Escalati⭘6N!

THE HIGH SEAS

10

JAY

CURSE OF THE AVALON

GODDEN

13th AGE COMMUNITY USE

Imperial Dispatch

Having grown up in Southern California, Disneyland attractions left an early impression on me. Long before the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie series, I would compare movies and TV shows to the swashbuckling action I experienced on the Pirates of the Caribbean ride. This childhood connection led to a sense of excitement when the community voted for "Pirates and Nautical Fantasy" as the theme of Escalation Issue 10.

Having run a couple campaigns where the Midland Sea featured heavily, I wish I'd had access to the wide range of articles in this issue. My games would have been richer if I'd incorporated the pirate-themed monsters, icons, factions, magic items, voyage rules, and swashbuckling encounters. You could really flesh out *The Strangling Sea* using these materials. Don't stop there just because these articles were written with nautical settings in mind. Many of them will encourage more cinematic, pulp action to your games, regardless of where they're located.

To those of you who contributed to this issue, thank you for sharing your articles and artwork with the community. The Escalation team's next project is the *Red Moon and Warring Kingdoms* book, describing how to play Lunar characters in 13th Age Glorantha. It may be a while before we come up for air, so please be patient with us in the meantime.

Gratefully yours,
Tim Baker

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMUNITY USE POLICIES

Pirates in the Current Age

By Ryan Shatford

Pirates in the Current Age

This article presents potential pirate crew members that could be fought at each of the tiers of the game. Individual members can be adjusted to move them to different tiered crews if you prefer; after all, there's no reason you couldn't have a 3rd-level sea priest or a 12th-level legend of the seas who's entire schtick is that they have a proto-shotgun. Mix and match which crew members a ship has—not every single ship has to be led by an NPC with the word "captain" in their title.

Adventurer Tier

Adventurer tier pirate crews are dangerous relative to the normal person, but fall quickly under the major powers of the world. They stick to the most mundane and easiest targets, hoping to avoid drawing the full ire of an icon, or even just an actually-experienced adventuring party. The lucky ones plunder an inexperienced party carting their claimed treasures, or a wealthy merchant who skimped a bit on their protection fees, and can retire young without making real names for themselves. Most of the rest just die.

Pirate Scoundrel

This is not the stat block for a pirate that doesn't do anything.
2nd level troop [HUMANOID]
Initiative: +5

Cutlass +6 vs. AC—7 damage
  Gang Up: The pirate gains a +2 bonus to attack and damage if another ally is engaged with the target.

R: Poorly Maintained Pistol +6 vs. AC (one nearby enemy or one far away enemy at -2 atk)—8 damage
  Natural 1: The pistol explodes, dealing 1d6 damage to the pirate and it can no longer use this attack.
  Limited Use: The pirate can recharge this attack by spending a quick action to reload.
  Rigging Monkey: The pirate can climb through a ship's rigging as easily as it walks on the ground. While on a ship, the pirate can't be intercepted as long as it chooses to move by swinging on a rope or otherwise using the environment.

AC	17	
PD	16	**HP 38**
MD	13	
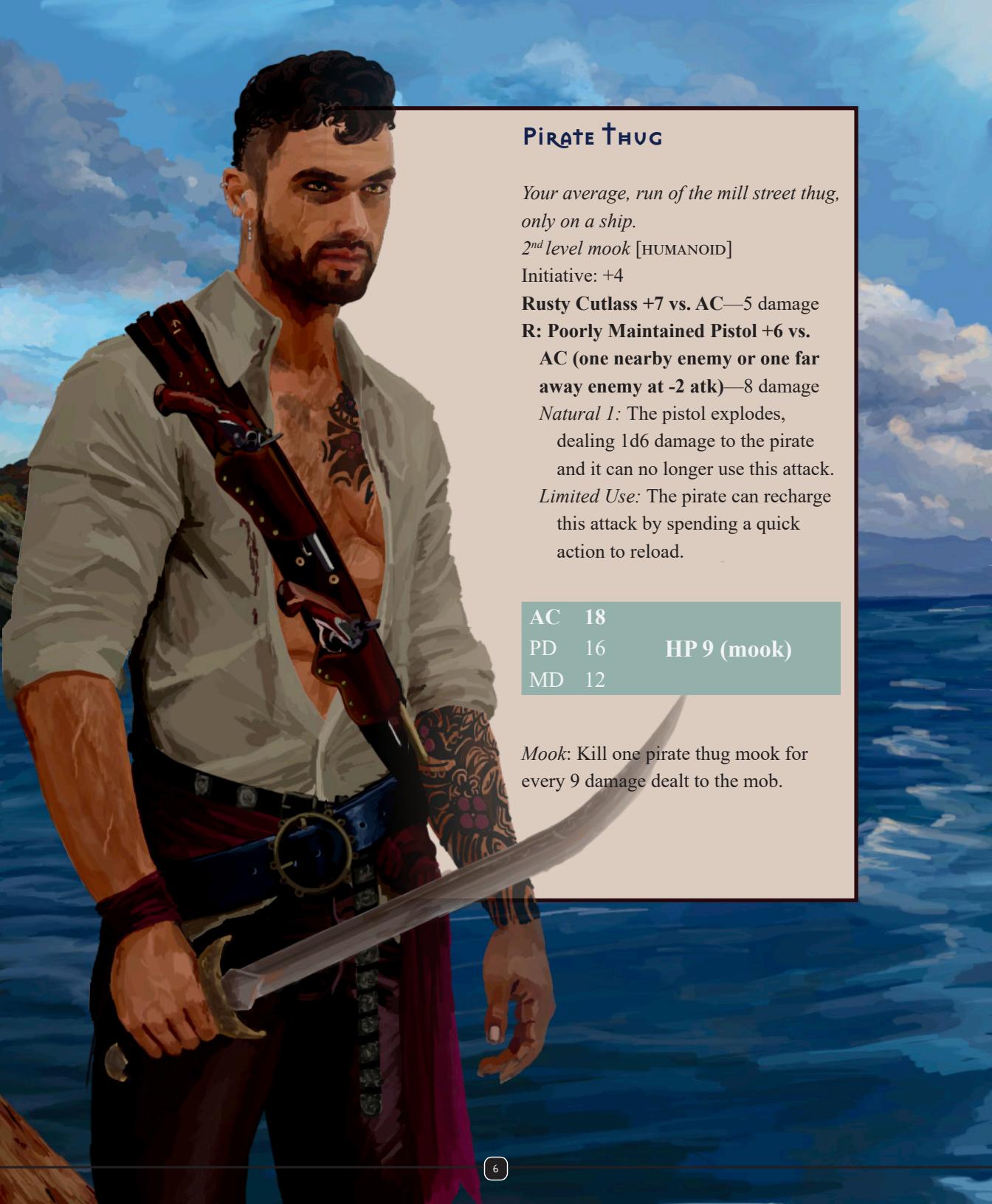
Pirate Thug

Your average, run of the mill street thug, only on a ship.

2nd level mook [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +4

Rusty Cutlass +7 vs. AC—5 damage

R: Poorly Maintained Pistol +6 vs. AC (one nearby enemy or one far away enemy at -2 atk)—8 damage

Natural 1: The pistol explodes, dealing 1d6 damage to the pirate and it can no longer use this attack.

Limited Use: The pirate can recharge this attack by spending a quick action to reload.

AC	18	
PD	16	**HP 9 (mook)**
MD	12	

Mook: Kill one pirate thug mook for every 9 damage dealt to the mob.

Pirate with a Blunderbuss

He's got a boomstick, and not much else to hold on to. Maybe making a single, incredibly dangerous weapon your entire personality was a bad life choice.

2nd level archer [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +5

Cutlass +6 vs. AC—6 damage

R: Blunderbuss +8 vs. AC (1d3 nearby enemies in a group)—4 damage

Natural 14+: The target pops free from all enemies engaged with it and loses its next move action.

Natural 1: After resolving this attack, blunderbuss explodes. The pirate takes 10 damage and can't make this attack again, and makes an exploding weapon attack as a free action.

Limited Use: The pirate can recharge this attack by spending a quick action to reload.

[Special Trigger] **C: Exploding Weapon +6 vs. PD (1d4 random nearby creatures)** —6 fire damage

AC	17	
PD	15	**HP 40**
MD	12	

Pirate Bully

Motivates the crew with threats of whipping and keelhauling. Threatens you with them as well, in fact.

3rd level leader [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +6

Cat o' Nine Tails +8 vs. AC—10 damage

Natural Even Hit or Miss: Each nearby friendly mook deals +3 damage with a successful melee attack before the pirate's next turn.

R: Poorly Maintained Pistol +7 vs. AC (one nearby enemy or one far away enemy at -2 atk)—8 damage

Natural 1: The pistol explodes, dealing 1d6 damage to the pirate and it can no longer use this attack.

Limited Use: The pirate can recharge this attack by spending a quick action to reload.

Encourage: 1/turn, as an interrupt action, when a nearby ally misses an attack, the pirate can deal 1d6 damage to that ally and the ally rerolls the attack.

AC	19	
PD	17	**HP 48**
MD	13	

Pirate Musician

One of the most important roles on a ship, the musician raises spirits during long, boring days of work and spurs on bloodlust during the short, exciting battles that interrupt the work.

3rd level caster [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +7

Desperate Instrument Bash +7 vs. AC—8 damage

    Natural Even Hit or Miss: The target also takes 4 thunder damage.

    Natural Even Hit or Miss: The pirate takes a cumulative -2 penalty to all attacks.

R: Instrumental Interlude +7 vs. MD (1d3 nearby enemies)—5 thunder damage, and roll a d4 to determine the secondary effect of the music:

    1: Energetic Jig— One of the pirate's nearby allies can pop free of all enemies it's engaged with and move as a free action.

    *2: Ominous Dirge—*If the target has 15 hp or fewer, it's dazed and does not add the escalation die to its attacks while engaged with an enemy (save ends).

    3: Stunning Note— The target is stunned until the end of its next turn.

    4: Guiding Waltz— The target is confused until the end of its next turn.

[Special Trigger] **C: Exploding Weapon +6 vs. PD (1d4 random nearby creatures)** —6 fire damage

AC	17	
PD	17	**HP 40**
MD	17	
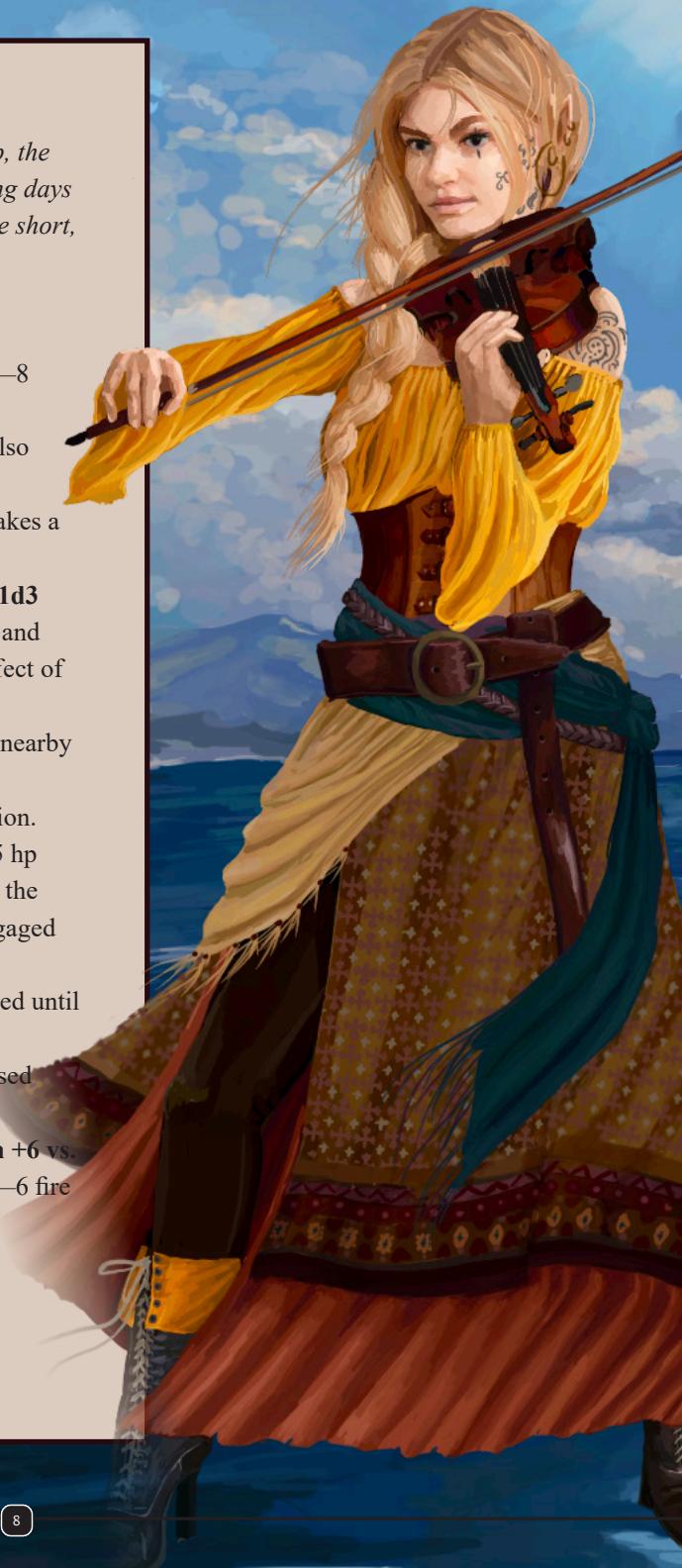
Pirate Sniper

A fight is best appreciated from as far away as possible, through a telescopic lens.

3rd level archer [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +8

Cutlass +7 vs. AC—8 damage

R: Rifle +8 vs. AC (one nearby or far away enemy)—10 damage

Natural 16+: The target is dazed until the end of its next turn

Natural 1: The rifle backfires, dealing 1d6 damage to the pirate

Limited Use: The pirate can recharge this attack by spending a move action while unengaged to reload.

Expert Sniper: If the pirate starts its turn far away from all enemies and does not move this turn, it gains a +3 bonus to attack and damage with its rifle until the end of its turn.

AC	18	
PD	18	**HP 42**
MD	13	

Ogre Pirate

An ogre on a pirate ship does what it's told…as long as it's told to do what it wants.

Large 3rd level troop [GIANT]

Initiative: +5

Flailing Anchor +8 vs. AC—16 damage

Natural 5, 10, 15, or 20: The ogre pirate can make a lashing chain attack against a different enemy as a free action.

Miss: Half damage

[Special Trigger] **C: Lashing Chain +8 vs. PD (one nearby enemy)**—8 damage and the target pops free from each enemy and is moved to engage the ogre pirate

R: Handheld Cannon +6 vs. AC (one nearby enemy or one far away enemy at -2)—15 damage

Natural 1: The cannon misfires, dealing 2d6 damage to the ogre pirate.

Limited Use: The ogre can recharge this attack by spending a move action while unengaged to reload.

Sea Legs: Any time the ogre pirate is popped free of an enemy, it can immediately move to engage a different nearby enemy.

AC	19	
PD	17	**HP 90**
MD	13	

Pirate Captain

This is a captain early in their career.
They've taken down some merchants, maybe
sacked a village or two, but are still laying
low.

4th level spoiler [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +9

Captain's Cutlass +9 vs. AC—14 damage
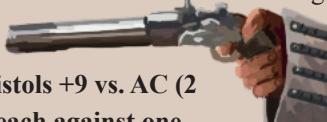
Brace of Pistols +9 vs. AC (2
attacks, each against one
nearby enemy or one far away
enemy at -2)—8 damage

Natural 1: The pistol misfires, dealing 1d6
damage to the captain.

Limited Use: 3/battle.

C: This is My Ship! +9 vs. MD (all nearby
enemies)—The target is hampered and
can't add the escalation die to its attacks
(save ends both). Until the target saves, the
captain and its allies can add the escalation
die to attacks against the target.

Limited Use: 1/battle, as a quick action.

