even in death. And it's far too large to haul onboard, even in part, so whatever the PCs do will need to be done at sea.

 In general, PCs will probably try one of three general courses of action:

HACKING AWAY

If the PCs decide to cut the serpent open, treat the body as an inanimate object with a Hardness of 10 and an AC of 0. Once the PCs have done 200 hit points of damage to the serpent, the Hardness drops to 5 (they've cut past the scales) — but they still



need to do another 500 hit points of damage before they reach the stomach.

PCs may attempt to use damaging spells to speed this process up, but most of these should be considered ineffective. A *fireball*, for example, won't blast holes in the sea serpent — it will just scorch the corpse.

DOWN THE HATCH

Instead of cutting a hole, the PCs may try to use the one that's already available to them by flying or crawling down the serpent's gullet. To do so, the characters must first pry open the serpent's mouth. This requires a Strength check (DC 20). Once inside, the characters face a number of difficulties:

Movement: Characters walking down the gullet must wade through water up to their waist. Characters flying down the gullet have to deal with the tight, twisting passage. Either way, movement is reduced to half and running is impossible. Characters who attempt to move quickly must make a Dexterity check (DC 12) or fall. The distance from mouth to stomach is 300 feet.

Sphincters: The serpent's four powerful sphincters contracted in death, essentially sealing the passage. Characters will need to hack through these in sequence as they proceed down the serpent's throat. Each has a Hardness of 3, 40 hit points, and an AC of 0.

Contaminated Air: As characters move down the gullet, the air becomes increasingly thick and inhospitable. 200 feet into the serpent (100 feet from the stomach), the air finally reaches a dangerous quality. Characters must make a Fortitude save (DC 12) each round. A character who fails a save begins suffocating, and will likely need to retreat back up the serpent's gullet to breathable air; use the standard D20 System rules for suffocation.

Acid: The stomach acid of the sea serpent is a potent corrosive. Flying characters can easily avoid it, but those walking will need to wade through it. Characters take 1d6 points of damage per round, unless they are totally submerged (which will happen if they fall prone in the stomach), in which case they take 10d6 points of damage each round.

The Kraken: Characters inside the sea serpent when the kraken attacks are potentially in a lot of trouble. The violent, thrashing movement of the kraken in combat causes the sea serpent's body to move wildly; characters must make a Dexterity check (DC 20) each round or fall prone. Furthermore, if the kraken is forced to withdraw it attempts to take the sea serpent's body with it — which means that characters inside may be drawn to their dooms.

THE MAGICAL APPROACH

There are several spells that the PCs might try to use to gain access to the treasure. As noted above, most damage-causing spells will actually prove ineffectual at getting the PCs where they want to go, but other spells may prove useful:

Arcane Eye, Scrying: PCs might use these spells to see whether or not there really is a treasure. (There is, see below.) *Arcane eye* is very effective, because it can travel down the gullet, squeeze past the sphincters, and reach the stomach. *Scrying* is less effective, because the PCs probably aren't familiar with the sea serpent's stomach.

Reduce, Shrink Item: The PCs may think to use these spells to shrink the sea serpent, making it easier to chop through to the stomach. The sea serpent's Hardness remains unaffected, but the number of hit points the PCs need to do in damage will be proportionally reduced. Unfortunately, when the kraken sees its meal shrink to some

fraction of its former size it will become enraged and attack immediately.

Blink, Ethereal Jaunt: These spells are a quick way to reach the stomach by way of the Ethereal Plane.

Dimension Door, Teleport: Of these spells, *dimension door* is the best bet. *Teleport*, on the other hand, carries a serious chance of landing in a similar location (and the place most similar to a dead sea serpent's stomach is a *live* sea serpent's stomach).

Summon Monster, Unseen Servant: These, and several other spells, can be used to summon servants that can go and retrieve the treasure for the PCs.

Levitate, Passwall: Thinking to use these spells is pretty clever. Unfortunately, they don't work that way (as per their spell descriptions).

The Kraken

Whatever the PCs do, they're on a time limit. Five minutes after the ship comes to a relative stop with the sea serpent, the other shoe drops.



The kraken comes up directly under the ship and serpent. Despite its size, the characters have basically no chance of seeing it coming unless they're underwater. Unfortunately, if a character is underwater the kraken will probably spot him — in which case it uses its Ink Cloud ability from 100 feet away to obliterate his sight one round before it reaches the ship (using its Jet ability).

If the kraken does need to use its Ink Cloud ability, characters on the surface can make a Spot check (DC 20) to notice the sudden

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darkening of the water. (Remember to apply the -5 penalty to characters who have their attention on something else ... such as slicing up a sea serpent.)

The kraken will reach up with its tentacles and grab the ship, leaving its two raked tentacles free to attack anyone who causes problems.



The kraken will attempt to crush the ship. Treat the ship as having a Hardness of 10, an AC of 0, and 300 hit points. If the ship is reduced below 100 hit points it has become badly damaged and

begins taking on water — it will automatically suffer 1 hit point of damage per minute until temporary repairs can be made (requiring 15 minutes of work and an appropriate Craft check at DC 20). If the ship drops below 0 hit points, it sinks. (Note: This means that if the ship is reduced to fewer than 15 hit points, it's a lost cause.)

Characters may attempt to attack the tentacles in order to make them let go of the ship. Resolve such attacks against the kraken normally. If the characters can do 25 hit points



Kraken

CR 12; SZ G (magical beast [aquatic]); HD 20d10+180; hp 290; Init +4 (Improved Initiative); Swim 20 ft.; AC 20 (-4 size, +14 natural); Atk melee +28 (2d8+12, 19-20/x2, 2 tentacle rakes), melee +23 (1d6+6, 19-20/x2, 6 arms), melee +23 (4d6+6, bite); Face 20 ft. x 40 ft.; Reach 10 ft. (100 ft. with tentacle); SA Constrict 2d8+12 or 1d6+6, Improved Grab; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Ink Cloud, Jet, Low-light Vision, Spell-like Abilities; SV Fort +21, Ref +12, Will +13; Str 34, Dex 10, Con 29, Int 21, Wis 20, Cha 10

Skills: Concentration +19, Knowledge (geography) +10, Knowledge (nature) +10, Listen +15, Search +15, Spot +15

Feats: Alertness, Blind-fight, Expertise, Improved Critical (tentacle), Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Iron Will

Languages: Common and Aquan

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the kraken must hit an opponent of up to Huge size with an arm of tentacle attack. If it gets a hold, it can Constrict.

Constrict (Ex): A kraken deals automatic arm or tentacle damage with a successful grapple check against Huge or smaller creatures.

Ink Cloud (Ex): A kraken can emit a cloud of jet-black ink 80 feet high by 80 feet wide by 120 feet long once per minute as a free action. The cloud provides total concealment, which the kraken normally uses to escape a losing fight. Creatures within the cloud suffer the effects of total darkness.

Jet (Ex): A kraken can jet backward once per round as a double move action at a speed of 280 feet.

Magical Beast: Magical beasts have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet and Low-light Vision.

Spell-like Abilities: A kraken can use the following spells as if cast by a 9th-level druid. The DC to resist these abilities is 15 + the spell level.

1/day — *control weather, control winds, dominate animal, resist elements*

of damage to one tentacle, however, the kraken will withdraw the tentacle.

The kraken won't be able to see people on the deck of the ship, but it does have the Blind-Fight feat. If characters enter the water, the kraken will emit its ink cloud and attack the characters from the cover of darkness while continuing to crush the ship.

Also, remember that krakens are highly intelligent — the characters are being attacked by a genius intellect, not a dumb animal.

If the kraken succeeds in sinking the ship, the characters are in serious trouble. The kraken will pull the ship down to the bottom of the ocean, and then return — grabbing one or two characters at a time and dragging them beneath the surface to drown.

 If the kraken is reduced below 100 hit points, or if it's forced to remove all six of its tentacles from the ship, it will grab the body of the sea serpent and retreat into the depths.

At the GM's discretion, the kraken might harbor dreams of revenge, stalking the ship while it licks its wounds and then attacking again at the worst possible moment. If the kraken blames the PCs in particular for its failure, it may return with stealth, perhaps grabbing one particular character from the deck of the ship and then plunging into the depths.

The Treasure

There really is a treasure in the belly of the serpent. Three months ago the creature was swimming nearer to shore, where it swallowed a small ship whole. The ship was actually attempting to smuggle illicit goods. The ship, its occupants, and the goods have long since been digested, but three iron coffers have survived, though badly pitted and scarred by the serpent's acid.



A relatively disgusting Search (DC 12) of the serpent's stomach reveals the coffers, which contain:

- 4,500 pp, 35,000 gp, 12,000 sp
- 12 diamonds (worth 500 gp each)
- 24 rubies (worth 100 gp each)
- 6 adamantine daggers

Note that the PCs will be expected to split this treasure equally with the rest of the crew. If the PCs are traveling by themselves for some reason (or if you suspect that they'll manage to abscond with all of the treasure one way or another), you may want to reduce this treasure to the following:

- 400 pp, 12,000 gp, 7,000 sp
- 4 diamonds (worth 500 gp each)
- 8 rubies (worth 100 gp each)
- 2 adamantine daggers

Message in a Bottle

BY KEITH BAKER ILLUSTRATED BY CHAD SERGESKETTER

Encounter Level: 1

Setting: An inn or tavern

Summary: While staying at an inn, the party receives visions of a murder while drinking a bottle of wine. Can they get to the bottom of the mystery?

Background

Once upon a time, an adventurer named Pedor Mors decided to give up his dangerous lifestyle. Using the wealth he had acquired he opened an inn. He married his childhood sweetheart, Magda, and in time they had a son they named Peden. But one fateful year Magda was struck down by a terrible fever. In need of assistance, Pedor turned to his brother Gregor. A vintner and cook, Gregor was happy to move in and help his brother run the inn.

As years passed, Gregor began to feel more and more attached to the business. But he felt that his brother didn't appreciate his work. Then Pedor began seeing an old friend from his adventuring days — a half-elven woman named Elledreth. Gregor was infuriated that his brother was "mixing his blood with this half-human hag." Eventually, Pedor decided to marry Elledreth; he asked his brother to move out of the inn, saying that he and his new wife could run the business on their own. At that point Gregor snapped. Calmly, he congratulated the couple and agreed to leave; but first he wanted to drink to their health with a special vintage he had been saving. It was indeed a special vintage — a bottle of wine laced with a deadly poison. Pedor and Elledreth died in

agony, and Gregor buried their bodies in the wine cellar. When young Peden returned from the market, Gregor claimed that the boy's father had run off with his "faerie witch" and left Peden behind. For the last year, Gregor has mercilessly browbeaten Peden into submission, warning him that if he doesn't do exactly as Gregor says they faeries will come for him as well.

But Pedor's murder and Gregor's mistreatment of Peden has left restless spirits behind — in more ways than one. Over the course of the year, the ghost of the murdered innkeeper has managed to imbue a barrel of wine with his memories. Now that Gregor has begun to serve this wine, his crime will finally be brought to light ...

Setting the Stage

"Message in a Bottle" can occur any time that a party stops at an inn or tavern, whether they intend to stay for the night or just stop for a meal or drink. This could be a random roadside inn, or it can be a tavern the party has been going to for months. For the purposes of the story, there are two NPCs who need to be present: the innkeeper Gregor and the boy Peden, who scampers around performing an endless array of tasks. If you want to use an established location, replace Gregor with the pre-existing innkeeper; the party has simply never learned his (or her) dark secret, and Peden has been kept busy in the scullery.