AC	19	
PD	17	**HP 54**
MD	16	
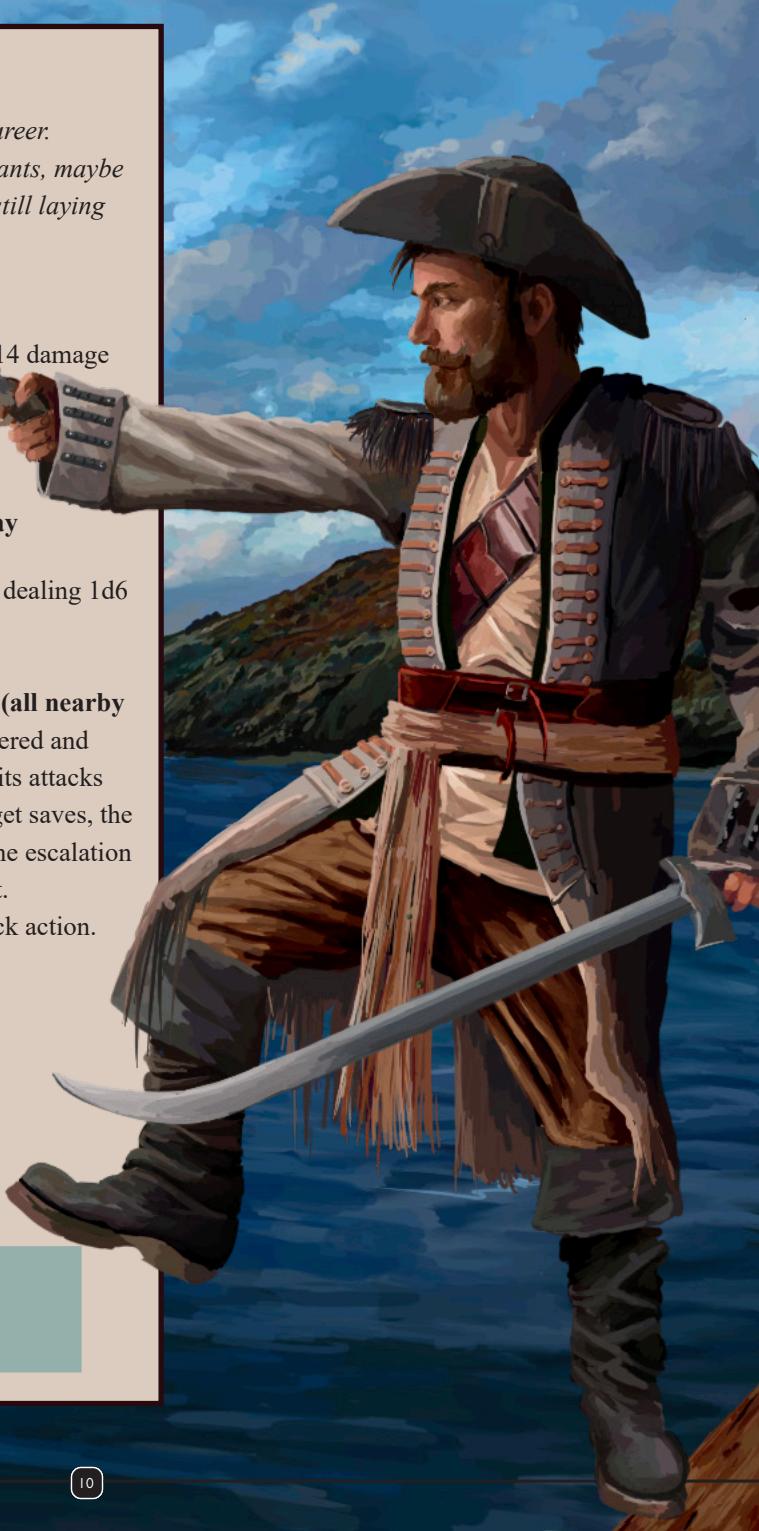
Champion Tier

Pirates who fight and plunder in the champion tier have quite a bit more skill and experience. At this point, the officers and captains start getting well-deserved reputations, and the bounties for their heads rise. Retirement into obscurity is a long-forgotten hope by this point, but the wealth and power that comes in its place is worth it for some. Regular guards aren't any help against these crews; you need equally experienced pirate hunters or the greater agents of an icon (such as the player characters) to bring them down.
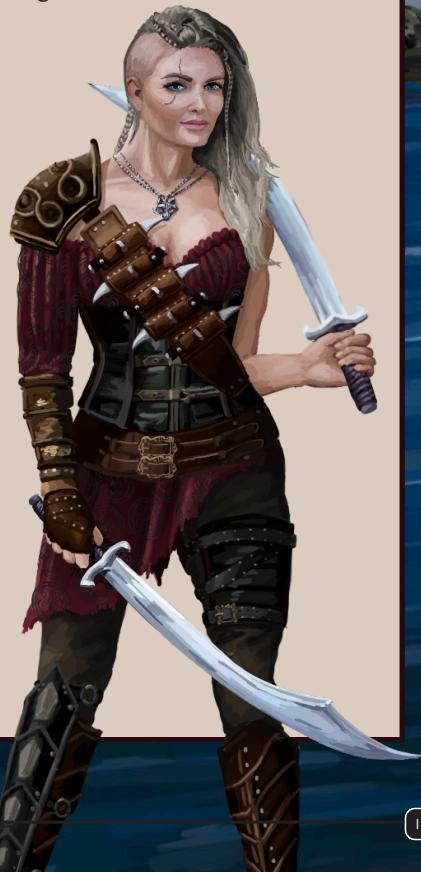
Experienced Pirate

With a couple years under your belt, piracy really becomes routine. Four months sailing with nothing to do, twelve minutes of pitched, adrenaline-pumping combat, then hopefully a pile of gold to spend on grog. Repeat until you get stabbed.

6th level blocker [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +11

Boarding Pike +11 vs. AC—20 damage

Natural 14+: The target is hampered as long as it's engaged with the pirate.

R: Rifle +10 vs. AC (one nearby or far away enemy)—20 damage

Natural 1: The rifle backfires, dealing 2d6 damage to the pirate.

Limited Use: The pirate can recharge this action by spending a move action while unengaged to reload.

Catch the Line: 1/battle, the pirate can pop free from all enemies and move to a nearby spot in the ship's rigging.

Pike Intercept: 1/round, an engaged pirate can attempt to intercept another enemy. Roll a save; on a success the pirate catches the enemy with the pike and engages them without disengaging from any other enemy.

AC	22	
PD	20	**HP 116**
MD	17	

Pirate Grenadier

A grenadier at full sprint outranks the captain.
7th level wrecker [HUMANOID]
Initiative: +9
Vulnerability: Fire
Heavy Club +11 vs. AC—25 damage

Natural Even Hit: The grenadier recharges one use of *firebomb*.

C: Firebomb +11 vs. PD (1d3 nearby enemies in a group, also targets the grenadier's allies engaged with the targets)—18 fire damage, or 9 fire damage to the grenadier's allies

Miss: 9 fire damage, or 5 fire damage to the grenadier's allies.

Limited Use: 2/battle

Bomb Belt: When a fire attack hits the grenadier while it has at least one firebomb use, it must roll a d6. If the result is lower than the escalation die, the grenadier explodes and dies. Each nearby creature not engaged with it takes 3d6 fire damage, and it makes the following attack against each creature engaged with it.

[Special Trigger] **C: Firebomb Detonation +13 vs. PD**—30 fire damage

Miss: 15 fire damage.

AC	24	
PD	21	**HP 100**
MD	17	

Pirate Gunslinger

A master at quickdraw and trick shots, the skills transfer quite nicely into battle. Carries enough pistols to arm an entire ship.

7th *level archer* [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +13

Axe and Cutlass +10 vs. AC (2 attacks—14 damage

Natural 14+: The pirate gains a +5 bonus on checks to disengage from the enemy before the end of its turn.

R: Pistol Shot +13 vs. AC (one nearby enemy or one far away enemy at -2)—18 damage

Natural Even Hit or Miss: The pirate can make a second pistol shot attack (no more) as a free action.

Quick Shot: When the pirate is unengaged and an enemy moves to engage it, roll a saving throw. On a success, the pirate can make a pistol shot attack against that enemy as a free action just before being engaged.

AC	22	
PD	21	**HP 108**
MD	18	

Pirate Rigger

Some pirates focus more on weapons. Others focus more on ropes and learning the rigging. This is the second type.

6th *level mook* [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +11

C: Dagger +11 vs. AC (one nearby enemy)—10 damage

Natural Even Hit: The target loses its next move action.

[Group Ability] **Rope Action +11 vs. PD**—10 damage, and the target is grabbed by the rigger. The target is stuck, weakened, and takes 5 ongoing damage as long as it is grabbed in this way.

Group Ability: For every four riggers in the battle (round up), one of them can use rope action during the battle.

Rigging Rat: The rigger doesn't provoke opportunity attacks while moving in a ship's rigging.

AC	22	
PD	20	**HP 23 (mook)**
MD	16	

Mook: Kill one pirate rigger mook for every 23 damage dealt to the mob.

Pirate Wind Mage

Someone's got to keep the sails full and the ship on course, regardless of the weather.

7th level caster [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +10

Dagger +12 vs. AC—12 damage

> *Natural 12+:* The target takes an additional 20 damage, pops free of all enemies, and moves to a nearby spot of the wind mage's choice. The target can't be thrown into dangerous terrain.

> *Natural 18+:* When the target is moved, it is thrown overboard the ship and into the water.

R: Cutting Winds +12 vs. PD (1d3 nearby enemies—14 damage

C: Hurricane Blast +12 vs. PD (all nearby and far away enemies)—14 damage and the target is stuck and hampered (save ends both). Until the target saves, the wind mage has a +5 bonus to attack rolls with cutting winds against the target

Aloft in the Breeze: The wind mage can fly when the escalation die is even.

Whirlwind Defenses: The wind mage and each of its nearby allies have +2 AC and PD against attacks from far away enemies.

AC	23	
PD	19	**HP 98**
MD	21	

Figurehead

A ship treated well by her crew sometimes repays that kindness with protection. Other times the captain just pays a wizard a giant pile of gold to animate the figurehead as a sort of living ram

Large 7th level leader [CONSTRUCT]
Initiative: +9

Sculpted Weapon +12 vs. AC (2 attacks)—20 damage
Natural 16+: The target also takes 15 ongoing damage.
Protective Wards: As a standard action, the figurehead can layer protective wards over its entire ship until the start of its next turn. Until then, each of its allies on the ship gains *resist all damage* 12+, and the first time an enemy on the ship makes an attack against one of the figurehead's allies, that enemy takes 15 damage from lashing ropes, spinning mast booms, or other angry ship parts.
Shipbound: The figurehead is attached to the front of its ship and cannot move unless it rips itself free. If it does so, it immediately takes 8d6 damage and takes a -2 penalty to AC and PD for the rest of the battle.

AC	23	
PD	21	**HP 190**
MD	16	

Legendary Captain

Once a captain gets this reputation, their legacy is set. Everyone will remember their pillaging for generations to come. Will your legend last as long?

8th level leader [HUMANOID]
Initiative: +12

Enchanted Cutlass +13 vs. AC (2 attacks)—18 damage
Natural 2-5: The captain can make a wicked hook attack as a free action.
[Special Trigger] **Wicked Hook +12 vs. AC**—9 damage
R: Pepper-box Pistol +13 vs. AC (1d3 nearby enemies in a group, or far away enemies at -2 atk)(2 attacks)—22 damage
Natural 1: One barrel of the pistol backfires, dealing 3d6 damage to the captain.
Limited Use: The captain can recharge this attack by spending a move action while unengaged to reload.
Fear Aura: While engaged with the captain, if the target has 18 hp or fewer, it's dazed and does not add the escalation die to its attacks.
My Reputation Precedes Me: Choose one of the following
• *Inspiring:* The first time the captain is staggered during a battle, all its allies gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage on their next turn. If the captain is killed, each ally gains a +2 bonus to attack and damage for the rest of the battle.
• *Tyrannical:* Each of the captain's allies gains a +2 bonus to attack and damage as long as the captain is alive. If the captain is killed, 1d4+1 of the captain's allies immediately surrender or flee the battle (lowest level allies flee first, mooks before all).

AC	24	
PD	20	**HP 144**
MD	20	
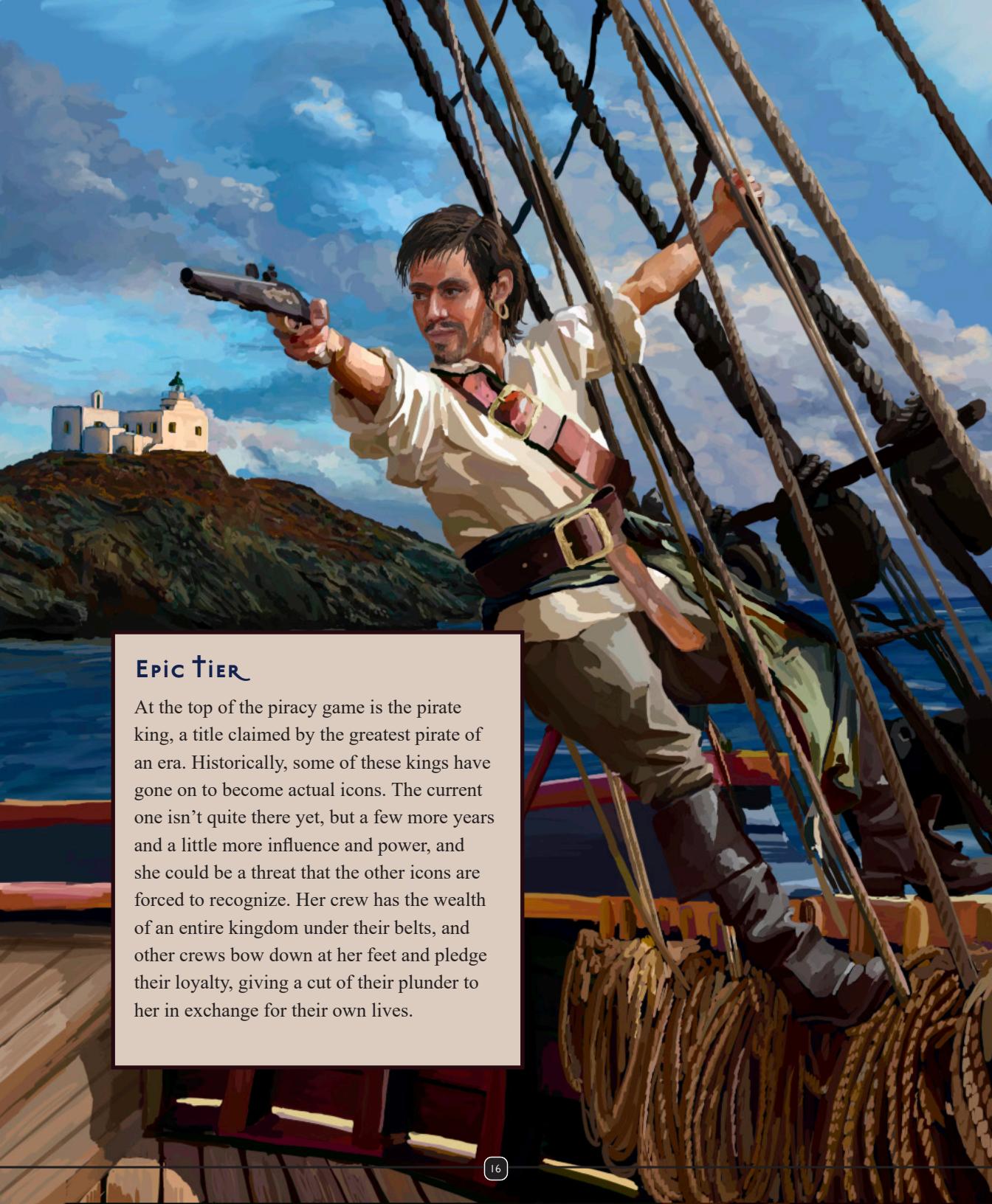
Epic Tier

At the top of the piracy game is the pirate king, a title claimed by the greatest pirate of an era. Historically, some of these kings have gone on to become actual icons. The current one isn't quite there yet, but a few more years and a little more influence and power, and she could be a threat that the other icons are forced to recognize. Her crew has the wealth of an entire kingdom under their belts, and other crews bow down at her feet and pledge their loyalty, giving a cut of their plunder to her in exchange for their own lives.

Pirate King's Crew Member

They're mooks to you, but any one of them could take an entire adventurer tier pirate crew solo, and do a number to a champion tier ship. Only the best on the pirate king's ship.

Double Strength 12th level mook [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +18

C: Magic Weapons +17 vs. AC (2 attacks, each against a nearby enemy, or a far away enemy at -2)—60 damage

　Natural Even Hit: The crew member can pop free from the target and move as a free action (usually by means of swinging on ropes hanging from the mast and such).

　Natural 1: The weapon gets upset, and the crew member is dazed (save ends)

Group Ability: For every three crew members in the battle (round up), one of them can use magic gear during the battle.

Magic Gear (group): As a free action, use one of the following effects. Each effect can only be activated once:

• On a hit, the crew member can deal an extra 2d10 damage to the target. The crew member takes the same damage.