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Gregor is a middle-aged human with more fat than muscle, with shoulder-length, curly black hair and an enormous handlebar mustache. He has the practiced charm of someone whose livelihood depends on repeat customers; he specializes in being charming and genial, but when necessary he can put on a fierce display of anger — something he generally saves for his nephew. He is an expert on the subject of wines and owns a small vineyard (which may be some distance from the inn, if you're setting the adventure in a city).

While Gregor is technically evil, he is most concerned with making a comfortable living. He dislikes all non-humans, but is able to cover his bigotry for the sake of business. He's capable of murder and treats his nephew cruelly, but does

not perform shocking acts of evil on a regular basis.



For the purposes of *detect evil*, Gregor has a very faint aura.

A character who makes a successful Sense Motive check (DC 25) will sense that beneath his gruff exterior, Gregor harbors guilty feelings related to Peden.

If someone uses *detect thoughts* and the conversation turns to Peden, Gregor will think: "It's not my fault ... he brought it on himself" or "What sort of mother would that *thing* have been?" Needless to say, this is his attempt to justify his murder of his brother Pedor and the half-elf Elledreth.



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Gregor's temper only shows when he's dealing with his nephew Peden. Gregor is constantly ordering Peden about, and complains about how shiftless and lazy the boy is. "He's lucky I keep him around," he grumbles on a regular basis, despite the fact that Peden works as hard as two or three normal boys.

Peden is a twelve-year-old human boy. He has short, curly black hair and thoughtful brown eyes. He has a family resemblance to Gregor, but if someone specifically asks, there are noticeable differences; his nose is smaller and his eyes are closer together. Peden is filled with restless energy; it is this youthful exuberance that gives him the strength to accomplish all of the chores his uncle lays upon him.



With that said, Gregor treats Peden poorly and doesn't give him enough to

eat; with a few months of a healthy diet Peden's Strength and Constitution scores would increase by one point apiece.

Peden generally avoids speaking to strangers. He is extremely shy, especially around elves and half-elves; he will not speak to women with elvish blood.



A successful Sense Motive check (DC 20) will reveal that Peden is obsessed with some sort of secret shame.

Peden has been traumatized by his father's disappearance; he doesn't know whether to blame elves, his father, or himself. He's hoping that if he works hard enough and keeps the inn running well, his father will come back. He dislikes his uncle, but his uncle didn't leave him for some elf, so his feelings are mixed.

Gregor Mors

2nd-Level Human Expert (Innkeeper)

CR 1; SZ M (humanoid); HD 2d6; hp 9; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (Dex); Atk melee +0 (1d4 subdual, dagger); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL NE; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +2, Str 10, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 13, Wis 9, Cha 14

Skills: Bluff +7, Craft (cook) +6, Craft (vintner) +8, Intimidate +5, Listen +4, Knowledge (wines) +8, Move Silently +6, Pick Pocket +3, Profession (innkeeper) +4

Feats: Skill Focus (Craft — vintner), Skill Focus (Knowledge — wines)

Gregor speaks Common and Elvish, although his Elvish accent is atrocious.



Peden Mors

1st-Level Human Expert (Stableboy)

CR 1/2; SZ M (humanoid); HD 1d6; hp 6; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (Dex); Atk melee -1 (1d3-1 subdual, unarmed strike); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL CG; SV Fort +0, Ref +3, Will +3; Str 9, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 13

Skills: Handle Animal +5, Hide +7, Listen +7, Move Silently +7, Pick Pocket +7, Profession (Innkeeper) +3, Search +3, Spot +7

Feats: Alertness, Dodge

Drunken Visions

Gregor is especially obsequious when dealing with adventurers. He knows the sort of wealth that passes through the hands of these heroes, and hasn't forgotten the fact that his brother's adventures financed the original purchase of the business. When the characters sit down to their meal — whether they're resting for the evening or having a relaxed lunch — he brings them a pitcher of wine. "Please, gracious guests, do me the honor of tasting this fine vintage, prepared from my own humble vineyard."

⊗ A Sense Motive check (DC 20) will reveal that Gregor has no ulterior motives; he is honestly trying to pamper his guests, and of course hopes that they will enjoy the wine and wish for more.

The wine is not poisoned, and does not radiate magic. *Detect undead* will reveal an extremely dim aura in the wine; a gleaner will recognize this aura as having more in common with a revenant than a normal negatively charged spirit (the gleaner is a class specializing in the cultivation of spirits; see Atlas Games' *Occult Lore* for full details on gleaners and revenants).

Assuming the party accepts the gift, determine which characters would be most sensitive to visions from beyond the grave.

A gleaner is an obvious choice for this. Other logical choices would be a paladin (who is sensitive to the injustice that has occurred), a priest, or even a necromancer. Otherwise, try to choose the characters that are most concerned about justice, or who are mostly likely to seek reparations for Peden.

If you wish, the entire party could receive the visions. However, the encounter is more effective if some of the characters find the wine to be completely normal. This accents the fact that there is a supernatural force at work — that it is not simply a hallucinogenic chemical.

The wine is excellent — at least, most of the characters find it to be so. When the sensitive characters taste the wine, it's as if they've swallowed a mouthful of blood. On examination, the liquid is physically wine — but the coppery taste fills the characters' mouths, and they will have to struggle to keep from gagging. If a character spits out the wine, Gregor immediately appears at the table. "Is something wrong with your wine, milady?" He will carefully examine the wine — but nothing appears to be wrong with it, and again, the rest of the party will find it to be of fine quality.

If sensitive characters taste the wine again, it now tastes normal. But within a few moments the characters suffer momentary seizures, during which they experience dreamlike visions. Divide these visions up between the sensitive PCs:

- *Your vision clouds, and you see an image of the kitchen boy, Peden. You have your hand on his shoulder, and he's gazing up at you with an adoring smile. You are filled with love and pride for the boy, and wonder what great things he will accomplish in the years to come.*

If the character asks, his hands are those of a male human, probably in his thirties, callused from regular work and bare of any rings or jewelry. Peden looks a year or two younger than he does today.

- *You are holding hands with a half-elven woman. She's about thirty years old, and has olive skin, wide green eyes, and short, straight black hair; she's dressed in simple brown traveling clothes. As you gaze into*

her eyes, she seems like the most beautiful woman you have ever seen; you open her mouth to ask her to marry you, and the vision fades.

- *You see a large, flat piece of wood — a floorboard, or a wall panel? The image of a chest has been carved into the wood with a knife or similar tool. As you watch, a hand reaches out to touch the chest, but instead of touching the wood, the hand moves forward and through, reaching into the image.*

In this image, the hands are small; those of a child, or perhaps a halfling.

The innkeeper rushes over and inquires after the health of the PCs who have gone into seizures. If they begin to talk about their visions, both he and Peden will perk up and listen; but their reactions will be quite different.



If a character describes the half-elven woman, Peden will shout: “That’s the woman who took my father!” After this outburst, he won’t want to talk, but if cornered, he will say that his father was spending lots of time with her, and that she was an evil woman, and that she stole his father away and left him with Uncle Gregor. Sense Motive, *discern lies*, *zone of truth*, and *detect thoughts* will all register these things to be true, since Peden believes them.

Peden will keep quiet if the wooden image is described, but a Spot check (DC 20) will notice a flinch. If questioned, he claims that he knows nothing about it, using Bluff to conceal the lie; a successful Sense Motive check against Peden’s Bluff roll reveals the fact of the lie, while Diplomacy (DC 20), Intimidate (DC 10), or *detect thoughts* will reveal that he has seen that image on the floor in the corner of his father’s room, where Uncle Gregor sleeps now. If Intimidate is used, Peden will be hostile

towards the party and will run to hide in the stables.

As for Gregor, anyone who makes a Spot check (DC 20) will notice that he goes pale at mention of the visions. If pressed, he will admit that the inn used to be owned by his brother Pedor, who was Peden’s father. He will say that the half-elven woman sounds like Elledreth, the woman Pedor ran off with a year ago; at this point, a Sense Motive check against his Bluff skill will reveal that he is lying about Pedor’s disappearance.

Gregor honestly knows nothing about the image of the wooden board and the chest, although he is interested; he always thought his brother was hiding treasure from his old adventuring days.

In any case, if he overhears any mention of the visions, he will become very nervous. “That’s enough of that wine,” he says loudly. “Please, my deepest apologies, allow me to get you something else ... the finest my cellar has to offer.” He moves to remove the wine from the table.



Anyone who has made a successful Sense Motive check against Gregor in the past will automatically recognize that he’s afraid; he doesn’t know what’s going on, but he wants it to stop. If no one has made a successful check, allow them to make a new Sense Motive checks at this point (DC 15).

Truth in Wine

Hopefully, the party will have reached the conclusion that the visions are linked to the wine and prevent Gregor from taking it away. If they

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drink more of the wine, the sensitive characters will have the following vision:

You have a glass of wine in your hand. To your right, a beautiful black-haired half-elven woman is also holding a glass, and your heart beats faster as you glance at her. Across from you, the innkeeper Gregor holds a goblet and a beaker, and you feel a sense of relief as the three of you raise your glasses. You drink the wine, and within moments you feel a terrible pain in your belly — a fire that burns in your gut. You drop the goblet and fall towards the ground. As the vision fades, you see the half-elf lying next to you and the innkeeper looking down at you and smiling.

Needless to say, the woman in the image is Elledreth — the same woman from the earlier vision. The background is a dark room filled with casks and bottles — a wine cellar.

If Gregor succeeds in taking away the wine, give the vision to the sensitive PC who would have consumed the most wine; her head swims for a moment and she's overcome by the image. Drinking *more* wine from the barrel will result in the same four visions, repeated in the same order.

As before, any character who receives the vision will have a momentary seizure. When Gregor sees this, he will step away from the party.

 Anyone who makes a Spot check (DC 15) will notice that he has a hand on his dagger and his back to a wall. Sense Motive (DC 15) will reveal that he's terrified. He doesn't know what the characters' visions have shown, but he knows that he's no match for them in battle.

"I don't know what you've seen," Gregor says, his voice calm and reasonable. "But clearly you can see that this is some sort of attack against me. That elven woman took my brother ...

now her kinfolk are using their magic to destroy me as well. Don't let them use you!"



Use Gregor's Bluff skill to determine the difficulty of any Sense Motive check. Gregor is lying, although in his bigotry he does believe that one of Elledreth's relatives could be responsible for the visions.

Detect thoughts, discern lies, or zone of truth will all allow the party to get to the heart of the matter.

Characters can also Intimidate Gregor into confessing (DC 12), use Diplomacy to convince him to come clean (DC 15), or Bluff him in some way (DC 16); they could convince him that they'll help him against the elves, for example. Non-human characters will receive a +2 circumstance bonus to any Bluff or Intimidate check if that check plays on their inhuman nature; for example, a half-orc threatening to eat the innkeeper would count.

In any case, if the truth comes out, Gregor will be unrepentant. "I was doing what was best for me and the boy," he says. "He was going to choose that half-human ... woman ... over me. She'd bewitched him! And what will you do now, kill me? What right do you have? And who do you think will run the inn with me gone ... Peden? That boy couldn't find his boots without my help."