• Before rolling a ranged weapon attack, the crew member can choose to make the natural attack roll a 10.

• When the crew member makes a melee attack, it can roll a save against one effect on it.

• The crew member's next ranged attack has its crit range expanded by 1. On a miss, that attack deals 10 damage.

• Enemies engaged with the crew member take a -2 penalty to attacks against the crew's allies.

• When the crew member hits with a melee attack, it can make one extra magic weapon attack against an enemy it's engaged with. That attack has an attack bonus of +10 instead of the normal.

If the players win the battle, they can loot a bunch of adventurer tier magic items from the crew members if they really want to.

Double-Strength Mook: The pirate king's crew member counts as two 12th level mooks when you're building battles.

AC	28	
PD	26	**HP 180 (mook)**
MD	22	

Mook: Kill one pirate king's crew member mook for every 180 damage dealt to the mob.

Pirate Swordmaster

A sword is a point of pride. You wear one around a swordmaster, you'd better prove that you've earned it.

12th level wrecker [HUMANOID]
Initiative: +18

Rapid Sword Strikes +17 vs. AC (3 attacks)—30 damage
Dual Hit: If two rapid sword strikes hit on the same turn, the pirate can make a perfect strike attack during its next turn as a standard action.

[Special Trigger] **Perfect Strike +19 vs. PD**—100 damage
Keen Edge: The crit range of this attack is expanded by 5.

R: Pressure Wave Slash +17 vs. AC (3 attacks, each against a different nearby enemy)—25 damage

Escalating Sword Duel: The pirate adds the escalation die to its defenses against attacks made with swords, and adds the escalation die to attack rolls against enemies wielding swords.

AC	27	
PD	27	**HP 380**
MD	21	
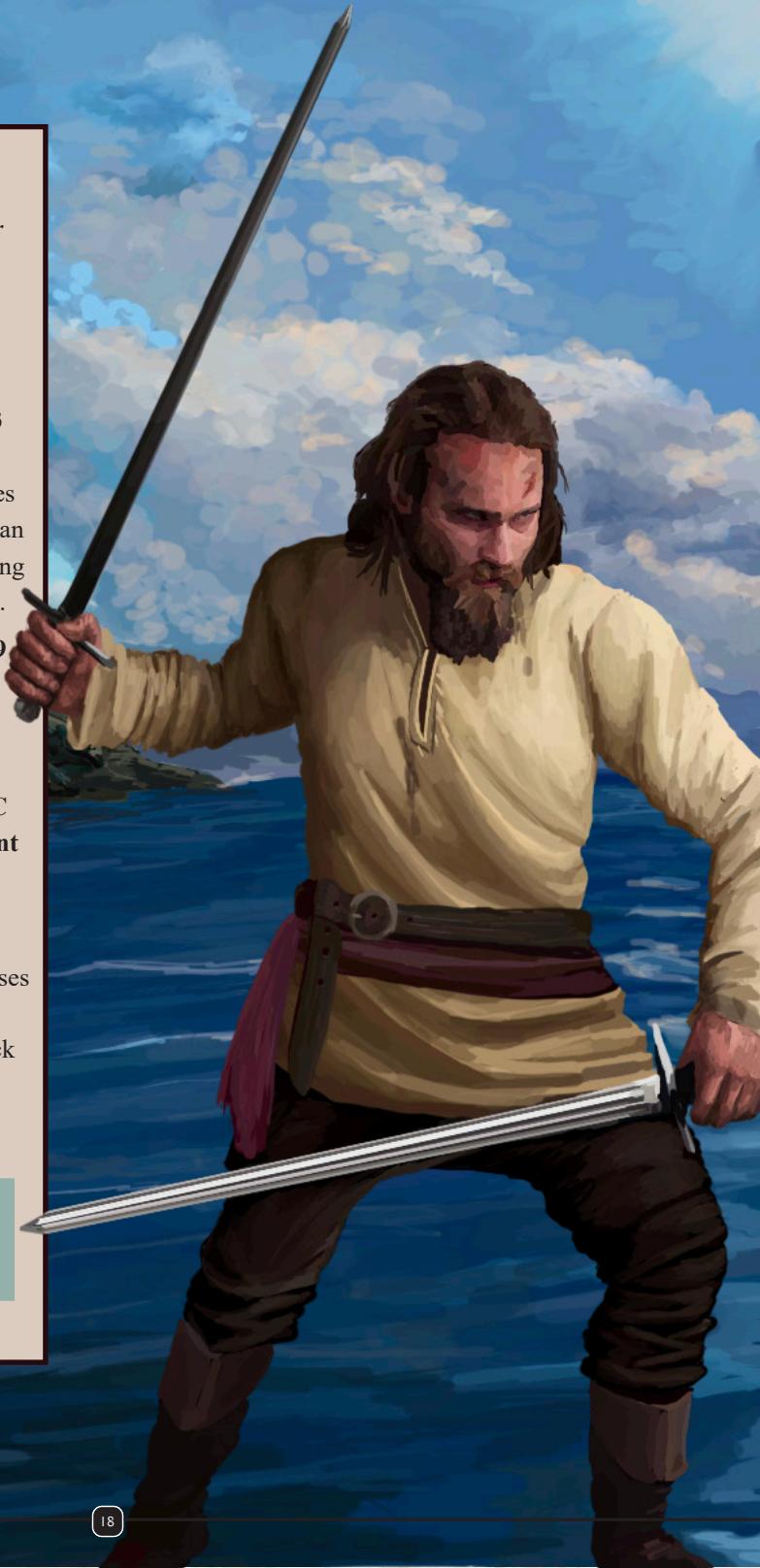
Sea Priest

Prayers to the sea are usually done to ward off storms, disease, or bad luck. This priest knows how to redirect that kind of energy right into you.

12th level caster [HUMANOID]
Initiative: +14

C: Blessed Trident +17 vs. AC (one nearby enemy)—75 damage
  Natural 16+: The target also takes 50 lightning damage as it's struck by lightning. This lightning damage is not doubled on a crit.
Curse of Scurvy +17 vs. PD—The target is hampered, vulnerable, and regains only half health when using a recovery (save ends all)
  Limited Use: 2/battle, as a quick action (1/round).
R: Curse of Drowning +17 vs. PD (one nearby enemy)—The target must start making last gasp saves, taking 50 damage on each failed save. On the fourth failure, the target drowns as water fills its lungs
  Limited Use: 1/battle, recharges when the priest ends its turn and no enemy is making last gasp saves because of this attack.
Guiding Currents: The sea priest and each of its allies can swim through the water without worry as long as the priest is alive.
Protecting Waters: Each of the priest's allies in this battle that are in or nearby water take no damage from missed attacks as long as the priest is alive.

AC	27	
PD	24	**HP 360**
MD	25	

Cannon Golem

A recent advancement in golem crafting, each of these behemoths is as expensive as a battleship, but far more destructive.

Large 12th level archer [CONSTRUCT]
Initiative: +16
Vulnerability: Fire

Sweeping Barrel +17 vs. AC (all engaged enemies)—65 damage
  First Critical Hit: The golem can make a cannon attack against the target as a free action. The attack doesn't hit any other creature, and doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.
Slam +17 vs. AC—80 damage
  Limited Use: The golem can make one slam attack as a quick action if it didn't make a ranged attack on its turn.
R: Cannon +17 vs. PD (2d3 nearby or far away enemies in a rough line)—100 damage
  Natural 1 on the First Attack: The golem takes 8d12 damage and doesn't make any more attacks this turn.
  Limited Use: 4/battle. While the golem is unengaged, it can spend a standard action to reload one use of this attack.
Gunpowder Stores: If the golem is hit by a critical hit that deals fire damage, it takes three times the damage instead of double. If it is hit by a critical hit that deals cold damage, it can't make an attack with its cannon on its next turn.
Inorganic Immunity: The golem is immune to effects. It can't be dazed, weakened, confused, made vulnerable, take ongoing damage, etc.

AC	28	
PD	26	**HP 650**
MD	22	

The Pirate King

Nothing in the world can tell the pirate king what she can't do. Not even the icons. The endless seas bow before her.

14th level troop [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +19

Sword of Storms +19 vs. AC—80 damage plus 60 lightning damage

> *Natural Even Hit:* The target is also dazed (hard save ends, 16+)

R: Hurricane Pistol +19 vs. AC (one nearby or far away enemy))—100 damage

> *Natural 16+:* The pirate king can make a *hurricane gust* attack against the target and 1d3 enemies nearby the target.

C: Hurricane Gust +19 vs. PD—20 damage and the target pops free from all enemies engaged with it, flies to a nearby random location and loses its next move action.

Fear Aura: While engaged with the pirate king, a target with 192 hp or fewer is dazed and does not add the escalation die to its attacks.

Freest Person on the Water: The pirate king can't be grabbed, stuck, dazed, hampered, or weakened.

Master of my Ship: The pirate king doesn't provoke opportunity attacks on its ship, and can move to any spot on its ship as if that location was nearby, even if it isn't.

Oceanic Escalator: The pirate king adds the escalation die to its attacks while on a ship, dock, in water, or in any location that is ship- or water-related.

| AC	30	
PD	28	**HP 576**
MD	24	

Nastier Specials

No Master: Icon relationships can't provide any help in battle against the pirate king.
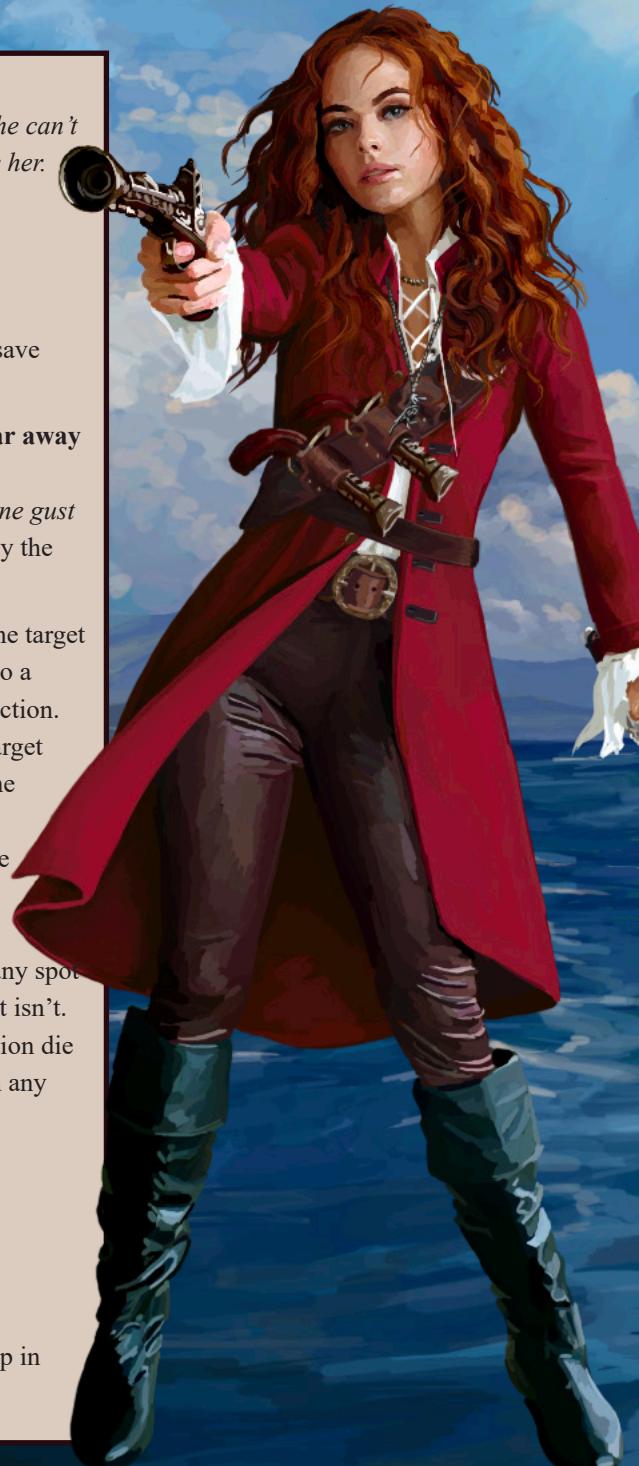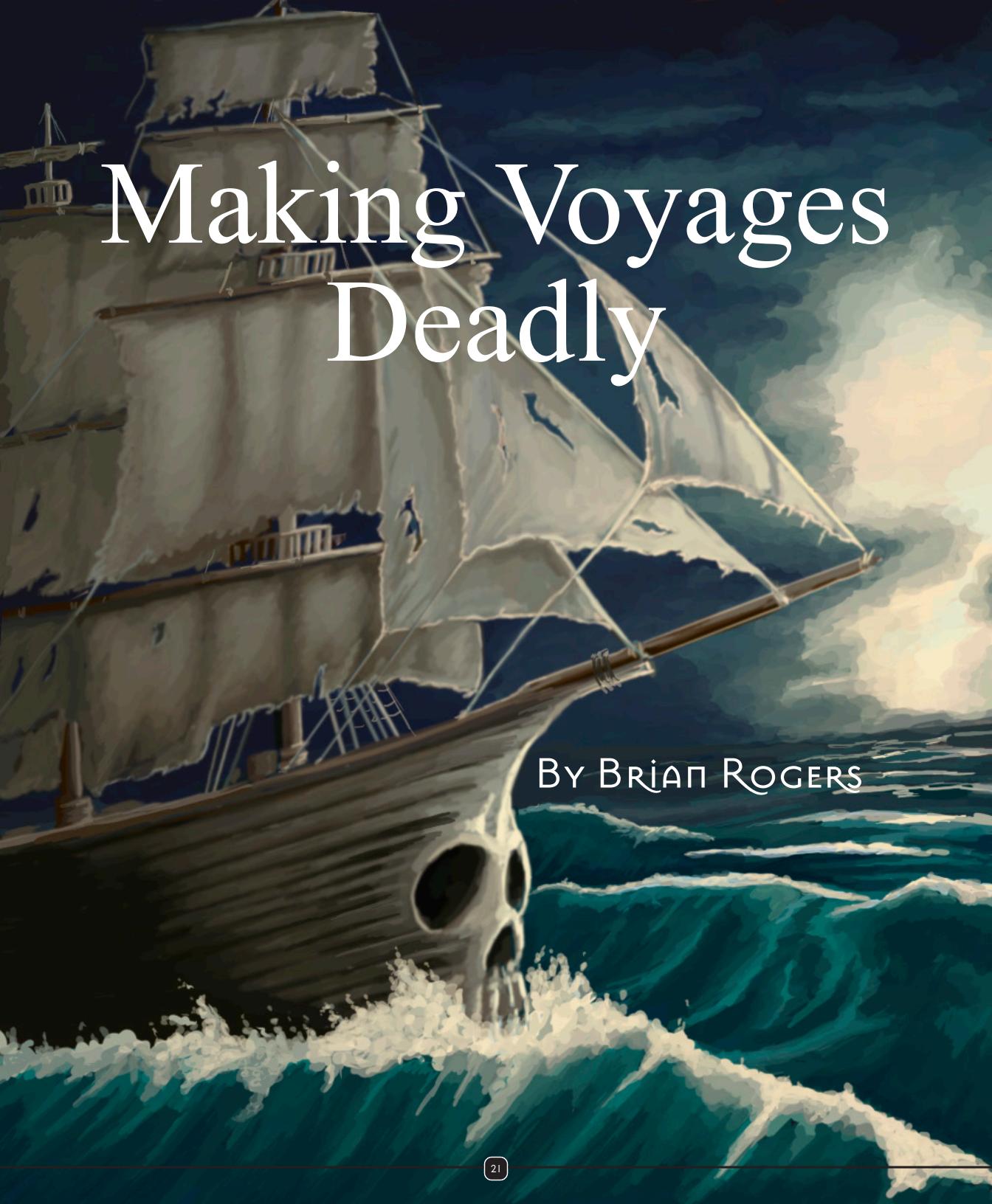
Making Voyages Deadly

By Brian Rogers

Making Voyages Deadly

One of the classic conflicts of fiction is Man vs. Nature, where people struggle to survive in punishing circumstances that cannot be tricked, nor reasoned with. In fantasy fiction, this takes the form of uncharted oceans, passless mountains, or tractless deserts, which our heroes must chart, pass, or...ummm...tract, I guess. And unfortunately, our standard game systems stumble just as badly as that sentence in getting across the menace of the natural world and establishing that there are worse things than monsters.

Here are some strategies to assist with that.