If he learns the truth, Peden will be furious. "All this time you told me that that my father ran away from me, that it was the elves who took him, and it was you all along!" Unless he's restrained, he will leap on his uncle and combat will occur. If he hears Gregor talk about the inn, he'll protest: "I don't want to run this inn! I want to go out into the world, like my father!"

There is no clear answer here. Will the party kill Gregor, believing that his crimes justify this action? Will they allow Peden to fight his uncle

— and what if Gregor begins to beat the boy? Will they allow Gregor to live, or perhaps report him to the local authorities (which may be difficult if the inn is on a road far from town)? If Gregor is killed, what will they do with the inn? And can the characters really trust the wine? If they don't have magical divination on their side, can they be certain that someone *isn't* framing the poor innkeeper?

 If anyone thinks to try, *locate object* can be used to find the remains of Pedor and Elledreth, buried in the wine cellar. There is little left of them; certainly not enough to perform *raise dead* or *speak with dead*. If a player attempts to *resurrect* or *reincarnate* Pedor or Elledreth, the spell will fail; despite this unfinished business, neither truly wants to return to the world.

Peden's Inheritance

The fact of the matter is that vengeance is not Pedor's greatest desire. While he is angry at his brother for killing him, Pedor's primary concern is to pass his treasures on to his son. Regardless of how the party deals with Gregor — perhaps even in the middle of an argument or battle — the characters who have been touched by the visions will have another flash. This is a repeat of the image of the hand reaching through the engraved chest; the sensitive characters will feel the surge of emotion attached to this image, and the sense that this is what truly matters to the angry spirit. If the characters describe the vision, Peden mentions the engraving on the floor in his father's old room. If the party follows up on this, they find that the carving perfectly matches the image from the vision.

 If *detect magic* is used, the engraving has a moderate Conjuration aura.

The floorboard appears to be perfectly solid; even if someone breaks through the floorboards, they will find nothing unusual beneath the surface. But if Peden touches the engraving, his hand moves right through it.

 The engraving conceals an interdimensional space, just like a *bag of holding*. The contents of this space include a purse containing 150 gp, a masterwork shortsword, and two *potions of cure light wounds* — relics of Pedor's adventuring career, which he wanted to pass on to his son.

You could also place any additional small item that you want to pass along to the party within this vault. Needless to say, Peden cannot actually stop the party from taking all of this treasure. But if they let him keep what's rightfully his, he will give them one item from the hoard — either the object you added in or one of the potions. Taking the rest, he prepares to set out into the world in search of his destiny.

Once Peden has removed the goods from the interdimensional space, the sensitive characters will feel a strong sense of inner peace, as the restless spirit slowly fades away.

Loose Ends

This encounter may have a number of loose ends. The first is the fate of the inn. If the party reveals Gregor's treachery but choose to let him live, they will have a powerful hold over the treacherous innkeeper; at the least, they'll be able to convert this incident into free room and board any time they pass through the area. If Gregor dies, will the party allow the inn to stand empty? If so, its fate will depend on where the building is located; if it's out in the woods, it could become the lair of a group of bandits.

Another question is what will happen to Peden. He's determined to become an adventurer, like his father and the player characters. Perhaps he'll turn up again in the future, once he's gained more experience.

 It's quite possible for this encounter to end without any combat. In this case, the party should receive a story award based on their actions. If they kill Gregor right away, without bothering to delve into the mystery, they should simply receive his CR value of 1. As long as they spend some time trying to get to the bottom of the visions, they should receive a story award with an EL equal to half the level of the party. If the characters solve the mystery and locate Peden's inheritance — and give it to Peden instead of taking it themselves — they should receive a story award equal to the average level of the party.

Drinking at Sea

If you wish, you could set this encounter on a ship at sea. In this case, Gregor would be the captain of a merchant vessel that once belonged to Pedor, and Peden would be his cabin boy.

 In this case, replace Profession (innkeeper) with Profession (sailor) and Move Silently with Swim in both Gregor and Peden's stats.

The party could find themselves in more of a quandary if Captain Gregor broke out the wine in the middle of the voyage. If they don't have the skills necessary to run the ship, they may need Gregor's skills to make it safely to their destination. Will they make a deal with the treacherous sailor?

Purple Storm

BY JUSTIN BACON • ILLUSTRATED BY CHAD SERGESKETTER

Encounter Level: 5

Setting: Any terrain

Summary: The characters are caught in a storm warped by arcane energies gone amok.

Background

This encounter can be set in any environment, but will play very differently depending on the exact circumstances. Possibilities include: the PCs are in the middle of the wilderness and are unable to seek conventional shelter from the storm; the PCs are traveling a lonely road, and the only place they can take refuge is an isolated inn full of frightened travelers; or the PCs are in the middle of a town, and are forced to deal with the fall-out the storm has on a civilian population.

The Storm Approaches

The air is calm and still. The morning has passed beneath a clear, blue sky. It is a shock to you, then, when a strong, steady wind strikes you abruptly from the east. Turning in mild surprise, your eyes are immediately drawn to the horizon, where a roiling mass of unnatural, purple clouds twists across the sky — its dark shadow races towards you, either driving or driven by the strange wind that has leapt up all about you.



The characters are now under the effects of a moderate wind (see the “Weather Effects” insert). They have approximately two minutes (20 rounds) in which to make preparations or seek shelter. (To build tension, you might consider calling for Initiative and tracking time as if it were a combat situation.)

Random Magical Effects: The raw, untapped forces of chaotic arcane magic in the storm are already beginning to affect the area where the PCs are standing. Roll once on the “Random Magical Effects” chart. Use the result during this time of preparation as a foreshadowing of what’s to come.

Wilderness Lore: A successful Wilderness Lore check (DC 10) will let a character know approximately how much time is left before the storm hits.

Detect Magic: If the characters manage to somehow *detect magic* on the storm front from this distance (roughly twenty miles), they’ll discover that the entire storm pulses with an overwhelming magical aura.

Severe Weather

Once the storm reaches the PCs it proceeds through eight stages, which are described below. The descriptions of each stage include:

Stage & Effects: The weather effects of each stage are listed first. These effects are described in the “Weather Effects” insert.

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 Note, the penalties for weather effects stack. For example, a Windstorm conveys a –8 penalty to Listen checks. Hail conveys a –4 penalty to Listen checks. During Stage 6, where both a Windstorm and Hail are present, characters suffer a –12 penalty to Listen checks.

Duration: The duration of the stage is given next; this tells how long it will be before the next stage begins.

 **Concentration DC:** This line gives the Concentration check DC required to cast or maintain a spell effect while exposed to the weather effects of this stage of the storm. If the caster is currently unaffected by the weather effects for some reason, this check does not need to be made. This DC does not include damage dealt by the storm (DC 10 + level of spell + damage taken).

Random Magical Effects: The frequency of rolls on the Random Magical Effects table is given next. The GM can either roll, or choose an appropriate selection from the table at his discretion. A magical effect either lasts the amount of time listed in its description, until two more magical effects have been generated, or until the storm ends, whichever happens first.

Descriptive Text: A section of text is given that can be read out loud as the stage begins.

Handling the Storm

This encounter is driven by the PCs; it is, ultimately, about how they react to this extraordinary — and extremely dangerous — set of circumstances. The first priority, therefore, is presenting the storm with a deadly fast pace. Don't keep the PCs on combat timing throughout the duration of the storm. From beginning to end the storm lasts almost an hour (570 rounds);

handled round by round, it would merely become tedious and pointless in short order. Instead, blend combat timing with a looser handling of time in a freeform fashion as it seems most appropriate. When the Random Magical Effects chart creates an active threat, switch to combat. During Stage 5, when hurricane-force winds are blowing, switch to combat. Keep the threat of the storm over the PCs' heads, but don't bore them by continually asking "doing anything different this round?" Also, adapt the chart results and weather effects to the circumstances in which the PCs find themselves. Emphasize the wonder of this fantastic event, and the keen edge of danger.

The second priority is making sure that the players feel a sense of accomplishment. Let the solutions they find work as they should. Don't take it easy on them, but — at the same time — don't cheat them out of their legitimate successes.

 Attempts to *detect magic* or use similar effects within the storm will reveal an overwhelming magical aura permeating everything within the storm. The aura lingers for 1d6 days after the storm passes — effectively rendering *detect magic* useless in the area.

Characters with access to spells such as *rope trick*, *teleport*, and *ethereal jaunt* may attempt to use them to either escape or ride out the storm. Thwarting the PCs isn't something you should do on a regular basis, but if you want to use this encounter without simply watching your PCs skip out on the action, here are a few suggestions:

If the PCs have to worry about the welfare of NPCs, you may overload their capacity to magically escape. (If a spell only affects a half dozen people, and the PCs have a dozen NPCs to worry about, then they can't use the spell without abandoning their charges.)



Putting the PCs in a situation where using the spell results in an unexpected, non-optimal result is always a good solution. PCs who use *rope trick* on a ship, for example, may be perfectly safe, but the ship will be blown away and they will be abandoned in the middle of the ocean.

Spells such as *rope trick* or *etherealness* may function properly at first, but the storm might also disrupt the relationship between the planes. Unless the spellcaster makes a successful Spellcraft check (DC 20) each round, the storm rips the spell apart and dumps the affected characters back onto the Prime Material plane.

STAGE 1: MODERATE WIND, RAIN

Duration: 2 minutes (20 rounds)

Concentration DC: 5 + level of the spell

Random Magical Effects: Roll once every 10 rounds.

The purple clouds sweep through the sky above you like a wall, and at their heels a cold, biting rain pierces down. The air about you seems suddenly charged with some unknowable potential, and the distant echoes of thunder rumble in your ears ...

STAGE 2: SEVERE WIND, RAIN

Duration: 2 minutes (20 rounds)

Concentration: 5 + level of the spell

Random Magical Effects: Roll once every 5 rounds.

The wind picks up speed, driving the rain nearly horizontal with its painful intensity. Visibility has sunk to just a handful of feet, and the strange, dancing gyrations of the purple shad-

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ows created by the strange clouds above is disorienting and confusing.

STAGE 3: WINDSTORM, RAIN, PURPLE LIGHTNING

Duration: 5 minutes (50 rounds)

Concentration: 10 + level of the spell

Random Magical Effects: Roll once every 5 rounds.

All of nature's fury seems focused in this wind as it whips and churns and howls. Bolts of violet lightning lash down and lick the earth all about, tearing at the ground with frightening force and lighting small fires here and there that are quickly extinguished by the furious downpour.

STAGE 4: WINDSTORM, SLEET, PURPLE LIGHTNING

Duration: 5 minutes (50 rounds)

Concentration: 10 + level of the spell

Random Magical Effects: Roll once every 5 rounds.

With a sudden, lurching shock, the temperature drops and your bones seem to freeze within you. The rain turns to a thin, merciless sleet that is driven by the cold, piercing force of the howling wind. The clouds above now block out all light from sun and sky, and the chilling scene is lit only by the dark violet bursts of lightning.

STAGE 5: HURRICANCE-FORCE WIND, HAIL, PURPLE LIGHTNING

Duration: 3 minutes (30 rounds)

Concentration: 15 + level of the spell

Random Magical Effects: Roll once every 10 rounds.

Like a living thing, the wind swells and roars, striking you like a wall. A great, tortured groaning fills the air. The clouds above you froth. The air is ripped from your lungs. The sleet abruptly turns to the hard pellets of hail. All of nature's fury seems to be unleashed upon you.

STAGE 6: WINDSTORM, HAIL, PURPLE LIGHTNING

Duration: 10 minutes (100 rounds)

Concentration: 10 + level of the spell

Random Magical Effects: Roll once every 10 rounds.

After what seems an agonizing age, the wind quiets somewhat, slackening its force and giving your lungs a chance to catch their breath. But, in a way, this is even worse, since the purple clouds still roil above you. Lightning accompanied by great, deafening claps of thunder still dances all about you. And the hail has grown to the size of a fist, pounding down with relentless, endless strength.

At some point near the end of this stage, the hail will shrink and then stop, being replaced once more by slanting rain.

STAGE 7: MODERATE WIND, RAIN

Duration: 10 minutes (100 rounds)

Concentration: 5 + level of the spell

Random Magical Effects: Roll once every 20 rounds.

As time passes, it becomes clear that the worst of the storm has passed you by. The wind still beats steadily from the east, but its ferocity is

gone. The light of the sun has begun to dimly penetrate to the earth once more, and the clouds above you have lost their sickening, purplish tinge, assuming their natural countenance of gray. The downpour continues, but even that seems warmer and gentler than it did only a few minutes ago.

🌀 STAGE 8: LIGHT WIND, RAIN

Duration: 20 minutes (100 rounds)

Concentration: No check required

Random Magical Effects: None. (Perhaps one or two lingering, minor effects at the GM's discretion.)

The last clouds above you slowly break up, leaving nothing but tattered wisps of gray in their wake. The rain continues, but is soon little more than a lingering drizzle. A light wind — calm and soothing in the wake of the storm that has passed — continues to blow out of the east, but it seems to be shifting slowly to the north. On the horizon to the west you can still see the purple flashes of lightning beneath a dark, roiling mass of clouds.

Variant: Stopping the Storm

As designed, this encounter is about survival and endurance. The PCs don't know what caused the storm and have no way of stopping it. All they can hope to do is outlast it.

Some GMs, however, may prefer to have a solution to the problem. Here are some possibilities:

- The storm was caused by a powerful sorcerer who attempted to harness magical energies beyond his abilities. While trying to learn a spell that would bend all of reality to his will, the sorcerer lost control of his magical talents. The ruined remnants of the spell manifested themselves as the storm, while the sorcerer was stripped of his magical abilities. Ashamed and powerless, the sorcerer seeks protection from the storm (possibly with the PCs), but does not want to admit his own culpability. In order to stop the storm, the PCs must discover the truth and destroy the scroll from which the sorcerer was working. (The scroll is now a blank piece of parchment, but it continues to serve as a magical focus for the arcane energies the sorcerer attempted to unleash.)
- The storm was caused by a group of errant adventurers. During their recent dungeon-looting trip, the adventurers disturbed an ancient tomb, unleashing an ancient curse that took the form of the purple storm. The adventurers were killed in the first instants of the arcane fury they unleashed, but the tomb remains open ... and until it's closed, the purple storm will rage. (For a twist, the PCs may have actually caused the storm by disturbing a tomb during their last adventure. They will need to travel back to the scene, and right their wrong.)
- A coven of black mages is responsible for the storm, which is, in fact, nothing more than a side effect of their dark ritual: the gathering of the tremendous arcane energies they require to resurrect an ancient and evil god. The PCs must travel to the eye of the storm and overcome the coven before it's too late.



☉ *Weather Effects*

For your convenience, the standard D20 System weather effects referred to in this encounter are reprinted here, along with new rules for the effects of purple lightning.

WIND

(Note: Flying or airborne creatures are treated as one size category smaller than their actual size for the purposes of determining wind effects.)

Light Wind: A gentle breeze, having little or no game effect.

Moderate Wind: A steady wind (11–20 mph) with a 50% chance of extinguishing small, unprotected flames (such as candles).

Severe Wind: Winds of this magnitude (31–50 mph) automatically extinguish any unprotected flames and have a 50% chance of extinguishing even protected flames (such as those of lanterns). Ranged weapon attacks and Listen checks are at a –4 penalty. Tiny creatures must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or be blown away. Small creatures must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or be knocked down.

Windstorm: Windstorms (winds of 51–74 mph) automatically extinguish unprotected flames and have a 75% chance of extinguishing protected flames. Ranged weapon attacks become impossible (even siege weaponry is at a –4 penalty). Listen checks are at a –8 penalty due to the wind. Small and smaller creatures must make a Fortitude save (DC 18) or be blown away. Medium-size creatures must make a Fortitude save (DC 18) or be knocked down. Large or Huge creatures must make a Fortitude save (DC 18) or be checked.

Hurricane-Force Winds: Hurricane-force winds (75–174 mph) automatically extinguish all flames. Ranged attacks are impossible (except with siege weapons, which have a –8 penalty to attack). Listen checks are impossible (all charac-

ters can hear is the roaring of the wind). Medium-size creatures or smaller must make a Fortitude save (DC 20) or be blown away. Large creatures must make a Fortitude save (DC 20) or be knocked down. Huge creatures must make a Fortitude save (DC 20) or be checked.

WIND EFFECTS

Checked: Creatures are unable to move forward against the force of the wind. Flying creatures are blown back 1d6 x 5 feet.

Knocked Down: Creatures are knocked prone by the force of the wind. Flying creatures are instead blown back 1d6 x 10 feet.

Blown Away: Creatures on the ground are knocked prone and roll 1d4 x 10 feet, sustaining 1d4 points of subdual damage per 10 feet. Flying creatures are blown back 2d6 x 10 feet, and sustain 2d6 points of subdual damage due to battering and buffeting.

PRECIPITATION

Rain: Rain reduces visibility ranges by half, resulting in a –4 penalty to Spot and Search checks. Rain automatically extinguishes unprotected flames and has a 50% chance of extinguishing protected flames. Ranged weapon attacks and Listen checks are at a –4 penalty.

Sleet: Essentially frozen rain, sleet has the same effect as rain while falling (except that its chance to extinguish protected flames is 75%). Once on the ground (two minutes after it starts to sleet), it reduces movement by half.

Hail: Hail does not reduce visibility, but the sound of falling hail imposes a –4 penalty on Listen checks. The hail accompanying the magical storm in this encounter is large enough to deal 1 point of damage to anything in the open (including unprotected characters). Once on the ground, hail reduces movement by half.

Weather Effects: Continued

NEW WEATHER EFFECT: PURPLE LIGHTNING

The storm in this encounter is accompanied by strange lightning, which is drawn inexplicably towards concentrations of magic. There is a 20% chance per minute (every 10 rounds) that a lightning bolt will strike an arcane spellcaster or anyone carrying more than 10,000 gp in magic items. Each lightning bolt causes electrical dam-

age equal to 1d10 eight-sided dice (Reflex save DC 15 for half damage), sets fire to combustibles, and can melt metals with a low melting point (such as lead, gold, copper, silver, or bronze). Barriers may not protect characters; if a lightning bolt deals enough damage to a barrier to destroy it, the bolt may continue beyond the barrier.



Variant Rules

TRAVEL IN THE STORM

When PCs are attempting to travel in the storm, use the result of a saving throw to adjudicate and describe their progress. A result of “checked” might result in very slow progress (it takes them two hours to make an hour’s worth of progress). A result of “knocked prone” might result in negligible progress (it takes them four hours to make an hour’s worth of progress). A result of “blown away” would mean that the character was unable to make any progress (unless assisted by others, in which case the whole group would be slowed to negligible progress).

SAVING THROWS

The D20 System rules leave it unclear exactly how often saves should be made during a storm, and what the consequences of a successful save are. Can characters in a hurricane act as if nothing were untoward so long as they make a single Fortitude save at the beginning of the storm?

We suggest the following guidelines:

Make a new check once every minute (every 10 rounds). Characters suffering adverse effects (those who are blown away, knocked down, or

checked) can make a new saving throw each round to overcome the adverse effects.

A successful save moves the characters one step down on the effects table (blown away to knocked down; knocked down to checked; checked to no effect). Characters suffering no effects must still make a new check every minute — a failure indicates they suffer the worst possible effect for a creature of their size.

For example, a Small character is caught by hurricane-force winds. He fails his first Fortitude save, and is blown away on the first round. In the second round, he makes his saving throw and is only knocked down. In the third round, he makes the saving throw again — he’s checked, but can regain his feet. In the fourth round, he fails the saving throw, so he remains checked. In the fifth round, he makes his saving throw, and is free from the storm’s effects for awhile. Ten rounds after his first check, however, the Small character would need to make a new saving throw — otherwise he’ll be blown away again.

Random Magical Effects

d% Result

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| <p>1 A baby rabbit with blue fur appears. With each hop it ages a year until it dies after the ninth hop.</p> <p>2 All of the air around the PCs turns into a thick, purplish, unbreathable mist. Characters can attempt to hold their breath, as per the D20 System rules for suffocation.</p> <p>3 If there is snow on the ground, all of it flies straight up twenty feet into the air before falling back down again. If there is no snow on the ground, three feet of snow falls from the sky in one large clump.</p> <p>4 The earth beneath the characters' feet rumbles (but does not actually move).</p> <p>5 The true names of characters appear on their foreheads as blue, glowing, elvish runes.</p> <p>6 The next spell cast in the storm (if any) appears to fail to take effect. 2d10 rounds later, however, the spell takes effect as if it had just been cast (regardless of what the caster is doing).</p> <p>7 An area of solid earth begins to behave as if it were a raging river. Treat this area of the earth exactly as if it were fast-moving water. The effect lasts until the storm ends.</p> <p>8 A deafening thunder clap goes off just above the heads of the PCs. All characters within 100 feet must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or suffer deafness for the next 3d6 rounds. All characters within 20 feet must make a Reflex save (DC 20) or be knocked prone.</p> <p>9 For the next 3d6 minutes, the characters' skins randomly turn transparent for brief</p> | <p>periods of time (revealing muscles, internal organs, etc.).</p> <p>10 The next spell cast in the storm (if any) takes effect as if it were empowered (as per the Empower Spell feat).</p> <p>11 A random PC freezes in time: he simply stops moving, freezing in place. Other characters will find themselves unable to affect the PC. 1d20 rounds later, the PC will unfreeze, completely unaware that any time has passed at all.</p> <p>12 A swarm of locusts passes through the area.</p> <p>13 A random character's hair, beard, fingernails, and toenails all grow at a rapid rate until they are unnaturally long. The character suffers a -2 penalty to Dexterity-based checks until they can be properly trimmed.</p> <p>14 A random character teleports 1d100 feet in a random direction (as per a <i>teleport without error</i> spell).</p> <p>15 An exact mirror image of the PCs (and any NPCs accompanying the PCs) appears directly in front of the party. These images act independently, and are seemingly just as confused as the characters they appear to be duplicates of. 1d6 minutes later the PCs disappear, but find themselves reliving the actions of their mirror images. Once they return to the point where they originally disappeared, time flows normally again.</p> <p>16 2d20 oak trees grow up around the PCs in an instant.</p> <p>17 A number of black cats equal to the number of PCs crosses the party's path, pauses for a moment to look at the characters, and then disappears into thin air with a wisp of smoke.</p> |
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⊗ *Random Magical Effects, Continued*