Using Environment for Attrition

13th Age PCs regain their recoveries, daily spells, and similar resources after four significant combat encounters. The game is designed around forward motion and rewards the players by letting them recoup all their personal power without the need to fall back, hunker down, and scrounge up healing. This is great from a design standpoint, preventing the 15-minute adventuring day and facing every encounter at full power, but it does make the idea of attrition complicated. Add to this how 13th Age eschews a lot of other F20 logistics, and you're running out of tools for the idea of some trips being dangerous or deadly.

So let's get dangerous. Under the general 13th Age rule of transparency, you should make it clear to the players that this cursed voyage is extra dangerous— one that is going to take up an entire "adventuring day," and will have different rules than the usual abstracted "hey, what's the worst that could happen? Having an owlbear rip an arm off?" sort of trip.

One: the day doesn't end until the cursed journey does

Rather than the adventuring day ending after four major encounters, it ends when the PCs reach their destination. *No matter how long that takes.*

This may play to the PCs' advantage: if they roll really well, are clever, avoid temptations, and evade attacks, they can get their full heal-up in two or three encounters. The real advantage to this is keeping more of their one-use treasure, but there's also an emotional achievement.

More likely, the PCs will end up facing at least four, if not more, encounters. The further they get on the encounter count, the greater the risk of losing some or all

of the party en route as recoveries and daily spells become ever scarcer. In order for this to work, the GM should present the players with a variation between encounters they can avoid and ones they cannot. The GM can keep throwing unavoidable encounters at them to underline the harsh and capricious nature of, well, nature, but it's better for player engagement to give them choices—especially if those choices come back to bite them later.

 The players can always throw in the towel and accept a campaign loss, but this means they have been diverted to an alternate destination. Yes, they get the full heal up, but they still aren't where they need to be, may have missed a critical deadline, and may be faced with a new set of challenges before they can get back on their way.

Two: Recoveries are resources

Rather than working up a new set of mechanics to insert "iron rations and fresh water" logistics, all discussions related to having enough food, water, critical equipment, etc. come in the form of directly attacking the PCs' recoveries. Inevitably, not having the right equipment will lead to losing some of your food and water. Not having enough food and water means you're not able to rest or heal properly. In the words of Gauntlet, "Warrior Needs Food Badly."

In lieu of combat or athletic encounters, the GM can toss any number of scenes at the players that describe a cartographic, logistical, or supply challenge and ask for a skill check against an appropriate degree of challenge. The GM can and should feel free to mix these up a bit, so that there are patches where the endless ocean is really quite pleasant (normal) versus the sargassos where the wind has died, the seaweed fouled your rudder and block your nets, and the pitiless sun beats down upon you (ridiculously hard). The GM will ask for three skill checks with descriptions of the challenges the party faces, and the PCs explain how they intend to deal with this problem. Ideally, at least two different PCs make a skill check, and the various challenges should be aimed at different types of skill. Still, if you have one PC whose shtick is that they are a master sailor, let them show off with the bulk of the rolls; it's their spotlight time.

Each one of these challenges is going to strip the PCs, as a group, of 1d4 recoveries, but for each success out of the three skill checks, the PCs get a -1 on the number of recoveries lost. A group of heroes who make three out of three skill checks have a 75% chance of escaping unscathed. Those who flub all three could be in for a world of hurt. Let the players distribute the recovery losses as they see fit: plenty of space for the paladin who has been reducing their own rations to feed the sickly wizard, or arguing over who has to eat the weevil-ridden biscuits.

PCs can try to use rituals to get around these threats, and the GM should let them: using a ritual from mass healing to pull a "create food and water" is a classic F20 image and a great spotlight moment, but more importantly, it's still a resource loss. The PCs are trading a daily spell for the loss of recoveries, and still feel the pinch of the cursed voyage bearing down on them.

Three: Athletic rather than combat

The 13th Age design aesthetic defaults to combat because traps are capricious, but we are looking at the capriciousness of nature. Dangerous travel should include some encounters that act as traps and obstacles from pages 185-186 of the 13th Age core book. A rope snaps, and the cargo collapses onto people. The cliffside trails collapse, forcing leaps to safety. Something huge passing by underneath bumps the ship and might toss people overboard. In any event, there's a space for a skill check/attack roll combination to deliver impromptu damage in a way that isn't combat. You'll want to have a few of these, because they don't measure up to a real "encounters," but they are moments where the PCs' skills can shine or fail and lead to the attrition of hit points.
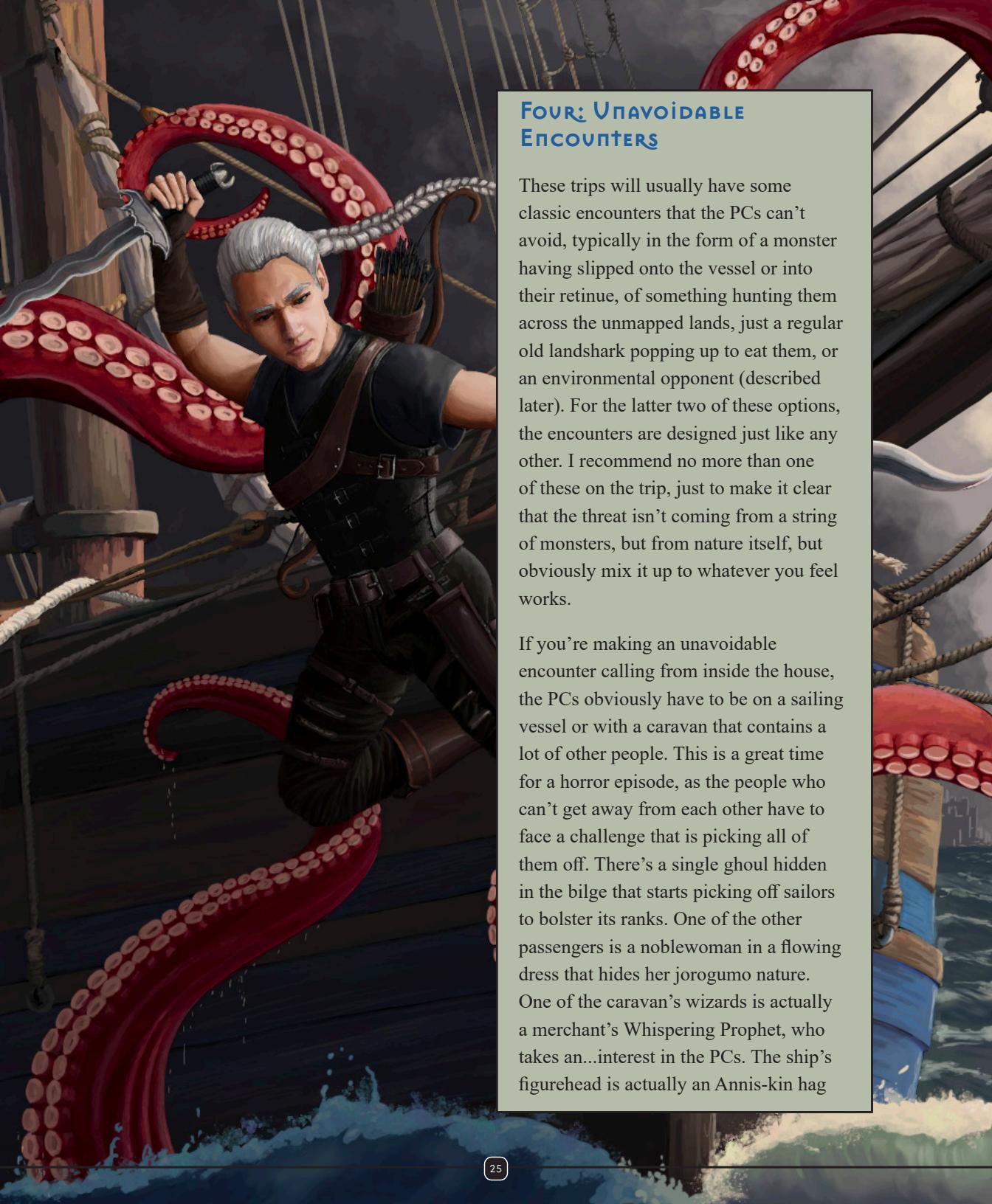
Four: Unavoidable Encounters

These trips will usually have some classic encounters that the PCs can't avoid, typically in the form of a monster having slipped onto the vessel or into their retinue, of something hunting them across the unmapped lands, just a regular old landshark popping up to eat them, or an environmental opponent (described later). For the latter two of these options, the encounters are designed just like any other. I recommend no more than one of these on the trip, just to make it clear that the threat isn't coming from a string of monsters, but from nature itself, but obviously mix it up to whatever you feel works.

If you're making an unavoidable encounter calling from inside the house, the PCs obviously have to be on a sailing vessel or with a caravan that contains a lot of other people. This is a great time for a horror episode, as the people who can't get away from each other have to face a challenge that is picking all of them off. There's a single ghoul hidden in the bilge that starts picking off sailors to bolster its ranks. One of the other passengers is a noblewoman in a flowing dress that hides her jorogumo nature. One of the caravan's wizards is actually a merchant's Whispering Prophet, who takes an...interest in the PCs. The ship's figurehead is actually an Annis-kin hag

in disguise trying to get away from the paladins of the last port, and just can't help herself from causing some chaos onboard. There's a vampire who has been buying up property in Axis and is just now shipping himself into the unsuspecting capital where he might blend in....

My preferred design is one unavoidable "monster is one of us" and one "monster randomly attacks" so that the damage to the crew's morale (and the crew itself) is the sign of weakness that explains the second attack: things go from bad to worse.

Five: Avoidable Encounters

Finally, there should be encounters that the PCs can opt not to pursue. There's a derelict ship floating on the horizon. The shifting snow has revealed the entrance to a lost dwarven outpost. Another cluster of warriors in the caravan tries to pick a fight. These are all things that the adventurers can decide to investigate or not. On a usual trip, the players likely believe that this isn't being put in front of them if it wasn't important to the larger story, so make sure to remind them that you're in a travel-as-threat setting. This thing is here. The world is a big, wide, wonderful place. There could be untold riches in there. There could be nothing. There could be something incredibly dangerous. The PCs have no way of knowing if the reward equals the risk. It's up to them. But every encounter they have saps their resources just a little bit more. They can't drink the treasure theygathered here if they run out of recoveries on the pitiless sands.

But if they don't go after it, they will never know what was there.

OK, so the GM will probably repurpose the work invested into a different encounter later, but the *players* don't know that, and the PCs certainly don't. They're leaving a mystery behind them.

It's always fun to have unavoidable encounters lead into avoidable ones, or vice versa. The PCs' ship is attacked by a black dragon on the high seas, but they had spotted it taking flight from a nearby rocky outcropping; doubtless its horde is there, just waiting, perhaps undefended. The PCs spot unidentified tracks leading from a looted settlement into a secluded cave; if they attack the thing in its den, they can recover what it stole, but they don't know whether it will turn to hunting them if they pass it by. An encounter with a desert ghost reveals the ghost's original body and the journal of their time with an exiled dwarven craftsman who needed medical care a century ago and doubtless is lying dead amongst his works in his stone workshop.

Avoidable encounters all attack the players' senses of greed and curiosity: do we really want that treasure? Do we really need to know what's going on? Do we want to roll those dice when we don't know when we're getting another full rest? This design adds an element of old school play: being off the map means you're outside the narrative, and the sense of story is not going to protect you from your hubris.

Using Environments as an Opponent

The other way to make the environment threatening is to literally make it the opponent.

Yes, it's a faceless, intangible, implacable opponent that ignores swords and bowshot, but since the goal isn't to defeat it but survive it, there are plentiful ways for heroes to assist in denying it its victory condition of wiping you from the face of the world.

When an environment attacks the heroes, it's turning the tense, chaotic final moments of a crisis situation into the equivalent of a battle. Yes, things may have been unpleasant before now, but it is these few minutes that determine who lives...and who dies. The world itself becomes the monster, and as the monster, it is a huge foe of sufficient level to account for 4 PCs, with the following abilities:

<u>**Escalator:**</u> The environmental crisis will build and build until the round after the escalation die reaches 6, when it passes. The worst of it is gone; the crisis is over, even if the PCs haven't damaged it enough to kill it.

<u>**Non-Sentient:**</u> The environment cannot be attacked by targeting its Mental Defense. It doesn't have a personality, it knows no fear, it cannot be mocked, nor can it be damaged psychically. It's beyond that. If you have any weird effects that do *psychic* damage but don't attack MD, it's immune to those too.

Abstract Concept: The environment is an abstraction of the conditions surrounding the characters, and it cannot be attacked by anything doing standard damage. Your sword won't hurt it, but the sword of a cleric with the sun domain talent who does *holy* damage with her attacks would, because it's not so much the sword but the divinity channeled through the cleric's faith. The environment may be immune to other damage types based on the specific circumstances—a hurricane is probably immune to *acid* damage, a landslide may not be—though the GM should always follow the 13th Age rules regarding targeting transparency.

Universal Engagement: Once the environment attacks, assume it's engaged with all the PCs. This means spellcasters will have to disengage or take opportunity attacks from the environment when they cast ranged spells. Classes with other ranged abilities also have to solve this problem. Players and GMs should come up with colorful ways to explain the disengagement that both make sense in the scene and spotlight the characters, while making it clear that the environment is exceptionally dangerous.

Harm Reduction: The hit point total of the environment is an abstraction of its ability to harm the PCs. It will lose its ability to harm them when the fight extends beyond 6 on the escalation die *or* the environment is reduced to 0 HP.

Spellcasters damaging the environment with magical attacks do so by blunting its force, redirecting it, or using the special effects of the spell to release arcane or divine energy that tames or interferes with it. A wizard can use a fireball to blast part of the avalanche approaching them, melting it into place, the explosion forcing a part of it aside. The cleric might use *sanctuary* for the will of their god to redirect the blizzard from them, forming a temporary bubble around them. A druid's *gust* spell directly counters the hurricane's winds, weakening it.

When in doubt as to the damage a normally non-damaging spell would do, find a 1st level daily spell and apply the damage it would do at the level of the non-damaging daily being used. For example, *sanctuary* cast at 5th level would do damage as per *spirits of the righteous* cast at 5th level: 7d10.

Ritual magic used in advance of the environment has the same effect: as the hurricane bears down on them, the party wizard creates a *shield* ritual to create a protective St. Elmo's Fire around the ship, while the party cleric uses a ritual of *mass healing* to undo every trace of rot and weakness in their vessel. Before the storm even reaches them, the PCs have dealt the environment considerable "damage" by reducing its ability to harm them. The advantage to the ritual is that it lets you convert a non-damaging spell into one that will "damage" the environment. Damage is rolled and applied directly to the oncoming storm.

For non-spellcasters, they can similarly damage the environment by finding ways to reduce the harm it is doing to the PCs,

to their shelter, or to their vehicle. Mechanically, this is using a skill check to attack the environment's AC, using the damage die based on the character class in the table below. As with traditional combat, PCs deal 1 die of damage per character level. PCs who don't have any other way to attack the environment do more damage than spellcasters who have different ways to shine. You expect your barbarians, fighters, thieves, and rangers to focus on saving endangered NPCs, holding doors shut, bracing shelter walls being pummeled by the wave of snow, or leaping across the rigging to cut free a sail and save the ship. That's their idiom, and they should be rewarded for it.

In order to keep up the dangerous scene in an action movie vibe, non-magical attempts to "damage" the environment are penalized if they are repeated. The first two times someone on your side succeeds in doing something to fight back against the environment, it does maximal damage. The fifth time? Not so much. The GM should have a handful of suggestions to toss out if a player suddenly gets stage fright or can't imagine the scene enough to come up with a clever plan, but these rules exist to stop one player from saying "I tighten the rigging" over and over. The goal is to get the players to think outside their usual combat visualization and find other ways to spotlight their PCs' skills.

Environmental Mooks

Depending on the nature of the environment, it's possible that they also have environmental mooks. These exist both to provide some different options for the GM, shore up the action economy, and allow a psychological moment for the PCs. These are not actual creatures: they are embodiments of the PCs' fear in the face of an overwhelming foe and approaching death. With the hurricane or sandstorm all around them, it's all too easy to see faces, figures, or threats inside the ever-shifting clouds, winds, and debris, and to imagine those reaching out, closer and closer, dragging you down to your death.

Environmental mooks share the qualities of *non-sentient* and *abstract concept* with their parent event, but they do not have *harm reduction*—you can't kill an environmental mook by bracing the door against the storm, you have to find a magical way to attack it, or just suck it up. Environmental mooks all have the following properly.

Parent Dependent: All environmental mooks vanish when the environmental opponent is defeated.