- 18 All non-magical metal in the PCs' possession is permanently turned to gold. This is good for coins, but renders weapons and armor effectively useless (although not worthless).
- 19 1d4 skeletons rise from the ground near the PCs, but ignore the characters. They choose, instead, to wander off into the storm.
- 20 The earth around the PCs turns to a thick mud.
- 21 The sun (or moon) disappears from the sky for 1d6 minutes.
- 22 Floating black globes drift slowly past the party. They are incorporeal and cannot be affected by magic.
- 23 Characters within the storm are either extremely fast (as per the *haste* spell), or extremely slow (as per the *slow* spell). Determine this randomly for each character.
- 24 A river of ants goes marching past the characters.
- 25 Everything within 1d100 feet of the PCs begins glowing a soft red.
- 26 The nearest inflammable object not being carried by a character bursts into flame.
- 27 A large toad crawls out of the mouth of a random character.
- 28 The earth beneath the feet of a random character opens up without warning. He must make a Reflex save (DC 20) or fall 1d20 feet (taking the standard 1d6 points of damage per 10 feet fallen). 1d6+4 rounds later, the earth closes up again, trapping anyone or anything still within the pit inside solid earth.
- 29 A geyser of water explodes 1d4 feet away from a random character.
- 30 A random object carried by the PCs disappears. It does not reappear.
- 31 A thousand red roses fall from the sky.
- 32 All the gold carried by a random character is transformed into fool's gold. The change is permanent.
- 33 1d12 Small air elementals whip past the characters, attacking anyone who interferes with them, but otherwise ignoring the group.
- 34 A random character suffers from complete amnesia for 3d6 minutes.
- 35 All rocks and stones (or other inanimate objects at the GM's discretion) within 50 feet of the characters levitate 3 feet into the air and stay that way until they are touched (at which point they crash back to the earth).
- 36 The sound of a softly playing violin music fills the air, and can be heard despite the raging storm for the next 1d4 minutes.
- 37 A random character shrinks to one half his normal size for the next 1d6+4 minutes.
- 38 A flock of red toads flies by.
- 39 A random magic item carried by the PCs must make a Fortitude save (DC 20). If it fails it explodes, causing 4d6 points of damage to the character carrying it.



⊗ *Random Magical Effects, Continued*

- 40 All spellcasters in the storm are struck mute for the next 1d6 minutes, but will find themselves capable of casting spells (as per the Silent Spell feat) if they attempt to cast anything.
- 41 Harmless blue flames spring up wherever the characters step.
- 42 A robin's egg appears in the mouth of a random character.
- 43 A random character finds himself suddenly covered in a thin layer of frost. Another is limned in *faerie fire* (as per the spell). Both effects last for 1d4 rounds.
- 44 3d6 humanoid hands burst through the earth around the characters, groping and grasping at their feet.
- 45 A random *bag of holding* near the characters (if any) ceases to function, dumping its contents to the ground.
- 46 The most expensive gem carried by the characters becomes enchanted as per a *continual flame* spell.
- 47 The faces of all the characters in the area become featureless for 1d6 minutes. (This does not affect a character's ability to see, hear, smell, speak, or breathe.)
- 48 All the gold carried by the PCs becomes permanently hard as steel.
- 49 The ground in a 20-foot radius around a random character turns to glass. Characters attempting to move across the glassy surface at more than half speed must make a Reflex save (DC 15) or fall prone.
- 50 A wall of flame races from the horizon and passes over the characters 1d6 rounds later — leaving them perfectly unharmed.
- 51 The world appears to lose all color: everything appears in shades of monotone gray. This effect lasts for 3d6 minutes.
- 52 All magic items carried by the characters turn invisible and incorporeal for 3d6 minutes — appearing to vanish entirely except by means of a *true sight* spell or similar effect.
- 53 A random spellcaster loses all of his remaining spells for the day. He feels the arcane or divine powers within him torn away by the storm.
- 54 All plant life within 50 feet of the characters is turned to iron.
- 55 A random charged magical item carried by the characters becomes fully charged (returning to the number of charges it had when created). This effect is permanent and does not end with the storm.
- 56 Any water carried by a random character becomes a free-willed water elemental (whose size is determined by the amount of water being carried) and attempts to escape.
- 57 The next spell cast in the storm (if any) takes effect as if it were enlarged (as per the Enlarge Spell feat).
- 58 All characters within a 50-foot radius of a central point randomly change places with one another, as per the *teleport* spell.
- 59 1d4 random characters become incorporeal and incapable of interacting with the physical world.

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⊗ *Random Magical Effects, Continued*

- 80 The PCs find themselves 1d4 minutes in the past. They may relive the past or attempt to change it.
- 81 Arcane magic ceases to function in an area whose radius is 500 feet from the PCs' current location for the next 1d10 minutes.
- 82 3,000 gp fall from the sky. Characters within 50 feet of the PCs must make a Reflex save (DC 20) or be struck by 2d6 coins, each of which inflicts 2d4 points of damage.
- 83 The rain or hail in a 1000-foot radius around the PCs changes to acid for the next 1d6 minutes. Characters and items without shelter suffer 1d6 points of damage per round.
- 84 All characters and creatures near the PCs take on a two-dimensional appearance for the next 2d4 minutes. This has no game effect.
- 85 All characters within 500 feet of the PCs (including the PCs) become mute.
- 86 An earthquake strikes a 100-foot-radius area around the PCs, as per the *earthquake* spell.
- 87 Lightning repeatedly strikes the tallest object (or character) in sight. Fortunately, the lightning attack proves abnormally weak: whatever it strikes takes 4d6 points of damage. A character may make a Reflex save (DC 15) for half damage.
- 88 One random charged magic item carried by the party is drained of charges.
- 89 A thick, billowing mist surrounds the party, whipping one way and another in the fierce winds. Nothing short of a magical effort will dissipate the mist, however, for 2d4 minutes. (Treat as an *obscuring mist* spell.)
- 90 The next spell cast in the storm (if any) takes effect as if it were extended (as per the *Extend Spell* feat).
- 91 Any water carried by a random character is turned to blood. (The water remains blood, even after the storm ends.)
- 92 All flames within 10 feet of the PCs turn to ice (and stop burning).
- 93 Any trees within 500 feet of the PCs are affected as per a *continual flame* spell, becoming wreathed in fire that does not burn.
- 94 Divine magic ceases to function in a 500-foot-radius area from the PCs' current location for the next 1d10 minutes.
- 95 The next spell cast in the storm (if any) takes effect as if it were maximized (as per the *Maximize Spell* feat).
- 96 All sources of fire within 100 feet of the PCs explode as *fireballs* cast by a 5th-level sorcerer.
- 97 All trees near the PCs uproot themselves and walk 2d10 feet to the south, as per the *animate object* spell.
- 98 The next spell cast in the storm (if any) takes effect as if it were heightened two spell levels (as per the *Heighten Spell* feat).
- 99 A massive fireball goes off, injuring the PCs and anyone else within 20 feet of them with 3d6 points of cold damage. Characters may make a Reflex save (DC 15) for half damage.
- 00 A large camel appears in front of a random PC, apologizes profusely for having missed their appointment, and then disappears.

Sea of Stones

BY KEITH BAKER • ILLUSTRATED BY CHAD SERGESKETTER

Encounter Level: 4

Setting: At sea

Summary: While traveling at sea, the party's ship runs aground on a swarm of tiny earth elementals. The adventurers must find a way to disperse the swarm before their ship is torn apart.

Background

"I've never seen anything like it," the captain said, looking down at the 'water.' "You're a priestess of the Stonefather, milady — can't you do something?"

Sera looked over the edge at the mass of spinning rocks that were jostling and milling about the hull of the ship, preventing movement and threatening to tear into the wood. Where were they coming from?

While on the sea, the party's vessel comes across a strange phenomenon — a swarm of small boulders, swarming about in the water as if struggling not to sink. These stones immediately flock to the ship and start clinging to it. Can the party find a way to deal with them before they sink the vessel?

What's going on here is that a tiny rupture in the wall between the material world and the elemental realm of earth has formed. These creatures are tiny earth elementals that have been shunted out into the material world against their will. They are desperate to get to dry land, and are only barely sentient; they are drawn to the ship simply because it is not water.

Perhaps the party can find a way to squeeze the elementals back through the rift. Maybe they can help the stones come together to form an island. Or perhaps the ship will sink ...

Rocks Afloat

This encounter can occur any time that the party is sailing across a large body of water like an ocean, sea, or lake. It's best if the ship is passing through a well-known trade route, so the crew has no concerns about running into hidden reefs or other navigational threats. The lookouts are more concerned with ships on the horizon than rocks in the water. As such, they may overlook the minor disturbance that lies ahead.

In the water in front of the party's ship, a small gap has opened to the elemental realm of earth. A host of diminutive, immature earth elementals — called *nuggets* — are being shunted through the gap and spit into the water.

A nugget is effectively a tiny chunk of stone — typically between the size of a grapefruit and a watermelon — that can move about of its own accord. The elemental realm of earth is filled with swarms of nuggets, which occasionally merge together to form larger and more sophisticated earth elementals. A nugget looks like a spherical or ovoid stone, ranging from 4 to 10 inches in diameter. Its edges are rough and irregular, and it has no apparent features or limbs. It moves about by rolling, and attacks by slamming into an opponent.

These small stones have limited intelligence, and this sudden encounter with an alien ele-



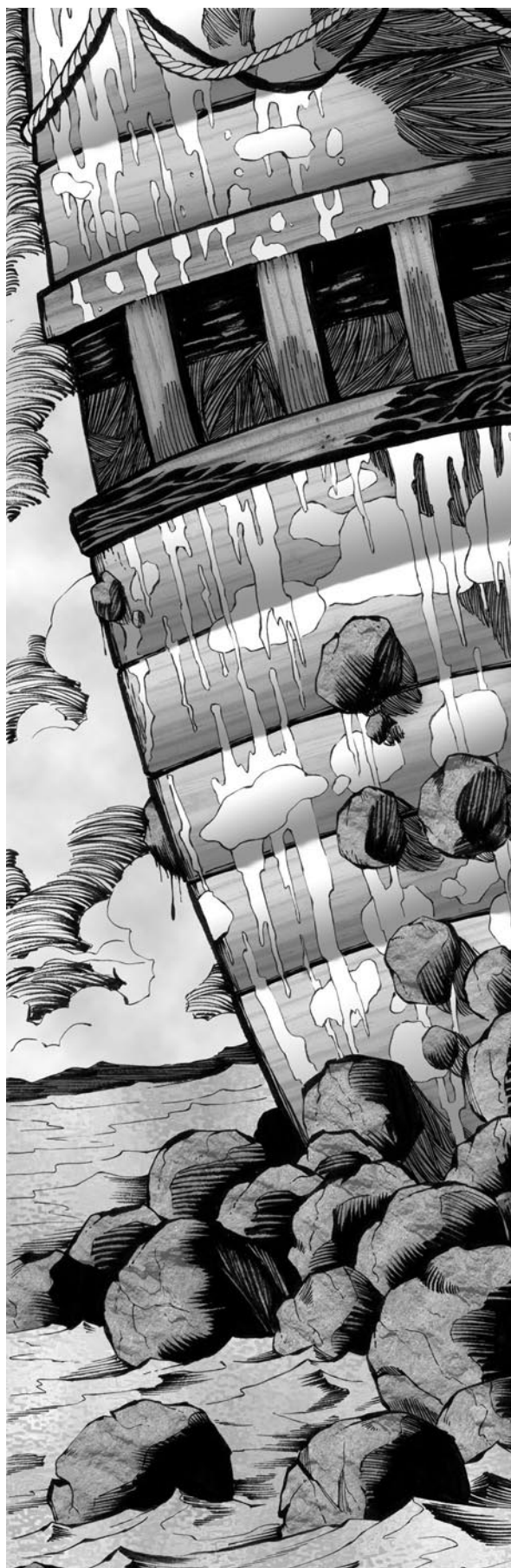
ment has thrown them into a panic. They are spinning wildly about, managing to avoid sinking through constant motion. But they want to find some way to get out of the water as quickly as possible — or failing that, to find something to which they can cling.

 The nuggets are scattered about in the water. Only a few will be on the surface of the water at any given time. If someone is actively watching the water, they will notice the stones with a successful Spot check (DC 30) — but even then, the stones could be mistaken for some sort of wreckage. A spotter will simply see a scattering of small objects across the water, and by the time they're seen it will be too late to avoid them.

Running Aground

When the party's ship comes within range, the nuggets see it as a sanctuary — a big object for them to cling to. Maybe it will take them away from the <wrong stuff> and get them <home>! At the least, it provides a respite from constant spinning. So the nuggets drift towards the ship and begin to attach themselves to it, slowly at first, but as the ship moves forward and gets closer to the dimensional gap, they will increase in number. Depending on a characters' location, they may spot the rocks scattered about the water, or hear the dull thuds as the ship runs into the floating nuggets.

 Most of the nuggets are beneath the surface of the water, so they are easily overlooked. Once the ship is on top of them, a character will notice the stones scattered across the water with a successful Spot check (DC 20). If she makes the check by five points, the character will notice that the stones are spinning about; if she makes it by



ten points she'll see that there are many additional stones just below the water. Alternately, a character below decks or on a particularly small ship may hear the thud of the vessel running into the nuggets; this will require a successful Listen check (DC 25).

A character can make these checks every few rounds, since every moment that passes more nuggets come towards the ship.

At first this may just seem to be odd — where are these little stones coming from? But the situation quickly becomes serious. Hundreds of nuggets begin to boil out of the water, surrounding the ship. As they cling to the vessel they incapacitate the rudder; they also begin to slow down the ship, both by filling the water and by clinging to the hull and altering the shape of the keel. Soon the ship will come to a dead stop, as more and more stones spin about in the water, jostling for a piece of the hull. Some cling to other nuggets; others start digging into the hull itself, which will quickly threaten the structural integrity of the ship.

 A character who makes a successful Profession (sailor) (DC 12), Knowledge (engineering) (DC 10), or Wisdom (DC 16) check will come to the conclusion that the rocks will eventually sink the ship, either by breaching the hull or simply overloading the ship. The amount of time that it will take for this to occur is based on the size of the ship. Every five minutes, the ship will take 1 point of damage for every five feet of hull length. This means that a keelboat will last 20 minutes, a longship will survive for 35 minutes, a war galley can endure for 40 minutes, a sailing ship or great galley can survive for an hour. A ship's lifeboat will last for about 15 minutes.

The clock is ticking and the party must work quickly if they are to save their ship. But how do you get rid of a sea of stones?

How to Get Your Rocks Off

There are a variety of techniques the party can employ as they try to keep their vessel from becoming a paperweight.

COMBAT

Individually, the nuggets pose little challenge; while small and difficult to hit, the nuggets will not respond to ranged attacks and can be picked off one at a time. The problem is pure numbers. Additional nuggets are continually pouring out of the dimensional gap; in the time it takes to kill one nugget, three will emerge from the rift. The party can fight all day, but the stones will continue to swarm out of the water.



If a character decides to go swimming amongst the nuggets, the elementals will try to cling to the new mass as opposed to fighting him. But this can still be dangerous; if enough nuggets affix themselves to a character, he will sink like — well, a stone. Statistics for nuggets can be found below.

MAGIC

In this situation, magic is a more effective tool than muscles. There are a number of ways that spells can help to save the ship.



Clerics of Earth and Air: Priests that possess the Earth or Air domains have power over earth elementals. A priestess of Air can use her domain power to Turn or Destroy earth elementals; a priest of Earth can Rebuke or Command the nuggets. Destroying the elementals is the least effective option; new nuggets will immediately move in to fill the gap. But if the elementals are Turned or Rebuked, they can form a buffer between the ship and other nuggets; this will temporarily prevent the ship from taking any damage. If they are successfully Commanded, they can be used to escort the ship through the mass of nuggets, until it is beyond the range of the

gap. Any of these options require the character to Control/Turn/Rebuke 7 Hit Dice of nuggets for every ten feet of hull length. So the cleric can easily protect a rowboat, but a galley is another matter entirely.

Clerics of Earth will also command a certain level of respect and recognition from the nuggets even without using their domain power; the nuggets are more likely to talk to an Earth priest than to any other sort of character.

Affecting the Gap: A character who uses *detect magic* can sense the presence of the magical gap between planes — a strong aura drawing on the Conjunction school. The gap is located approximately twenty feet beneath the surface of the water. If a caster can get close enough to the rift, he can effectively close it by using *forbiddance* or *dimensional anchor*. He can also try to close it with *dispel magic*; this requires a successful caster check (DC 29). Alternately, a *wall of force* or *resilient sphere* can temporarily contain the flow of nuggets from the gap. At this point, if the party can disperse the existing nuggets (through physical force, area effect spells, or other means) new nuggets will not be able to fill the space and the ship will be freed.

A New Home: No one would accuse a nugget of being intelligent. The elementals are simply searching for something that isn't water to cling to, so they can finally stop spinning. A *wall of stone* or *wall of iron* dropped in the water will distract them long enough to get the ship away from the gap (although characters will still have to deal with the nuggets embedded in the hull). They can also be fooled by illusions; if *major image* or *hallucinatory terrain* is used to create an island vista, the nuggets will flock towards the more attractive environment.

Keep Away: Any spell with a continuous repelling effect — such as *antipathy*, *repulsion*, *repel metal or stone*, or *forbiddance* — can be used against the nuggets. If the nuggets can be kept away from the ship, it can start to move; and once it gets a short distance away from the gap, the nuggets will fall behind.

A clever party may come up with other ways to use magic against the nuggets. Perhaps *transmute rock to mud* will drive the nuggets into a panic and cause them to flee. Use your best judgment and reward creativity.

CONVERSATION

The nuggets aren't terribly bright, but they can speak. If someone calls out to them in Terran, they will suddenly begin clamoring in gravelly voices. "Want home! Must leave bad stuff! No belong!" Once they have started talking, the difficulty will be getting them to shut up.



The nuggets are in a state of frenzy due to their fear of water. Just getting them to listen to what the party has to say will require a successful Diplomacy or Intimidate check (DC 20). Convincing them to leave is even more difficult. If the speaker simply wants the nuggets to leave the ship alone and return to the water, he must make a successful Diplomacy or Intimidate check (DC 35).

However, there are other alternatives. A group might convince the nuggets to form their own island by clinging to one another; this would require a Diplomacy check (DC 25), and the speaker can get a bonus of up to +5 if the party is willing to give the nuggets something to use as a core, like a lifeboat. The bonus should be based on the size of the object that is being offered and its value to the party. This is not really a tremendously smart idea; once the nuggets stop moving and begin to fuse together, they will

sink. Luckily, the nuggets aren't tremendously smart. And if they all get behind the plan, it will eventually work; as they continue to fuse, they will ultimately create a column of stone reaching up from the seabed.

Druids and clerics who possess the Earth domain get a +5 circumstance bonus to all of the rolls mentioned above. If none of the

characters in the party speaks Terran, you may decide that the nuggets can communicate with druids or Earth priests due to their shared bond with nature.

Even if the party cannot convince the nuggets to leave their ship alone, they may gain useful information. For example, if they ask where the nuggets came from, they will mention the gap

🌀 *New Creature: Nugget*

CR 1/2; SZ D (Elemental [Earth]); HP 1d8 (5 hp); Init +1 (Dex); Spd 15 ft., swim 5 ft.; AC 22 (+1 Dex, +4 size, +7 natural); Atk melee +4 (1d4, slam); Face 1 ft. x 1 ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SA Affix; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., Fusion, Immunities; AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will -1; Str 11, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 4, Wis 9, Cha 10

Skills: Swim +10

Feats: Power Attack

Nuggets speak Terran, but have a very limited vocabulary and can only understand basic concepts.

Affix (Ex): A nugget can attach itself to another creature or object, much like a barnacle. This requires a grapple check. If the attack is successful, the target must make Fortitude check (DC 4) or suffer 1 point of damage. In addition, for each nugget that is attached to him a character suffers a cumulative -1 penalty to any physical action (including attack rolls and, notably, Swim checks). Each nugget has an effective weight of 10 pounds; this weight is added to the victim's load, and may cause encumbrance penalties. Removing a nugget requires a full action and a successful Strength check (DC 20). For every ten minutes that a nugget remains attached, the target must make a

Fortitude save (DC 4) or suffer an additional point of damage, as the nugget slowly burrows into its victim. If the nugget is attached to an object, this damage bypasses the Hardness value of the target. Non-magical objects do get to make saving throws against this damage, but don't receive any sort of bonus to the check.

Elemental: An elemental is immune to poison, sleep, paralysis, and stunning. Elementals are not subject to critical hits or flanking and have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet. A slain elemental cannot be *raised* or *resurrected*, although a *wish* or *miracle* spell can restore it to life.

Fusion (Ex): Nuggets can fuse their mass together to form a larger chunk of rock. However, when they do this the nuggets lose their mobility, becoming a static lump of sentient stone. When nuggets fuse, their minds and memories merge into a single composite. When 10 nuggets fuse together, the composite creature gains a +1 bonus to Intelligence and Wisdom. It gains an additional +1 Intelligence and Wisdom when another 20 nuggets fuse to it; this progression increases, with the number of nuggets required for a bonus doubling at each step. So if 153,590 nuggets fuse together, the resulting island will have an 18 Intelligence and 23 Wisdom.

— “Hole! Hole from home! Pushed through hole into bad place!” This could give the party the knowledge they need to try to dispel the dimensional rift.

Birth of an Island

If the party just can't find a way to deal with the nuggets, the elementals will eventually start to tear the ship apart. Cracks begin to form in the hull. The unbalanced ship lists in the water. Things look bad for our heroes!

In all likelihood, you don't actually want to sink the ship; this has a way of interfering with a preplanned adventure. So, just when things are at their worst, the interdimensional gap increases in size and a larger earth elemental squeezes through. Well, normal earth elementals can't swim, and this one is no exception. But it serves as a magnet for the nuggets, who swarm to the elemental and begin to fuse around it.