Action	Non-Spellcaster	Mixed Spellcaser	Spellcaster
First 2 Successes	D12	D10	D8
3rd Success	D10	D8	D6
4th Success	D8	D6	D4
5th+Success	D6	D4	D4

The Storm

Here's a sample environmental opponent to deploy while the PCs are on a seagoing voyage, on an island, or in a coastal town. Depending on the party composition, the GM will want to include one or more mook mobs of storm ghosts to further engage the adventurers.

Teeth of the Storm

Huge 6th level troop [EVENT]
Initiative: +11
Vulnerability: force

The Wind and the Rain +11 vs. PD (2 attacks)—20 damage
If this attack roll is higher than the target's DEX, they are Stuck until the end of their next turn.
First natural 11+ each turn: Teeth of the storm can make a bonus attack (now known as thunderous roar and doing thunder damage) as a free action.
Second natural 11+ each turn: Teeth of the storm can make a bonus attack (now known as lightning strike and doing lightning damage) as a free action.

[Special trigger] **Fist of the Ocean +11 vs. PD**—25 damage
Limited use: When an enemy engages teeth of the storm it can make a *fist of the ocean* attack against that enemy as an interrupt action before the attack. If this attack roll is higher than the enemy's DEX, they are Stunned (-4 to hit) for this attack and pop free immediately afterwards.

AC	18	
PD	20	**HP 270**
MD	22	

Storm Ghost

6th level mook [EVENT]
Initiative: +16

You're all going to die +0 vs. MD—8 psychic damage, and 5 ongoing psychic damage
Death is inevitable!: Each time the storm ghost hits with the attack, the crit range for all storm ghosts against that target expands by 1 until the end of the battle.
Flight: Storm Ghost are fliers that ignore the winds of their parent storm.

AC	14	
PD	21	**HP 23 (mook)**
MD	22	

Mook: Kill one storm ghost mook for every 23 damage you deal to the mob.

Sample Cursed Voyage

Let's assume the PCs are 5th level and are making a trip across the Midland Sea, either hired on as sailors or renting passage. The ship has a hold full of merchandise for sale and several other well-heeled passengers. The overall premise is that one of the other passengers is a jorogumo binding bride, her small retinue are already her woven, and she will slowly add the captain and sailors to her heart collection (though not the PCs, because she has no intention of courting trouble). This will make the crew underperform and lead to trouble later.

A possible sequence of events:

1. Just out of port, one cluster of sailors takes a dislike to the PCs and tries to start a fight over some perceived slight. These turn out to be discharged imperial marines of credible skill, and the players can opt to get into a good old brawl with them, or they can talk them down, ignore them, report them to the captain, etc. This quick, avoidable encounter sets up some members of the crew.

2. Several days out, one of the crew makes a basic error with something on board the ship that leads to something slipping/swinging where it oughtn't and endangering one or more of the PCs. Treat this as a hard champion tier challenge, which would do 4d8 damage to one PC or 2d12 to a small group. This would be a life-ending mistake if it hit anyone other than the PCs, and the captain metes out punishment that is disproportionately lenient or harsh, based on which would generate suspicion among the PCs.

3. The captain misses the signs of a storm brewing on the Midland Sea, and the ship is suddenly facing the teeth of the storm and an array of storm ghosts. The PCs have to take point against this menace as the captain and officers have already had their hearts taken by the binding bride and are operating well below their maximum capacity. This should be a brutal, punishing, unavoidable encounter, and they are left off course in the Midland Sea.

4. In the wake of the storm, the ship is damaged, the crew is depleted, and the binding bride is desperate to replace her collection of hearts, many of which were lost overboard in the storm. She either attacks one of the PCs or her attack on one of the marines from the first avoidable encounter is interrupted and loudly reported, leading to a confrontation with the jorogumo and however many woven and officers-made-heartless are needed to balance the battle. This should absolutely play as a horror fight on the damaged ship at night with the binding bride's scuttling feet over the deck in the dark.

5. When the PCs win, they are left on a ship with no officers and a depleted crew. Like it or not, the PCs are probably now in charge, and if none of them have any maritime skill, they'll have to get what's left of the former imperial marines on their side.

6. First things first: where are they? Getting back on course is a recoveries-as-resources test. The longer it takes for them to get their bearings and get back on track, the more recoveries they are going to lose. This will be a normal champion tier test if they have the marines' experience backing them up, or a hard one if they don't. PCs might call on their own skills, druidic abilities, familiars to scout for land, time in the Archamge's collegium studying maps, or other clever uses of their abilities.

7. Taking inventory reveals that some of the ship's stores have gone bad, probably due to the woven quartermaster's distraction. Another recoveries-as-resources test, this one hard, regardless. The PCs might engage in a spot of fishing to bolster stores, use cooking skills to make what is left stretch, use ritual magic to restore or create food, and so on.

8. Something huge in the water bumps the ship while one of the PCs is in the rigging. It's a DC 25 skill check to avoid 4d8 impromptu damage. If anyone rushes to the side, they only see something enormous and serpentine dropping lower into the water. The sea is vast and holds secrets.

9. It hasn't rained since the storm, and fresh water is getting scarce. The PCs are not far from port, but they have reason to be concerned. Then they spot a rocky outcropping in the distance, they realize that it might hold pools of standing water. Is it worth the risk? What could be on there? It's an avoidable encounter, as the island is home to some chuul who will happily swim after the ship if the PCs disturb them and then run away. On the other hand, if they do defeat the chuul, they get enough fresh, if brackish, water to ease or eliminate the final encounter.

10. Just when the PCs can see their destination through a spyglass, the sea goes dead calm. The cloudless sky is banging down and unless they went to the chuul outcropping, their water supplies are rapidly drying up. The marines are all for killing whoever is left of the non PC passengers (they know enough to not take on the PCs...yet), and the PCs have to either make one more round of recoveries-as-resources checks to stretch water and keep the marines in line, or devolve into one last fight to save the passengers.

11. Eventually, the PCs will limp the ship into port (or if they have no skills and no marines left to help, they can flag down another vessel for assistance) and finally end the adventuring day. Recoveries come best in fancy restaurants eating weevil-free food and drinking your weight in water.
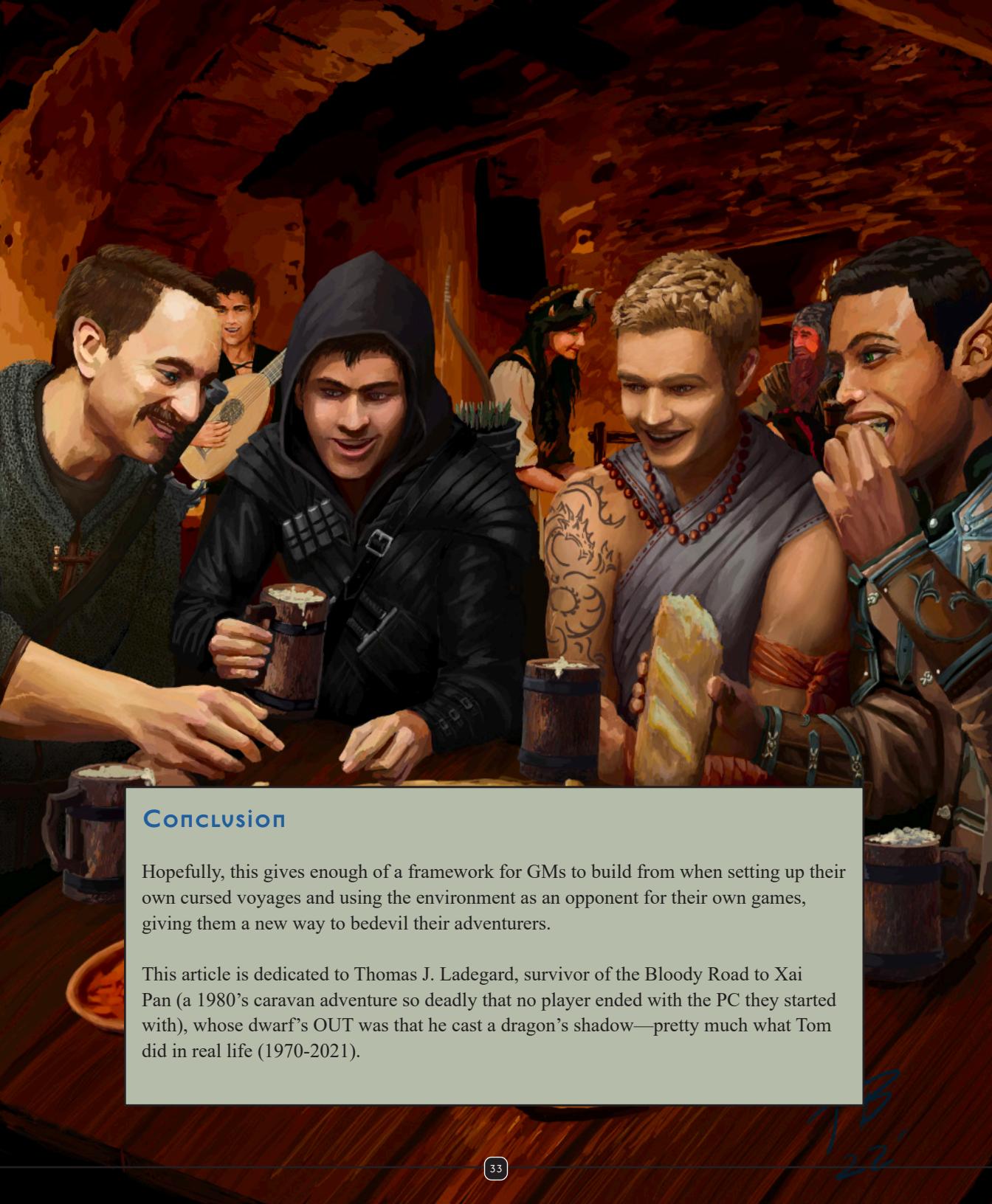
Conclusion

Hopefully, this gives enough of a framework for GMs to build from when setting up their own cursed voyages and using the environment as an opponent for their own games, giving them a new way to bedevil their adventurers.

This article is dedicated to Thomas J. Ladegard, survivor of the Bloody Road to Xai Pan (a 1980's caravan adventure so deadly that no player ended with the PC they started with), whose dwarf's OUT was that he cast a dragon's shadow—pretty much what Tom did in real life (1970-2021).

Welcome to Pirate's Cove

By Jonathan Charlton

Welcome to Pirate's Cove

Set sail for a beach with beautiful red sand, hazy sunsets that seem to stretch for hours—and treacherous secrets buried six feet under.

Pirate's Cove is a small adventure setting you can drop into your current campaign or use as a springboard for a new one. As such, while it suggests adventure hooks, characters, and types of enemies players may encounter, it does not provide stat blocks. Feel free to use the 13th Age monsters you feel best represent those threats and provide an appropriate challenge to your players.

Pirate's Cove can be located anywhere that works for your group. Likely locations include the Wake Islands, Shark Tooth Bay, and The Fangs—or anywhere along major sailing routes. Icons likely to have influence are the High Druid, Emperor, and the Prince of Shadows. This setting was written using the Book of Sandboxes tool featured at pelgranepress.com. It provides opportunities for swashbuckling combat, sly social encounters, and thrilling exploration.

Types of locations include:

- Strongholds—Places where that faction is especially strong and secure.
- Flashpoints—Places where the faction is likely to come into conflict, face danger, or seize an objective.
- Crossing Points—Places where the faction is entangled with another faction.
- Ruins—Spots that were once associated with the faction, but are now unavailable.

Pirate's Cove

Pirate's Cove is a narrow, circular coastal inlet that experiences warm, tropical weather. A small settlement of merchants, former sailors, and drifters, named Sunrise, has sprouted in the center of the cove. An imperial galleon has been anchored at the mouth of the inlet for several weeks. Further in from the beach is a lush jungle inhabited by a sect of druids who call themselves the Circle of the Typhoon.

Factions and Locations

Sunrise residents

Fortune's Favor Inn (Stronghold): The central hub of Sunrise is the Fortune's Favor Inn, which is built on the beachfront. The community does not have a formal government, but the innkeeper, a halfling named Bando Foxe, does a good job of keeping the peace. He also has big ideas about how to turn Pirate's Cove into a thriving tourism destination.

Rumors:

1. Bando has been overheard talking with someone in his office about a lost family heirloom—but no one else is ever seen entering or leaving.
2. The inn's chef, Eadbert, is looking for someone to obtain a rare herb from the jungle.
3. Every day at dusk, a cloaked drow arrives and sits at a table in the back corner and leaves after exactly one hour.
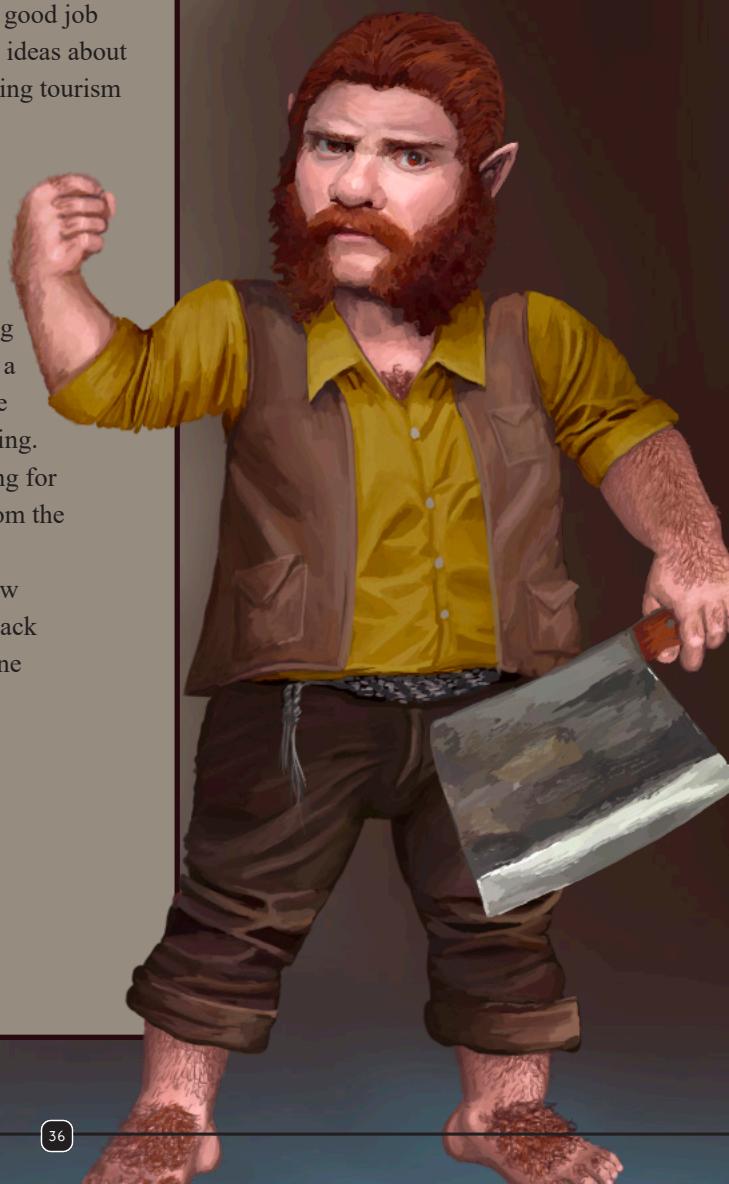
The Market (Crossing Point): Most people who come to Sunrise are just passing through on their way to fortune and fame. But some decide to settle down and make a living providing supplies and services to adventurers—and the occasional druid from the jungle. Sheila Strongarm, a skilled, no-nonsense blacksmith, often speaks for the merchants.

Rumors:
1. Sheila is looking for a rare metal for a masterpiece weapon.
2. Conflict is brewing between merchants who harvest fruit from the jungle and the druids who live there.
3. Kura, who sells beach glass, has been robbed.

The Crystal Cave (Ruin): The Crystal Cave is only a short walk from Sunrise—yet nobody goes there. What was once a source of invigorating spring water has been defiled by something that has killed several people. The very air and soil nearby are toxic.

Rumors:
1. The cave is now the lair of a green dragon, a demi-lich, or a dire hellhound.
2. A young elven woman named Iras has been seen scouting the area around the cave and taking notes.
3. The water was never pure—the cave and its spring were cursed by an evil sorcerer long ago.

Imperial Navy

The Defiant (Stronghold): The *Defiant,* a medium-sized Imperial Navy galleon, weighed anchor near Pirate's Cove a few weeks ago and hasn't left. The crew gets along well enough with the residents, but says little about why they're hanging around for so long. The *Defiant's* Captain, named Thane, stays on the boat with a skeleton crew.

Rumors:
1. Thane is plotting an expedition into the jungle to find an ancient arcane weapon.
2. The crew members stuck on board are increasingly frustrated with their long tour of duty, and a few are considering mutiny.
3. The *Defiant* is implementing an unofficial blockade of Pirate's Cove, charging a "docking fee" to other boats.