From the perspective of those on the ship, just as they start to hear the crack of hull breaches, an enormous circular wake spreads out around the ship, as if something large had just been dropped into the water. The nuggets immediately begin to drop off of the ship and dive down beneath the surface. As the water slowly clears, the leaky ship begins to move forward. Looking back, the characters see a curious sight; amidst the boiling water, the nuggets are piling on top of one another and fusing together. The center of the mass is sinking, but new nuggets continuously swarm onto the top. Eventually the nuggets create a column reaching to the seabed below, and the top layer begins to expand, creating a slowly spreading island.

Once the nuggets have begun to form an island, the area will be safe for naval travel. The nuggets prefer earth to stone, and will move directly to the island instead of chasing ships. If you want to close the gate, the nuggets could surround it in a layer of rock. Or it might remain open, or even continue to grow in size; the new island could become a tiny projection of the elemental realm of earth into the material world, filled with earth elementals of all shapes and sizes. And as additional nuggets fuse with the island, it will become more intelligent; in the future, it could actually be an interesting NPC and a useful source of information about the elemental realms.

While the damage to the party's ship is extensive, the vessel can be made seaworthy. If you want to penalize the party for failing to solve the problem on their own, water may have leaked into the cargo holds and damaged valuable goods. Or, if time is of the essence, the fact that the ship must limp to its final destination at a reduced speed may be penalty enough.

Experience



This encounter is not a combat challenge. While the nuggets have a Challenge Rating, they will not fight against the party; a character should not receive a full reward for sitting on the deck of a ship, picking off nuggets. The Encounter Level of this encounter gives you a baseline to work with. However, if the party spends a significant amount of time dealing with the nuggets or comes up with a brilliant idea, the Encounter Level should be increased to match the average level of the party for purposes of determining experience.

Water Stop

BY CHRIS AYLOTT • ILLUSTRATED BY GREY THORNBERRY

Encounter Level: 4

Setting: At sea

Summary: A routine stop for fresh water puts the party between escaped slaves and a force bent on recapturing them.

Background

It's good to be back on land, even if your sea legs have left you with a rolling gait. Bird song fills the air, fruit peeks out from behind green leaves, and the babbling brook in front of you promises a taste far better than the scum on the ship's "fresh" water. You smile as you prepare to fill your water barrels, and then you hear the faint creak of a crossbow string.

A high-pitched voice shouts, "Hold it right there! We have you all in our sights!"

Two months ago, the merchant prince Joy Ra'sall (rah-S AHL) chartered a pleasure barge for a cruise among the islands. He took along his nephew, two concubines, and a dozen slaves. He also brought several bodyguards — enough, he thought, to prevent any foolishness on the part of his property.

He thought wrong. An enterprising slave named Bel gained the trust of the guards, then overpowered them with custard tarts and a mild case of poisoning. The slaves put their owner and his entourage ashore and fled in the barge, hoping for calm seas and the chance to escape to a new life.

Unfortunately, the barge foundered in a storm. The slaves grabbed what they could and swam to a nearby island, where they have been marooned for two weeks.

There's plenty of food, water, and shelter for now, but the slaves have two problems. First, they need tools and supplies. Also, a ship from the Royal Navy has found Prince Ra'sall. The *Raptor* is searching for the escaped slaves, and is about to arrive at the island on which the slaves are hiding.

Enter the player characters, who know nothing about these events. They're sailing through the islands, minding their own business. Their involvement begins when they stop for water at a "deserted" island.

A Walk in the Woods

This encounter can be played at nearly any point in a sea voyage. If the ship has been at sea for a while, then supplies are likely to be low. If it's early in the journey, the captain (who may be either a PC or a non-player character) is topping off his fresh water at a convenient place. No trouble is expected — the island is an unexceptional waypoint with no settlements or large predators.

With that in mind, the captain sends a small party to fill the water barrels. If the PCs are members of the crew, then they're the logical choice for this task. If they're passengers, the captain will welcome any offers to help out, and will point out that the island is a good place to



EN ROUTE II: BY LAND OR BY SEA



stretch their legs and get off the ship for a few hours.

The ship drops anchor in a small cove. It's a pleasant day — the sun is out, and the beach has the quiet beauty of a rarely visited place. A brook empties into the cove, and the captain knows of a waterfall pool that's perfect for filling barrels, situated just a couple of hundred feet up the brook.

What the characters don't know is that their arrival has been noticed. Bel's former slaves have been keeping a lookout for pursuit. The slave who spotted the characters' ship has raced back to the group's hidden encampment, and Bel is preparing an armed welcome party.

 After landing on the beach, each PC may make a Spot check (DC 20). Any character who succeeds notices recent foot-

prints in the sand. These are too worn to follow, however.

The walk to the waterfall is uneventful, and the party has no trouble filling water barrels and getting ready to carry them back to the ship. The woods around the pool are thick, however, and unless the party posts a guard it will be easy for the slaves to sneak up on them.



Any player character posted as a guard may make a Listen check (DC 20). Any character that succeeds hears movement in the forest as the slaves approach, and may warn the party.

If all the guards fail their checks, the slaves surprise the entire party. The party is surrounded as described below, and any guards posted in the woods find themselves being

EN ROUTE II: BY LAND OR BY SEA

gently prodded from behind by the business end of a spear.

Unless a guard hears the slaves' approach, the first clue that anything is wrong is a rustling among the trees. Bel has sneaked up with seven of his fellow slaves. As soon as his people have surrounded the pool, Bel calls out to the party.

"Hold it right there!" he shouts. "We have you all in our sights! Throw down your weapons and nobody will get hurt!"

Bel is overstating his position. Only two of his fellow slaves have crossbows; two others have

makeshift spears and three are armed with clubs. Bel has a short sword and a magic ring taken from his former owner.



It's hard to see the ambushers among the trees, but any PC may make a Spot check (DC 20) to correctly assess how many people surround them. A successful check reveals that there are seven ambushers, that they are poorly armed, and that they are frightened.

The PCs face a decision. Do they fight this unexpected foe? Threaten dire consequences? Surrender? Or try to negotiate?

Bel, the Escaped Slave

2nd-Level Human Warrior

CR1; SZ M (humanoid); HD 2d8+4; 16 hp; Init +4; Spd 30 ft.; AC 10; Atk melee +5 (1d6+3, short sword); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL CG; SV Fort +5, Ref +0, Will +1; Str 16, Dex 10, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 14

Skills: Bluff +3, Climb +5, Jump +5, Intimidate +3, Sense Motive +5, Swim +5, Wilderness Lore +2

Feats: Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Sense Motive)

Equipment: Short sword, *ring of obedience*



Bel's Followers (11)

1st-Level Human Commoners

CR 1/2; SZ M (humanoid); HD 1d4+1; 5 hp; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (Dex); Atk melee +2 (1d6+2, club), or melee +2 (1d8+2, shortspear), or ranged +1 (1d8, light crossbow); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL CG; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 10

Skills: Craft or Profession (any one) +8, Wilderness Lore +2

Feats: Skill Focus (any one Craft or Profession)

Equipment: Two of Bel's followers are armed with light crossbows. Two more have improvised spears (actually daggers lashed to makeshift shafts), and three have clubs cut from fallen branches.

The Escapees

Bel is a large man — 6 feet 3 inches and 230 pounds, with dark skin and glittering green dragon tattoos on his hairless head. He looks terrifying, at least until he opens his mouth. Bel is a eunuch, raised from childhood to serve as a harem guard.

His position was largely ceremonial, and Joy Ra'sall treated him well. Nonetheless, Bel has dreamed of freedom all his life. When Ra'sall decided to take a cruise, Bel put together a plan for escape. He procured a mild poison, befriended Ra'sall's mercenary guards, and incapacitated them. Then he took over the barge. The plan was going well until a storm swamped the barge and sank it; Bel has been improvising ever since.

Of the seven of Bel's followers present for the ambush, five are men and two are women. They are a variety of builds and colors, and their ages range from early twenties to mid thirties. All of them are good-looking — Prince Ra'sall liked his servants to be pleasing to the eye. Two older men, a mother in her twenties, and a six-year-old child wait for the others back at the ex-slaves' camp.

In general, Bel's followers let Bel do all the talking. The encounter will move along faster if these characters stay in the background. The followers have a wide variety of skills, from carpentry and cooking and leatherworking, to sculpture and singing. If there's a skill that the PCs have need of, there's a 75% chance that one of the followers possesses it.

What Bel Knows, and What He Wants

Despite a fearsome appearance, Bel is a non-violent man who wants to do his best for the people following him. He bases his actions on the following information that he believes to be true:

- Joy Ra'sall has probably been rescued and will want his property back. The Royal Navy will be searching the islands for them — if not now, then soon.
- While these strangers are probably not part of the Royal Navy, they could easily give up the slaves to the Navy if allowed to go free. Many people would, especially with the reward Prince Ra'sall is likely to offer.
- On the other hand, the strangers are Bel's best chance for supplies or transport to a free country. He's not sure which he wants — transport would be safer, but the island is the first place that he and his friends have ever lived free, and they're already emotionally attached to it. If they can get the supplies they need, and if they can stay hidden until the Royal Navy loses interest in searching for them, this island would make a good home.
- His fellow slaves are poorly armed and almost completely untrained. Even in their current superior position, a fight will get most or all of them killed. Bel wants to avoid fighting if he can.
- If he can get the strangers to give up their weapons without a fight, he has a chance to

🌀 *New Magic Item: Ring of Obedience*

On command, this ring affects a subject as if the wearer had cast *command*. It is a favorite tool of slave-owners who want a symbol of power over their slaves.

Caster Level: 4th; *Prerequisites:* Forge Ring, *command*; *Market Price:* 4000 gp

negotiate from a position of strength. Bel believes it's better to risk making an enemy than to depend on the goodwill of a stranger.

With these facts in mind, Bel has decided to bluff the party into giving up without a fight. If they surrender, he can talk with them and decide if they're enemies or potential friends.

 If the party decides to fight, then Bel tries to overwhelm them before they can do serious harm to his friends. He has the advantages of surprise and position on his side, and can use the *ring of command* to great tactical advantage. If he successfully orders an opponent to "Fall!", one of his fellow slaves gains a +4 melee bonus to attack the prone defender. "Stand!" is an equally useful order that will leave an opponent flat-footed against a crossbow or spear attack.

Even with these advantages, Bel's band of slaves has almost no chance of defeating a party of adventurers. Bel surrenders as soon as any of his companions takes a serious injury. If Bel is knocked unconscious or killed, the other slaves flee into the woods.

If the slaves somehow overwhelm the party, Bel does his best to avoid fatalities. He offers the PCs several chances to surrender, and will risk his own life to prevent the death of a fallen companion or an opponent. If all of the player characters are knocked unconscious, they wake up to find their equipment taken and their wounds tended. Now that they're no longer a threat, Bel wants to talk with them.

IF THE PCS SURRENDER

Bel emerges from the trees to question them and negotiate if they surrender. He wants to know who they are, where they're from, and why they came to the island. He also answers any questions they have, since he hopes to befriend the PCs now that he's got the situation under control.

IF THE PCS ARE OVERPOWERED

If the ex-slaves win a battle with the PCs, Bel ties the characters to some trees and interrogates them as above.



The bits of rope used to tie up the characters are not very strong. Any character can escape by making an Escape Artist or Strength check (DC 20).

IF THE PCS GAIN THE UPPER HAND

Bel offers no resistance once defeated, and answers any questions the PCs have. However, he still has questions of his own for them. He is not aggressive or disagreeable, but he is determined never to be subservient to anyone again, even if it means his life.