The Beach (Crossing Point): Most of the *Defiant's* sailors are taking shore leave in Sunrise, either staying in the inn or camping on the nearby beach, which is the main path to the town from the jungle. The sailors have ample opportunity to barter, swap stories, and fish the day away.

Rumors:
1. Some of the sailors want to desert the *Defiant* and permanently experience island life.
2. The druids seem surprisingly happy to provide the sailors with fresh fruit in exchange for trinkets and small amounts of coin.
3. The town's food supplies are dwindling with the sailors' voracious appetites, even though the sailors pay a fair price.

The Wreck of the Indomitable (Ruin): The *Defiant* is not the first ship to stop at Pirate's Cove. A few months ago, the *Indomitable* weighed anchor around the same area. One morning a few days later, all that was left was driftwood. Captain Thane has been careful to not go near the same spot.

Rumors:
1. The druids summoned a storm to destroy the ship, fearing for the discovery of their secrets. Actually, they summoned a Kraken, or it was a great white whale.
2. Some of the sailors say they've seen ghosts of their drowned comrades, begging for release to the afterlife.
3. The first mate of the *Defiant,* Rancent, wants to make his name by avenging the *Indomitable*.

Circle of the Typhoon

Grove of the Ancients (Stronghold): The Circle of the Typhoon is fanatically committed to the protection of nature and wildlife—making the Grove of the Ancients a perfect home for them. The grove is surrounded by an impenetrable wall of vines and provides abundant food and fresh water. The druids also boast a legion of loyal animals in the area.

Rumors:
1. A leopard has started attacking the druids for no apparent reason.
2. A teen girl among the circle has fallen in love with a sailor and is sharing their secrets.
3. A palm tree in the grove has started talking in riddles and rhyme.
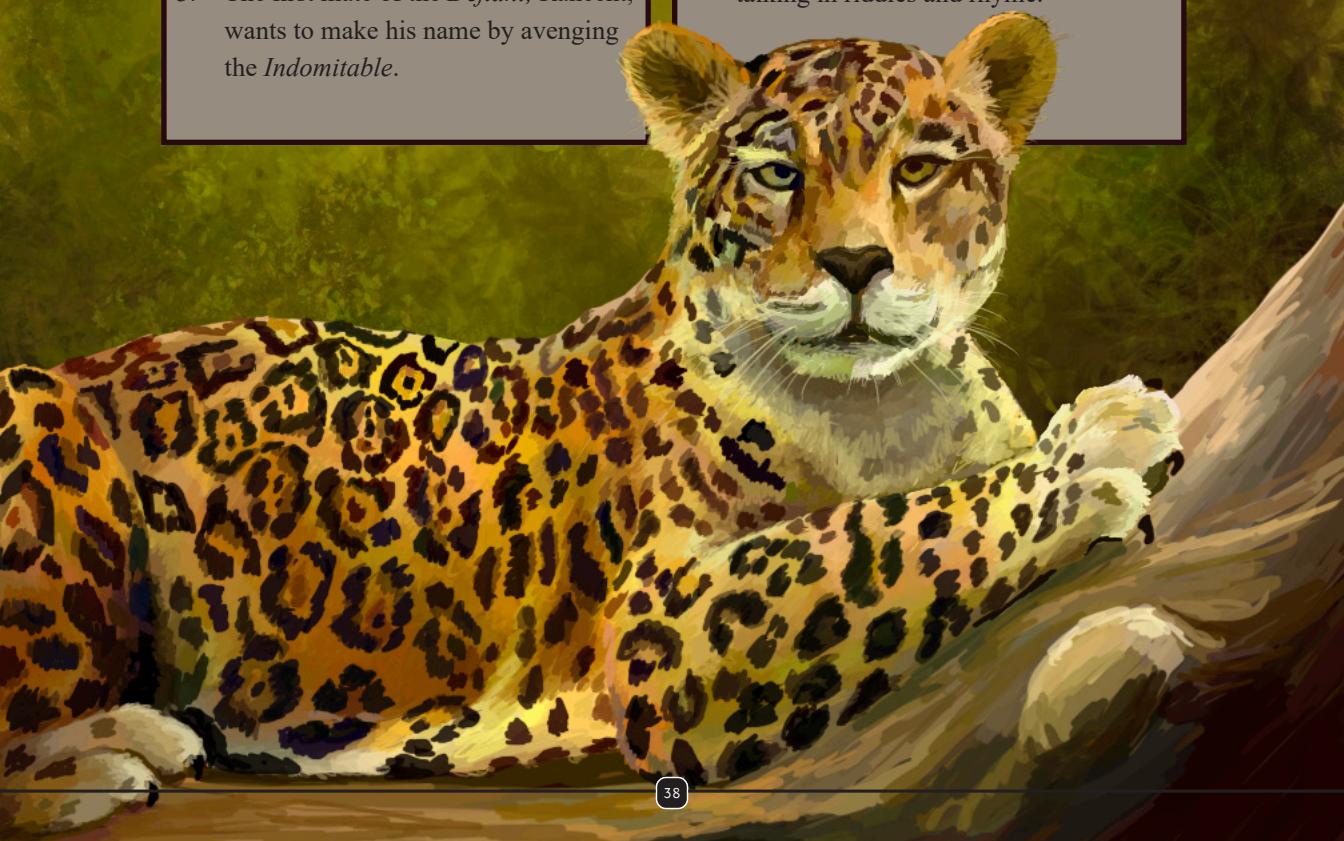
Angry Otter River (Flashpoint): Since the cove's new residents had to abandon their nearby spring, the Angry Otter River is the main source of fresh water on the island. It's within the jungle, so the druids consider it theirs to share as they please. The town's residents and the *Defiant's* sailors, however, don't recognize the druids' claim. If the three sides can't work out an agreement, the river could run red before long.

Rumors:

1. Someone has poisoned the river, and the druids are blamed.
2. One of the druids was recently swallowed whole by a giant fish.
3. A water nymph has been seen singing mournful songs by a waterfall.

Cave of the Jaguar God (Ruin): The druids believe that in a former age, another sect lived on the cove and worshiped an icon called the Jaguar God, who shared her power to protect the wilderness. They believe that when the Jaguar God died, she blessed her lair with her wild essence to sustain the druids. But in this age that power is...gone. The cave appears to be nothing but an empty tomb.

Rumors:

1. The Jaguar God has been reborn among the druids—but they disagree on who it is.
2. The leader of the druids, Lemminor, has sent scouts further into the jungle, beyond where the druids normally travel.
3. A young boy has disappeared—and his footsteps end at the mouth of the cave.

If you want to see more from me, check out my RPG blog at https://dungeonmastertips.ca/.

Alternate Icon: The Pirate Queen

By Brian Rogers

Alternate Icon: The Pirate Queen

The Pirate Queen is a melding of the Demonologist and the Orc Lord. She is the Joan of Arc of the orcs, receiving whispered advice from demons to lead her people to glory via sacking the empire. If you're running a 7-icon campaign, she's a natural selection, but if you're swapping an icon out, she overlaps more with the Orc Lord. If you're not doing either, she can be made a level 13 threat as a lieutenant to either of those icons.

Piracy requires a few things: something worth stealing, predictable lanes of transport, obscure ports to operate from, someone to sell those things to, and a loss of state control over the transit area.[1] The Midland Sea provides the first three of those, and likely the fourth if Drakkenhall or Shadow Port are secretly pirate-friendly cities. The GM will have to provide a rationale as to why the Dragon Empire has lost control of the area. Corruption in the previously-underused navy and incompetence in the naval officer corps work, but there's also the issue of metallic dragons being able to torch the pirate fleet from the air. To compensate, the Pirate Queen's sea witches can block observation of their vessels from the air. That should be enough rationale.

Alternately, this can be an age where the Iron Sea isn't an enemy of the Empire. In this case, the Pirate Queen is attacking the ocean trade routes to other shores, which opens the world quite a bit. She's the threat to the "civilized" lands from the outside, attacking shipping lanes and sacking cities the way the Orc Lord does, just from a different direction.

Quote

"Raise up the black flag, me boys! The voices promised us cities to sack tonight!"

Usual Location

In the Pirate Islands of the Midland or Iron Sea, among the remnants of recently sacked coastal towns, or on the waves.

Common Knowledge

Orcs have never been a problem to the empire's coastlines until now. In the last decade, piracy spread like a plague to bedevil trade, transport, and the towns of the coast. They are led by a powerfully charismatic young orc maiden, who was just a child when she took her first prize, led by the voices of her "gods." Her crews are fanatically loyal and incredibly powerful. While her prizes are never seen again, we know the captives are brought to work the orcish lands beyond the fields we know. How do we know this? Half orc bards happily spread her tale across coastline bars, demoralizing the empire's first line of defense without taking a shot. How much of a threat she truly poses to the empire is unknown, but the Emperor had better take it seriously....

---

1 For more on this, see Ken Hite's "Just Add Rum" in Best of Fenix: Volume 2.

Adventurers & the Icon

Adventurers who like plunder or voyage on the high seas, or who have a beef with the Imperial Navy, have joined up with the Pirate Queen. Lawful and good adventurers are making their way to face her, but the perils of ship-to-ship combat are not like those on land, so some are dragging their feet—plus much of the treasure they take is either frittered away or sent back to their home shores to outfit more pirates. Dwarves and their allies are rising against her, driven by the Dwarf King's promise of rewards.

Allies

The Pirate Queen is an enigma: this is her first appearance, and that makes it hard to predict her motives or goals. It might just be the chaotic joy of plunder—that the voices have tempted her to spit on her hands, hoist the black flag, and begin slitting throats. Or she could be aiming to destroy or weaken the empire for grievances unknown.

The Lich King might be willing to ally with the Pirate Queen, because he thinks he can channel her into weakening the empire. If she is replacing the Demonologist or the Orc Lord, the remaining of the two icons will happily ally with her, which is a thing most feared. The Crusader wishes her dead.

Depending on the nature of your orc/elf relations, the two queens might be mortal enemies or indifferent: a Pirate Queen without a grudge against the elves only attacks trade, shipping, and coastal cities, and the Elf Queen can easily ignore her. After the loss of a dwarvish cargo ship, the Dwarf Lord has acted decisively, declaring prize awards for pirate ships taken, a step that has driven more adventurers against the new icon than anything the Emperor, Archmage, or Priestess—who are trapped in an analysis paralysis trying to decipher the Pirate Queen's motivations and allies—have managed to-date.

The Prince of Shadows? He might be happy with the length of her demoralizing con and the breadth of her thefts, or he might feel that stealing people away to slavery is a bridge too far.

The Pirate Queen is already courting the Three to get clearance through the Koru Straits under Drakkenhall's eye—once her fleet can move freely in and out of the Middland Sea, the empire is in a world of trouble.

History

One day, a simple orcish girl on a distant shore started hearing voices. They directed her to the sea and fed her secrets that let her co-opt, disgrace, or overthrow several orcish chieftains, forming her own army...and navy. Originally going forth in unstable coracles, they used surprise and force of numbers to take their first prizes. In 10 years, she's made huge advances in both boatbuilding and navigation, first by mimicking imperial design and capturing navigators. Of late, the Pirate Queen has caught up with the empire and may be making significant advances on her own.

The True Danger

If her opponents can discern the identity and goals of the voices guiding her—and discover the network of informants she has already seeded throughout the empire to identify targets and threats—she might be stymied. If not....

Forces of the Pirate Queen

Much of the Pirate Queen's forces are lightly re-skinned orcs and ogres to give them a piratical or nautical feel. Give them scraggly, beaded beards, hair greased with rancid fat to keep away mosquitoes, etc., and you're just fine. The new orc types are below: pirate mooks that come in truly massive mobs and sea witches that give the Pirate Queen considerable advantages in stealth and surprise.

She also has ogres aplenty, along with demonic ogres and ogre mages drawing power from the voices that whisper. The ogre mages will provide surprising magical heft to any ship-to-ship action.

Each commodore in her fleet has a Whispering Prophet at their side: these all take an orcish aspect, but are just as horrific underneath as normal, and no one quite knows where they came from. The commodores aren't thrilled, but the advice is always good. The Whispering Prophets never ask the pirates to do things they aren't comfortable with: whether that's unusual for the prophets or a condemnation of the pirates is left to you.

Orc Blood Brethren Trio

Pirate attacks depend on using massive numbers to overwhelm the opposition. The Pirate Queen has instituted some discipline for her troops while keeping the advantage of massive numbers. Most orc pirates have two blood brethren with him; they attack, defend, live, sleep, and eat together.

Each one of these "mooks" is actually a group of three orcs working in close concert. This has the visual of "flooding the field." A battle that would typically include a 7-mook mob has 21 orc blood brethren in it! The mechanics are identical in terms of HP needed to drop the mob: any spell that affects one affects all three, they always attack in concert, etc. The main advantage is the immediate demoralizing effect, though if the PCs work out the nature of their protective ability, they can try to stagger as many as possible to get them to flee the field or be pinned down.

Orc Blood Brethren Trio

5th level mook [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +7

Cutlass, hatchet, or billhook +10 vs. AC—5 damage

Natural 11+: Two of the blood brethren connect, doing 9 damage total.

Natural 16+: Three of the blood brethren connect, doing 13 damage total.

R: Thrown hatchet or dirk +9 vs. AC—4 damage

Natural 11+: Two of the blood brethren connect, doing 7 damage total.

Natural 16+: Three of the blood brethren connect, doing 10 damage total.

Protective: When the blood brethren are staggered, assume that one member is down; they lose their Natural 16+ ability on all attacks for the rest of the fight, and if they don't disengage and flee the battle, they are considered *stuck* as they defend their fallen comrade.

Note that Blood Brethren don't have the classical *dangerous* ability, as it is subsumed into the damage for their Natural 16+ power

AC	21	
PD	19	**HP 18 (mook)**
MD	15	

Mook: Kill one orc blood brethren trio mook for every 18 damage you deal to the mob.

Orc Sea Witch

The Pirate Queen's other secret weapon are her sea witches, orcish demonologists who have mastered several magics to improve her allies' abilities, the most dangerous of which is a battle jaunt that lets her transport small numbers of pirates directly onto nearby enemy ships to harry the defenders as the boarding action starts. And yes, if a 3rd level sea witch jaunts over blood brethren, she sends nine bodies (three mooks), which is awfully disconcerting to the defenders.

Orc Sea Witch

3rd level leader [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +5

Spear +7 vs. AC—7 damage

Dangerous: The crit range of attacks by orcs expands by 3 unless they are staggered.

R: Battle curse +8 vs. MD (1d3 nearby enemies)—psychic damage, and for the rest of the battle, melee attacks by orcs deal +1d4 damage against the target (non-cumulative)

C: Clawing fog swarm +8 vs. PD (1d3 nearby enemies)—10 acid damage, as a swarm of demons made of water and air swarm the targets and claw at them with their eroding talons

Battle jaunt: As the sea witch's only action that round, she can teleport a number of nearby orcs equal to her level (usually 3) to a far away location. This is most often used to get orc blood brethren onto enemy ships during a boarding action, but can be used in any battle.

Mists and fog: The sea witch can summon a bank of obscuring fog and mist that, while it is merely creepy for people engaging in ship-to-ship combat, magically obscures the pirate vessels from airborne observation. This makes it nigh impossible for the Dragon Empire's titular protectors to locate them.

AC	19	
PD	13	**HP 40**
MD	17	
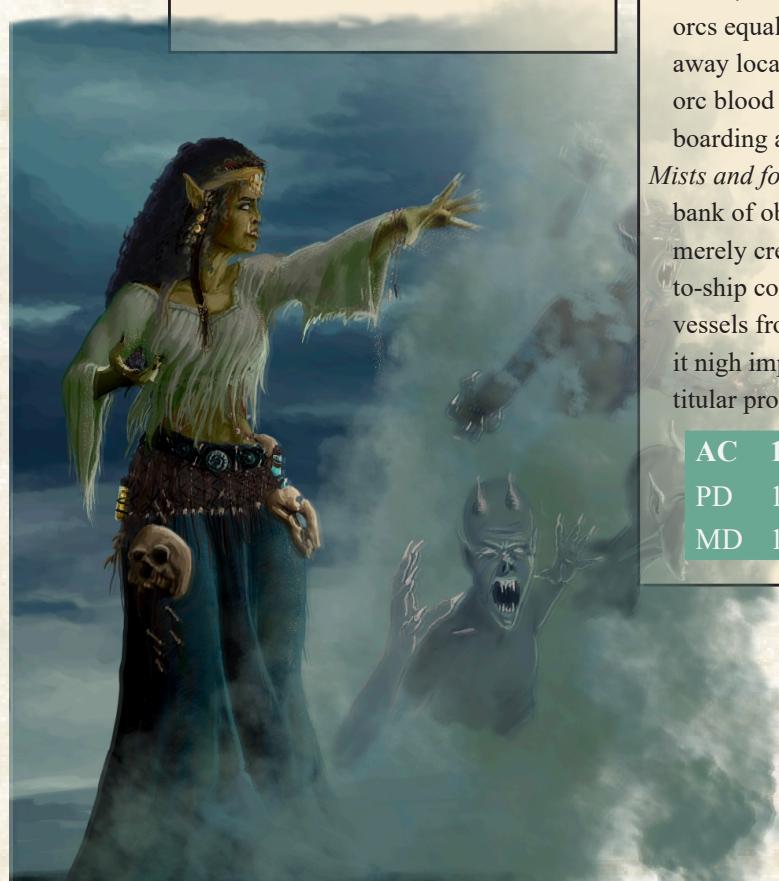
Smugglers of the Fens:

Duckfolk of the Dragon Empire

By Jeb Boyt

Smugglers of the Fens: Duckfolk of the Dragon Empire

Many races have existed during the ages of the Dragon Empire. Some have persisted. Some have risen and fallen with the passing of the time, such as the serpent kings. In corners of the Dragon Empire, remnants of some of these races have lasted into the 13th Age. One of these is the duckfolk.

The flightless duckfolk are simple people who dwell in villages near the edges of and on islands in swamps and marshes. The largest collection of duckfolk can be found in the Fangs, but their villages can also be found in the Hell Marsh, the Chuulfen, the Kneedeep, the river delta northeast of Santa Cora, and elsewhere. There are also sizeable duckfolk communities in Shadow Port, Drakenhall, and Foothold.

When mentioned in histories, the duckfolk are said to have flourished during the reign of the Wizard King and that their fortunes declined with his fall. Some say that the duckfolk are cursed from their service to the Wizard King. The duckfolk even claim to have had their own icon, the Great Drake, but if true, he has not been seen for many ages.

Most historians and imperial bureaucrats see the duckfolk as beneath their notice. But they have persisted through the ages and may still have a part to play, for good or ill. Consequently, as dwellers on the margins of the Empire, duckfolk have developed an unsavory reputation. Many duckfolk have embraced this reputation and live as smugglers, raiders, and wreckers, happily serving whoever best pays or suits their whims. Duckfolk are also known for flying into incomprehensible, quacking fits of rage.

Duckfolk have reputations both as eccentrics and as practitioners of dark, chaotic magic. You can choose which to emphasize in your game, but remember that the duckfolk like to keep others guessing.

Duckfolk NPCs

Duckfolk Bully

2nd level troop [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +3

Trusty Club +7 vs AC—7 damage

Dart +7 vs AC (one nearby enemy)—5
  damage

  [Special Trigger – When first staggered]
    Furious rage: The duckfolk begins
    raging, gaining an additional attack
    each round with its *trusty club* for the
    remainder of the battle.

Creature of the Fens: Duckfolk are strong
  swimmers and have advantage on all
  swimming, movement, and stealth checks
  in marshes, rolling 2d20 and taking the
  better result.

AC	18	
PD	16	**HP 50**
MD	11	

Duckfolk Shaman

3rd level caster [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +4

Fetish Staff +8 vs AC—8 damage

C: Thunderwave +8 vs PD (all engaged or 1d3 nearby enemies in a group)—6 damage and the target is pushed back.
Natural 16+: Target is also *dazed*. Normal save ends (11+).

R: Entangle +8 vs PD (one nearby enemy)—10 damage and target is *hampered,* normal save ends (11+)
Natural 16+: Target is *stuck* instead of *hampered.*

Creature of the Fens: Duckfolk are strong swimmers and have advantage on all swimming, movement, and stealth checks in marshes, rolling 2d20 and taking the better result.

AC	18	
PD	14	**HP 45**
MD	18	

Duckfolk Raider

4rd level troop [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +5

Boarding Pike +9 vs AC—14 damage
Natural 16+: Target is also *dazed*. Normal save ends (11+).

Short Bow +8 vs AC (one nearby enemy)—12 damage

Flighty: If two or more duckfolk raiders are engaged with a creature, one of the raiders can remain engaged, allowing the others to pop free.

Creature of the Fens: Duckfolk are strong swimmers and have advantage on all swimming, movement, and stealth checks in marshes, rolling 2d20 and taking the better results.

AC	20	
PD	18	**HP 54**
MD	14	

Marsh Guard

6th level spoiler [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +7

Duck-bill Axe +11 vs AC—21 damage
Natural 16+: Target is d*azed*. Normal save ends (11+).

Javelin +11 AC (one nearby enemy)—18 damage
Natural 16+: Target is *hampered*. Normal save ends (11+).

[Special Trigger – When first staggered] As a free action, the marsh guard may attack with either its axe or javelin.

Protect the Raft: If the marsh guard is not engaged, once per round, as an interrupt action, when a nearby ally is targeted by an attack against AC, the marsh guard may move to the ally's side, granting the ally a +2 bonus to AC until the start of the marsh guard's next turn.

Creature of the Fens: Duckfolk are strong swimmers and have advantage on all swimming, movement, and stealth checks in marshes, rolling 2d20 and taking the better result.

Nastier Specials

Escalating Critical: The marsh guard uses the escalation die to increase its chance of landing a critical strike. At +1, the marsh guard scores a critical hit on a 19-20. At +2, on an 18-20, and so on.

AC	22	
PD	20	**HP 90**
MD	16	

Death-rune Duck

Elite 7th level caster [HUMANOID]
Initiative: +9

Runestaff +11 vs AC—20 damage

C: Swamp Gas +12 vs PD (all engaged or 1d3 nearby enemies in a group)—15 poison damage, target is *hampered*, normal save ends (11+), and the death-rune duck pops free. The gas cloud persists for 1d3 rounds, obscuring vision. As a free action, the death-run duck can make a swamp gas attack against any creature that enters the gas cloud.
Natural 16+: Save to end is now hard (16+).

R: Death Chain +12 vs PD (one nearby enemy)—28 negative energy damage and the target is *vulnerable,* normal save ends (11+
Natural 16+: Target is also *weakened.*

Still as a Grave: When an enemy targets a death-rune duck with an attack against Mental Defense, each of the enemy's nearby allies suffers a -4 penalty to Mental Defense, normal save ends (11+).
Creature of the Fens: Duckfolk are strong swimmers and have advantage on all swimming, movement, and stealth checks in marshes, rolling 2d20 and taking the better result.

Nastier Specials
R: Death Gaze +10 vs MD (one nearby enemy)—20 psychic damage and the target is confused, normal save ends (11+)
Natural 16+: Save to end is now hard (16+)
Escalation Thief: On any natural 16+ attack roll, the death-rune duck can choose to steal the escalation die instead of applying the attack's normal benefit. The escalation die, and all associated benefits, are removed from play until the end of the death-rune duck's next turn.

AC	18	
PD	16	**HP 50**
MD	11	

Building Battles

Duckfolk generally do not associate with other marsh-dwelling races. But a village aligned with the Black is likely to work with black dragonborn and other agents. A group of duckfolk may work directly with a hag or a black dragon. Duckfolk also appear to be able to work with, or at least have an understanding, with will-o'-wisps. More disturbingly, duckfolk seem to get along well with briar elves.

Duckfolk Characters

+2 Dex OR +2 Int

Death Drake (Racial Power)
Once per battle as a free action, after you miss with an attack against a non-mook enemy that has 5 hp or fewer, you can reroll that attack. If the reroll still misses, you don't expend this power and can use it again on a different turn later in the battle.

The hit point threshold of the power increases as you gain levels

2nd level	7 hp
3rd level	10 hp
4th level	12 hp
5th level	15 hp
6th level	20 hp
7th level	25 hp
8th level	30 hp
9th level	40 hp
10th level	50 hp

Adventurer Feat: Your hit point threshold for using death drake is two levels higher than your level.

Champion Feat: You have advantage on checks to intimidate and bully others, rolling 2d20 and choosing the best result.

Classes: Popular classes for duckfolk include barbarian, fighter, ranger, and rogue. Spellcasters among the duckfolk are typically bards, chaos mages, demonologists, druids, necromancers, or wizards.

Backgrounds: Hunter, trapper, fisherman, smuggler, wrecker, peddler, ugly duckling, vizer, basket weaver, snail wrangler, barman, fence, scion of the duck dynasty.

Duckfolk and the Icons

The High Druid: As a benefactor of the forgotten and wild places, the High Druid could be a friend to the duckfolk. Or, they may be too strange and chaotic even for her.

The Diabolist: On the other hand, strange and chaotic is what the Diabolist is all about. Plus, she lives in a marsh. The duckfolk that have embraced the darkest parts of their heritage find safety in the Hell Marsh.

Prince of Shadows: As a dweller on the margins himself, the Prince can be a friend and a valuable intermediary between the duckfolk and others. The duckfolk's habit of smuggling is also useful to him. Then there is the legend of the lost money-bin of the Great Drake, which if true, would be a prize the Prince would love to claim.

The Three: Always glad to welcome a little chaos, the Black recruits duckfolk as her agents, and duckfolk wizards can be found serving the Blue.

The Orc Lord: The last time, duckfolk were aligned with the Wizard King against the Orc Lord. Who knows where they'll wind up this time? Some may see working with the Orc Lord as a way to settle old scores.

The Archmage: He doesn't trust the duckfolk. But why does he suppress all study of their history and their magic?

The Priestess: Duckfolk are generally not welcome in the Cathedral or really anywhere in Santa Cora.

The Elf Queen: Don't ask her about the duckfolk.

The Lich King: If it is true that the duckfolk were loyal servants of the Wizard King, are they still his allies now that he has returned as the Lich King?

Death Runes

For some reason, perhaps due to their connection with the Wizard King, duckfolk have a distinctive rune magic. Sometimes, they offer these runes as gifts to allies. These runes otherwise work the same as other runes.

Random Death Rune Effect

1-2	*Fatality:* +1 attack and +2 damage (+2/+3 champion, +3/+4 epic). Also applies to miss damage.
3-4	*Finisher:* +1 attack and damage (+2 champion, +3 epic). When each enemy creature and mook mob in a battle has taken damage, you gain a +2 bonus to damage until the end of the battle (+5 champion, +12 epic).
5-6	*True Strike* (recharge 16+): +1 attack and damage (+2 champion, +3 epic). Instead of making an attack roll, choose 10 as the natural roll for that attack.
7-8	*Vital StrikeI* (recharge 16+): +1 attack and damage (+2 champion, +3 epic). When you hit with a natural 16+ attack roll, the target takes 15 extra damage (40 damage champion, 90 damage epic).
9-10	*Doom:* +1 AC (+2 champion, +3 epic). Enemies engaged with you take a -2 attack penalty against allies without *doom* or another effect that penalizes attacks against other creatures (such as a paladin's Challenge talent).
11-12	*Uncanny Resilience* (recharge 16+): +1 PD (+2 champion, +3 epic). When you take damage from an attack against your Physical Defense, prevent that damage for the moment. At the start of your next turn, roll a normal save (11+). If you fail, you take that damage at the end of your turn. If you succeed, make the same save at the start of your next turn. Keep this up until you take the damage or the battle ends.
13-14	*Duality* (recharge 16+): +1 MD (+2 champion, +3 epic). When you fail a save against an effect by an undead creature, you succeed on the save instead.
15-16	*Death Grasp* (recharge 16+): When a nearby enemy drops to 20 + your Constitution modifier hit points or below, you can try to kill that foe with a death attack (50 + 2x Con mod hp at champion, 120 + 3x Con mod hp at epic). That enemy must roll a normal save. If it fails, it dies. If it succeeds, you don't expend the power.
17-18	*Shadow of the Grave* (once per battle): +1 attack and damage (+2 champion, +3 epic). When you hit with a natural even attack roll, if your target has fewer hit points than you (after taking the damage), the target is weakened (-4 attacks and defenses) until the start of your next turn.
19-20	*Still as a Grave* (recharge 16+): +1 MD (+2 champion, +3 epic). When an enemy targets you with an attack against Mental Defense, each enemy in the battle takes a -4 penalty to Mental Defense. Roll an easy save (6+) each turn to sustain this effect. On a failure, it ends.

Potions

Duck Grease: Can be applied to armor for advantage on stealth checks for one scene, rolling 2d20 and choosing the better result.

Bag of Thorns: When thrown at 1d3 nearby targets in a group, each target is subject, at adventurer tier, to a +8 vs PD attack, suffering 10 damage and *hampered,* normal save ends (11+). At champion tier it is a +12 attack and 28 damage. The area of thorns persists for the next 1d3 rounds, and any creature moving into or through the area is subject to the attack.

Arrow, Crossbow Bolt, Slingstone

Duck Shot: For your attack action, you can make three attacks, each inflicting half of your usual damage. If you miss with all three attacks, you inflict miss damage. Quirk: You follow up each success with a cackling laugh and each miss with sputters of frustration.

Belt, Swordbelt, Kilt, Girdle, Sash

Harness of the Drake: In addition to providing a bonus recovery (or two or three), you have advantage on stealth checks, rolling 2d20 and choosing the better result. Quirk: All of your stealthy movements are greatly exaggerated.

Cloak, Mantle, Cape

Cape of the Drake: In addition to providing a bonus to PD, cold attacks against the wearer are at disadvantage, rolling 2d20 and taking the worse result. Like water off of a duck's back. Quirk: You like to stand in the shadows and brood in the rain.

Cape of the Enchantress: In addition to providing a bonus to PD, this hooded, black cape also provides the wearer with advantage on checks for persuasion, rolling 2d20 and choosing the better result. Quirk: Obsessed with parting people from silver pieces.

Helmet, Crown, Diadem, Circlet

Circlet of the Enchantress (recharge 16+): In addition to providing a bonus to MD, this circlet allows the wearer to cast *message* and, as a ritual, to shape a creature's dreams. The creature must be known to you. You appear in the dream of a sleeping target, conversing with them and shaping the dream environment. Quirk: Protective of cats.

Hat of the Scout: In addition to providing a bonus to MD, this coonskin cap provides the wearer with advantage on checks relating to animal handling and nature, rolling 2d20 and choosing the better result. This bonus also applies to a druid's *nature talking.* Quirk: Prone to telling exaggerated tales of your exploits.

Necklace, Pendant

Amulet of the Enchantress (recharge 16+): In addition to providing a bonus to saves, this amulet allows you to turn a base metal into gold. Quirk: Fear of garlic.

Staff

Runestaff: In addition to serving as an implement, this staff allows you to cast *arcane mark* at will and to reroll random rune effects, choosing either result. Quirk: Out of combat, you frequently twirl this staff.

Wondrous Items

Duck Call (recharge 16+): A whistle that summons 1d3 duck bullies (adventurer tier) or 1d3 marsh guards (champion) that remain until the end of a battle or scene. Quirk: Speaks with an exaggerated, duck-like accent.

Folding Boat: A popular item with duckfolk smugglers, this comes as a parcel that is about the size of a book and opens into a dark boat that can hold up to three people. At night or in marshlands, checks to notice the boat are at disadvantage, rolling 2d20 and taking the worse result. Paddles or poles sold separately. Quirk: A habit for origami.

Lamp of the Drake: A duck-shaped oil lamp. When lit, the user can freely cast alarm and prestidigitation. Quirk: Prone to using hands as shadow puppets.