A Plea for Help

As the conversation continues, Bel explains how he and his fellow slaves came to be here. He apologizes for the rude welcome he gave to the party, and asks for the characters' help.

Bel and his people would like to stay on the island, but to do so they need supplies — rope, canvas, axes, nails, bolts, and carpentry tools. The party's ship has all of these items, but giving the slaves what they need will make repair work more difficult on the characters' own voyage. The assent of the ship's captain must also be gotten, especially if the captain is not a PC.



If the PCs decide to give the slaves what they need, the ship's supplies will be depleted. Until the ship reaches port and is restocked, any roll to repair the ship is at a -2 circumstance penalty.

There is also the question of compensation. Bel believes that all the slaves can offer is gratitude, which may not be enough of a reward.



Bel does have a valuable treasure — the *ring of obedience* — that he has

not considered. If the PCs ask for this in exchange for their help, he's reluctant to part with it. It's both a symbol of his own freedom and a tool that other slaveowners can use against people like him. However, it's also his only bargaining chip, and he will give it up if necessary.

IF THE PARTY CAN'T OR WON'T PROVIDE SUPPLIES

If no supplies are forthcoming, Bel begs passage to a free port where the slaves can make new lives for themselves. Again, whether the PCs say yes depends on both practical considerations and their generosity. The ship may not have room for a dozen new passengers, and the PCs or the captain may not want to give passage.

IF THE PARTY REFUSES ALL HELP

Bel accepts the characters' refusal to provide supplies or passage, if these seems to be no way to persuade them, and asks them to protect the secret of the slaves' location.

IF THE PARTY DECIDES TO TURN THE SLAVES IN

Regardless of who has the upper hand, the action moves back to the ship if the PCs are belligerent or obviously intent on informing the Royal Navy about the ex-slaves' presence on the island.

If Bel controls the situation, he takes the PCs to the ship hoping to use them as hostages and gain control of it. Since the *Raptor* has arrived in the cove (see below), this plan will fail miserably as either the marines capture Bel or the PCs find an opportunity to escape.

If the PCs control the situation, they may simply herd the slaves down to the cove and turn them over to the just-arrived Prince Ra'sall. Bel makes one last escape attempt somewhere along the way, having decided he'd rather die free than live again as a slave. One way or

another, the encounter ends with the slaves recaptured or dead.

Met Any Escaped Slaves Recently?

Sooner or later, the party returns to the cove. When they get to the shore, they see that another ship has arrived — the *Raptor*, a corvette of the Royal Navy.

A few days ago, the *Raptor* found and rescued Prince Ra'sall. Its current assignment is to help him recover his slaves. Captain Ven Charlo (CHAR-loe) thinks this island is a likely prospect. He's pleased to find a ship here, since he can ask its crew if they've seen any sign of the slaves.



Any PC that makes a Spot check (DC 10) notices that *Raptor* is flying the colors of the Royal Navy. They also notice that a jolly boat from the corvette is tied up to their own ship.

If the party remains on shore, the jolly boat returns to the *Raptor* for a few minutes, and then comes ashore. The PCs encounter Prince Ra'sall, Captain Charlo, and 12 marines on the beach.

If the party returns to the ship, they find Ra'sall, Charlo, and the 12 marines on board. They've been interviewing the crew of the ship, but have learned very little so far. (The ship's crew hasn't seen anything that's happened on the island, after all.)

Prince Ra'sall is a thin man in his mid-forties with striking blue eyes. He keeps fit with regular exercise, but his hands are soft, with long

lacquered nails. He wears colorful clothes under borrowed leather armor.

Ra'sall wants his property back, though he'd prefer to get it back without a fight. He'll offer a substantial reward for the location of the slaves, and has enough political influence to help — or threaten — a group of PCs. If he suspects the PCs know where the slaves are, he'll be very pushy about getting that information.

Captain Ven Charlo is in love with the sea. The son of a sea elf who romanced a young human woman, he grew up in a small port town in these islands. He took ship as a cabin boy as soon as he could, and has never again spent more than a few days at a time on land since. Over the years, he has risen to command the *Raptor*, a corvette of the Royal Navy.

Charlo's slight build, green eyes, and light green skin make him unusual in a mostly human navy, but his crew respects his skills and love of the sea. He's also tougher than he looks, both mentally and physically. He finds peace in the orderly life of a soldier, but his heart still thrills to the shifting chaos of the sea. His current task puts the two sides of his personality in conflict.

In his heart, Charlo sympathizes with the slaves' bid for freedom. However, his duty is clear — he must assist Ra'sall in the lawful retrieval of the prince's property. He is determined to perform this task, but he doesn't have to like it. If the PCs claim to know nothing about the slaves, he's likely to accept their word for it — and if they can present a way for him to leave the slaves alone without shirking his duty, he might just agree.

Once the PCs are introduced to Ra'Sall and Charlo, the prince begins to interrogate them about whether or not they've seen the missing slaves.

Yep. They 're Right Here

The PCs may turn in the slaves, in which case Charlo will lead his marines ashore and recapture them. Bel and his companions have no chance against trained marines; a few may die fighting, but the rest will be brought back in chains.



If the PCs turn the slaves in, Ra'sall pays them a bounty of 100 gp for each slave. He pays a bonus of 50 gp per slave if the characters help him recapture the slaves. He only pays for live slaves; dead ones are useless to him.

Nope. Didn 't See Anybody

The PCs may lie and claim they saw nobody on the island. If they can convince Ra'sall that there's no one there, the *Raptor* leaves to search elsewhere.



Any character who tries to lie about the slaves must make a Bluff check, which is opposed by Prince Ra'sall's Sense Motive check.

If the PCs lie, and Ra'sall doesn't believe them, he presses for more information. He asks them to reconsider their story, reminding them that there are severe legal penalties for aiding the escape of slaves. He points out facial tics or odd tones of voice to Captain Charlo. He's less interested in getting the truth from the PCs than he is in rousing Charlo's suspicions.



If the PCs failed in their check against Ra'sall, each PC must make another Bluff check. This check is opposed by Captain Charlo's Sense Motive check.

If Captain Charlo believes the party's story, he dismisses the prince's suspicions and leaves. If he doesn't believe the PCs, he takes a search party to the island. Unless the PCs interfere,

Joy Ra'sall Merchant Prince

3rd-Level Human Aristocrat

CR 2; SZ M (humanoid); HD 3d4+3; hp 10; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+2 Dex, +2 leather armor); Atk melee +4 (1d6, short sword); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL LN; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +6; Str 11, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 15

Skills: Appraise +4, Bluff +4, Diplomacy +6, Gather Information +4, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (geography) +2, Read Lips +2, Ride +4, Sense Motive +7

Feats: Iron Will, Skill Focus (Sense Motive), Weapon Finesse (short sword)



Captain Ven Charlo

3rd-Level Half-Elf Expert (Sea Captain)

CR 2; SZ M (humanoid); HD 3d6+3; hp 13; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+2 Dex, +2 leather armor); Atk melee +2 (1d6, short sword); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Immunities, Low-light Vision; AL LG; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +4; Str 11, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 13

Skills: Appraise +3, Climb +6, Diplomacy +6, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (geography) +8, Listen +6, Profession (sailor) +8,

Search +3, Sense Motive +5, Spot +6, Swim +6, Use Rope +4

Feats: Endurance, Toughness

Half-Elven Traits (Ex): Half-elves are immune to magic *sleep* spells and effects, have a +2 racial bonus to Will saves against enchantment spells or effects, and have Low-light Vision that lets them see twice as far as a human in starlight, moonlight, or torchlight. For all special abilities and effects, a half-elf is considered an elf.



Marines (24)

2nd-Level Human Warriors

CR 1; SZ M (humanoid); HD 2d8+9; hp 18; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+1 Dex, +3 studded leather armor); Atk melee +4 (1d6+2, short sword), or ranged +4 (1d8, light crossbow); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL LN; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 10

Skills: Climb +4, Jump +4, Profession (sailor) +2, Use Rope +2, Swim +4

Feats: Toughness, Weapon Focus (light crossbow)

Captain Charlo has 24 marines on board for ship defense and boarding actions. He is unlikely to take more than twelve ashore at any one time, and always leaves at least six on board the *Raptor* to guard the ship.

party to the island. Unless the PCs interfere, the search party recaptures the slaves.

Leave Them Alone!

The player characters have several options if they want to prevent the slaves' capture. They can fight Captain Charlo and his marines, possibly taking the captain or Prince Ra'sall hostage, but this course of action is likely to make them outlaws. They can try to convince the captain to look the other way and let the slaves go free. Or they can try to sneak the slaves aboard their own ship and flee the harbor.

The best solution, however, may be to buy the slaves from Ra'sall and set them free. Ra'sall isn't a merchant prince for nothing — put enough gold in his hand and he'll cheerfully drop his plans for retribution.



Ra'sall's slaves don't come cheap — he demands 500 gp for each of the 12 slaves. A player character may bargain that price down to 300 gp for each slave by making a Diplomacy check, which is opposed by Prince Ra'sall's Diplomacy check.

Virtue Is Its Own Reward

There aren't many tangible rewards for the party in this encounter. They may earn a reward for turning in the slaves, or gain Bel's ring in exchange for providing assistance. However, the most important gain for the party may be to its karma.

If the PCs choose to help the slaves and succeed, then an NPC who is connected to these events should do them an equally good turn in a later adventure. Some possibilities include:

- A relative of a slave grateful for a loved one's return.
- An enemy of Ra'sall who is pleased by his rival's misfortune.
- The slaves themselves, who have succeeded in finding better lives and are now in a position to do the PCs a favor.

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*Appendix II:
Encounter Locations*

COUNTRYSIDE

Hare Today, Gone Tomorrow
Hellcows
Purple Storm
The Door

TRAVEL BY SEA

Blood Vessel
Death from Above and Below
Devil's Breath
Figurehead
Lure of the Serpent
Purple Storm
Sea of Stones
The Bubblesphere
Water Stop

VILLAGE OR CITY

Ditty Bag
Hellcows
Message in a Bottle
Purple Storm

*Appendix III:
Encounter Levels*

EL ENCOUNTER

- 1 Message in a Bottle
 - 2 Blood Vessel
 - 2 The Door
 - 3 Hare Today, Gone Tomorrow
 - 4 Sea of Stones
 - 4 Water Stop
 - 5 Purple Storm
 - 5 Hellcows
 - 5 Death from Above and Below*
 - 5 The Bubblesphere
 - 7 Figurehead*
 - 9 Ditty Bag
 - 10 Lure of the Serpent
 - 10 Devil's Breath
 - 12 Figurehead*
 - 14 Death from Above and Below*
 - 20 Death from Above and Below*
- * Variable EL



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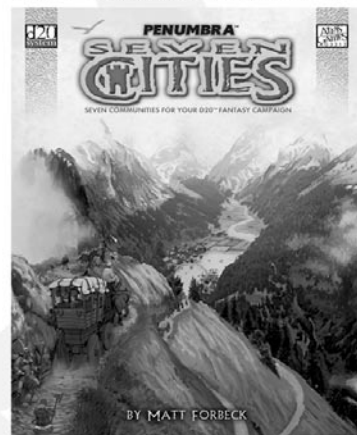


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