Scales of the Drake: Merchant scales that, when set up, provide the user with advantage on deception and sleight-of-hand checks. Quirk: Will take extra effort to complete a sale (or a con).
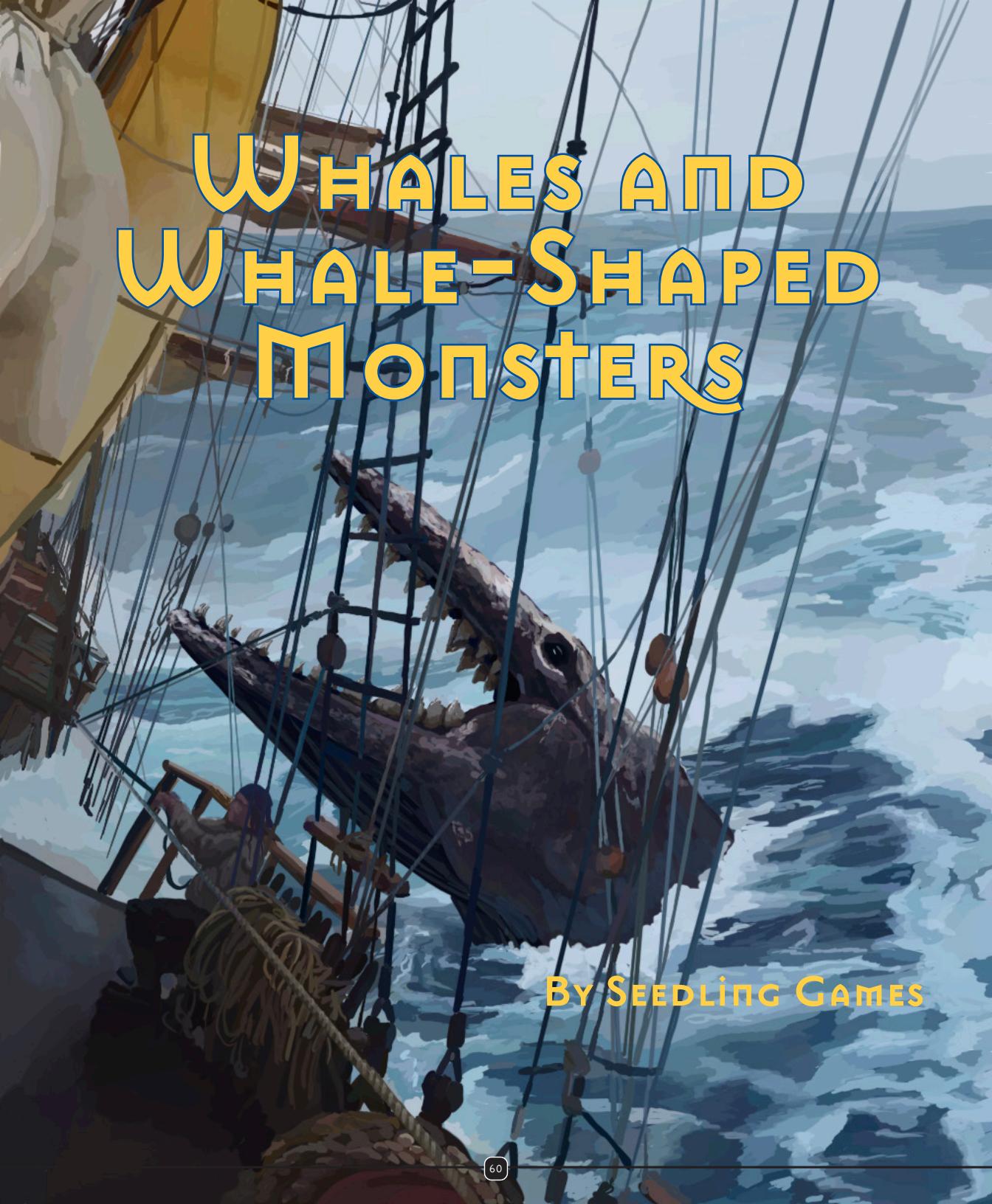
Whales and Whale-Shaped Monsters

By Seedling Games

Whales and Whale-Shaped Monsters

The Whale Puppets

The Archmage has made homunculi in the shape of whales to observe the sea and those around it, crafted out of driftwood, seaweed, shells, and the occasional glass bottle. Plentiful and disposable, he barely notices if someone else takes control of them.

Whale-puppet spies are small, crude puppets that travel in pods, minds linked for better surveillance and survivability. They are fragile, their main protection being that they are hard to see in the water. They are often accompanied by **whale-puppet guards,** more robust constructions reinforced with wire that emit an electric charge that jolts anyone that gets too close.

The wizard utility spell Speak with Item, or an Archmage icon roll, can be used to determine what they might have seen.

For all whale-puppets

All whale-puppets have the following two abilities:

Resist lightning 12+: When a lightning attack targets this creature, the attacker must roll a natural 12+ on the attack roll or it only deals half damage.

"Fish" out of water: This creature is weakened when on land.

Whale-Puppet Spy

A glint in the water, and you realize the clump of driftwood and seaweed is moving as one creature – and watching you.
1st level mook [CONSTRUCT]
Initiative: +6
Bite +5 vs AC—4 damage
Watching together: +2 to attack as long as another whale-puppet spy is nearby.
Slippery: When missed with an attack, the whale-puppet spy automatically disengages and moves away.

AC	19	
PD	15	**HP 5 (mook)**
MD	11	

Mook: kill one whale-puppet spy for every 5 damage you deal to the mob.

Whale-Puppet Guard

You can tell there's something wrong with this clump of driftwood because of all the sparks that are coming out of it.
1st level troop [CONSTRUCT]
Initiative: +6
Bite +6 vs AC—5 damage
C: Electric pulse +6 vs PD (1d4 nearby enemies that are standing in water)
   —3 lightning damage

AC	19	
PD	16	**HP 19**
MD	12	

Battles and adventures

Often a swarm of spies have a few guards watching over them. A nearby caster might have taken control of them, or there might be sea creatures following them in the hopes of eating any fish the whale-puppet guard might jolt. The spies are highly mobile and hard to lock down, and the guard can also go past your front-line defences, so pairing them with a less mobile enemy would make for a more well-rounded encounter.

They are highly ineffective on land, so they would be best fought in shallow water, where they are usually found. They can be found around the docks of any major city in the Midland Sea and in the rivers that flow into it.

Icons

The whale-puppets were made by the Archmage, though you are most likely to have to deal with them when they have gone rogue. Some are carrying out the wishes of the Emperor. Some other icons, like the Prince of Shadows, might be subverting them to their own purposes.

Plot hooks:

- An icon's agents have asked you to oppose the Archmage's plans. Since the whale-puppets are not alive and are just an animated surveillance system, destroying some whale-puppets is much less serious than attacking his living agents.

- There are reports that some whale-puppets at the docks have gone rogue. People are afraid to send fishing boats out. Can you deal with the problem, and maybe find out who is behind it?

The Sea Wolves

These large, sharp-toothed whales can see using nothing but sound. They can also focus waves of sound so strong that they can knock their prey into water.

Sea Wolf

Large 3rd level archer [BEAST]

Initiative: +13

R: Sonic blast +8 vs PD (2 attacks)—8 damage

Natural 16+: The target is thrown backwards and pops free of any enemy it is engaged with, and if relevant, falls off the ship or dock.

Bite +8 vs AC—20 damage

AC	18	
PD	14	**HP 120**
MD	10	

Nastier special

Ears ringing: On a natural even hit with sonic blast, the target is hampered.

Battles and Adventures

Sea wolves are meant to be fought on ships, which they attack in order to knock sailors into the water and devour them. They hunt in groups of 1–3, sometimes accompanied by smaller predators that swoop in to try to get a bite of the sea wolves' prey. If the encounter just has sea wolves, the party will need to rely on ranged attacks, or the melee oriented characters will need to be able to fight in the water.

Icons

Sea wolves are creatures of the wild (and thus the High Druid). They are plentiful in the Iron Sea, but also quite common in the Midland Sea, especially in more remote corners. Alternatively, the Orc Lord might utilize them in pirate raids on the Empire.

Plot hooks:

- There have been increasing reports of hostile wildlife at sea. Most recently, a small fishing boat drifted slowly towards town, and when someone sailed out to investigate, they found the entire crew was missing.
- A merchant needs to travel through an area known to be full of sea wolves. The party is hired to provide protection, although perhaps a truce with the High Druid could be negotiated instead?

What the Whale Skeleton Brings Up

When a whale dies, it sinks deep beneath the sea. There, in the depths, strange creatures that have never seen the light of the sun devour its corpse. Even those who dwell in the ocean have no reason to venture into this abyss. When a necromantic ritual raises the skeleton, it is the strange creatures that feed on it which are the real threat.

Slime Eels

These enormous eels have no jaws to bite with. Instead they smother their prey in corrosive slime – slime so slippery that you cannot walk or swim, just flail in place.

5th level blocker [BEAST]
Initiative: +10
Slime +10 vs PD—15 acid damage and the target is stuck until the end of their next turn

AC	21	
PD	19	**HP 72**
MD	15	

Glowfish

These fish provide some of the only light in the depths – light that doesn't illuminate their enormous jaws full of a thousand needle-like teeth.

5th level troop [BEAST]
Initiative: +7
Jaw full of needles +13 vs AC—15
   damage
   Natural 16+: The target takes 7 ongoing
      damage.

AC	18	
PD	16	**HP 72**
MD	12	

Gas Orbs

In the very depths, strange beings with no eyes or appendages live off of the strange air that seeps from the ocean depths. When they reach the surface, they tend to explode.
5th level mook [ABERRATION]
Initiative: +7
Vulnerability: fire
Explosive death +13 vs AC (on death, every creature engaged with or next to the gas orb)—312 fire damage. Yes, this can start off a cascade.
Breathes a different air: A creature that starts its turn engaged with the gas orb takes 4 poison damage.

AC	21	
PD	19	**HP 12 (mook)**
MD	15	

Mook: Kill one gas orb for every 12 damage you deal to the mob.

Battles and Adventures

The skeletal whale might technically be undead, but there is no stat block because it isn't really a threat. It washes ashore and then can't move – just provides cover to the creatures that clung to it. Unlike other monsters in this article, the intention is that the monsters here might be fought on land.

These creatures are meant to be used together. You can also add in other level-appropriate weird creatures, made sea themed. Everything that is brought up should be unfamiliar to the players. The bottom of the sea might as well be another world.

Note that the combination of being made stuck by the slime eel and the gas orb explosion effect could become quite deadly.

The gas orbs force mobility and tactics, but should otherwise behave predictably and in a not-very-intelligent way.

Icons

It is mostly The Lich King who raises these terrible things from the deep to destroy seaside villages. Who else would do such a thing? Well, maybe the Crusader if he deems the losses acceptable.

While such creatures are most likely found in the Iron Sea, these creatures live deep enough that the taming of the Midland Sea may not have affected them.

Plot hooks:

* You hear some cultists have been spotted in a remote fishing village. When you arrive, a skeleton has washed to shore, with all sorts of strange creatures crawling on land, and the villagers have fled.

13th Age Chess

By Michele Stara

13ᵗʰ Age Chess

Games and exhibitions are an important part of life in the Dragon Empire. For example, core to the identity of Axis are the gladiatorial games in the various arenas of the city. The game that fascinates me the most is *kjess*, an arena board game played with living pieces (13ᵗʰ Age core book, p. 261). It's obvious to me that citizens of the Empire will be equally obsessed with board games like chess. Historically, Vikings and Anglo Saxons alike were so enamored of board games that they were often buried with their favorite game. One of the most famous historic board games is Hnefatafl (the King's Table), an asymmetric game where the white pieces must capture the black king, which in turn must try to escape the board. Surely, the Dragon Empire has variants of such games.

In my 13ᵗʰ Age campaign, I present board games as an important part of imperial culture. Eventually, I wanted my characters to be challenged to play a chess game as part of a trial for the Great Golden Wyrm. Of course, I didn't want to interrupt the game with a real-life chess game. I came up with these rules to simulate a chess game as a small combat between the pieces on the board, and I created an enemy that could give the characters a challenge outside of typical combat.

These rules are a way to simulate a character playing a game of chess against an opponent without having to calculate every single move, different pieces' abilities, or the number of pieces left on the board. The rules are intended to be an abstraction of a game; players are encouraged to describe movements and captures as they please.

The Rules

Board Hit Points: Each player starts with a set of pieces worth 15 hp. We refer to them as *board HP*.

Initiative: In most of the Dragon Empire, the player of the white pieces starts first. Given that the first player has a clear advantage, each icon has a different way of determining who goes first. Here are some examples.

Dwarf King: What better than to start a chess game with a drinking competition? Only a true player can win while drunk! Determine who goes first with an opposed *Constitution check*. Whoever scores highest goes first. Usually, the towers (rooks) in dwarven games are made with Dwarven Tower coins, typically wagered in the game. Winner takes all.

Emperor: Rank and heroic gestures decide who goes first. Players must tell the story of their bravest exploit. Determine who goes first with an opposed *Charisma check*. Whoever scores highest goes first. In some parts of the empire, it's considered an honorable gesture to go second. Sometimes the discussion will devolve into who gets the honor of allowing the opponent to move first. In these games, the highest score goes *last*.

Lich King: In the Necropolis and other areas where the Lich King holds sway, the player of the black pieces starts first. Players will attempt any sort of trick in a bid to force their opponent to choose the white pieces. Curses and illusions can be cast on these pieces, making them change color when the decision is made. It's common to use

cursed chess boards in this game. Roll an attack, +5 versus MD (+10 champion; +15 epic) against each player. If only one player avoids this attack, they will go first. If both players resist or fail, the first player will be decided randomly (e.g., with a toss of a coin).

Escalation: The escalation die works as in standard combat, increasing by 1 every round after the first. It will decrease by 1 if both players use their castling move in two consecutive turns (see below).

Winner: The first player who forces their opponent to 0 board HP wins (checkmate)!

Recoveries: Players cannot use recoveries to regain board HP. (Or maybe they can… Will the Lich King "resurrect" pieces for instance?)

Background: Players can apply appropriate character backgrounds to the dice rolls representing their moves. For example, a background in gambling, gaming, or strategy could apply to a game of chess.

Moves: Each round, a player may choose one of the following moves to use in the game. Use the MD of the opponent as the defence.

Aggressive attack

You try to create an opening, potentially sacrificing your defense and pieces.

Intelligence + Level vs. MD—1d6 damage

> *Natural even hit:* "Opening." Your opponent takes a -2 penalty to MD until the end of your next turn.
> *Natural odd hit:* "Sacrifice!" You suffer 1d3 damage as well.
> *Natural odd miss:* "I didn't see this coming." Your opponent deals +1d3 damage on their next turn.

Tactical movement

You attempt to position your pieces in a way that will create an opportunity in forthcoming rounds.

Intelligence + Level vs. MD—1d3 damage

- *Natural even hit:*"Discovered attack." Gain +2 per move until the end of your next turn.
- *Natural odd hit:* "En passant." +1 damage.
- *Natural odd miss:* "Bad move!" Your opponent gains +2 per move until the end of their next turn.

Elf Queen's Gambit

Defensive strategy named after a famous game when the Elf Queen defeated the Emperor.

Intelligence + Level vs. MD

- *Natural even hit:*"Well played." +2 MD until the beginning of your next turn.
- *Natural odd hit:* "Promotion!" +1d3 temporary board HP.
- *Natural odd miss:* "Stuck!" -2 per move until the end of your next turn.

Castling

- *Limited:* Permitted only once per game, the when escalation die is 3+.
- *Effect:* Recovers 1d6 board HP.move until the end of your next turn.
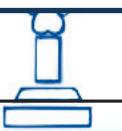
New Enemies
Chess Automaton

The Archmage, it is said, created the first chess automaton because there were no longer any worthy opponents to his brilliance and strategy. He infused a magical construct with everything he knew about chess. Unfortunately, the result was rather boring—all the games ended in a draw. Eventually, the Archmage decided to make a gift of the automaton, which is still out there, somewhere within the empire. Meanwhile, other wizards have continued to try to recreate the unbeatable automaton, but so far the copies are inferior to the original.

4th level caster [CONSTRUCT]

Initiative: +6

Special: In a chess match, the chess automaton will use its initiative modifier for the skill check to determine who goes first.

R: Stream of tales of ancient games +9 vs. MD—15 psychic damage
- *Natural even hit:* The enemy is dazed (save ends).

Chess player: +9 vs. MD
- *Special*: The chess automaton can perform any move of a chess player as per the rules above.
- *Living pieces:* In the case of immediate danger, usually caused by sore losers who want to find an alternative way to "win" a game, the chess automaton can animate the pieces on the board to fight the enemy. (See living pieces, below.)
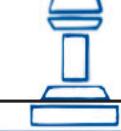
Flight: The automaton floats a few inches above the ground. It can't move very fast, but it's enough for it to strategically move away from foes.

Nastier Specials

The world is a chessboard: The chess automaton can use the Castling ability on living pieces once per battle.

AC	18	
PD	16	**HP 50**
MD	20	

Art: Michele Stara

Living pieces

When a chess automaton feels threatened, it can animate its chess pieces to defend itself. The little animated figures will strategically try to hit and discourage enemies while the automaton explains in detail why the opponent's strategy is weak and doesn't stand a chance of winning the fight.

3rd level mook [CONSTRUCT]

Initiative: +6

Special: In a chess match, the chess automaton will use its initiative modifier for the skill check to determine who goes first.

Small wooden swords +8 vs. AC—6 damage

Discourage: The crit range of the living pieces expands by 3 against dazed enemies.

Small: Living pieces have a +2 AC bonus against opportunity attacks.

AC	19	
PD	15	**HP 13 (mook)**
MD	11	

Mook: Kill one living piece for every 13 damage you deal to the mob.
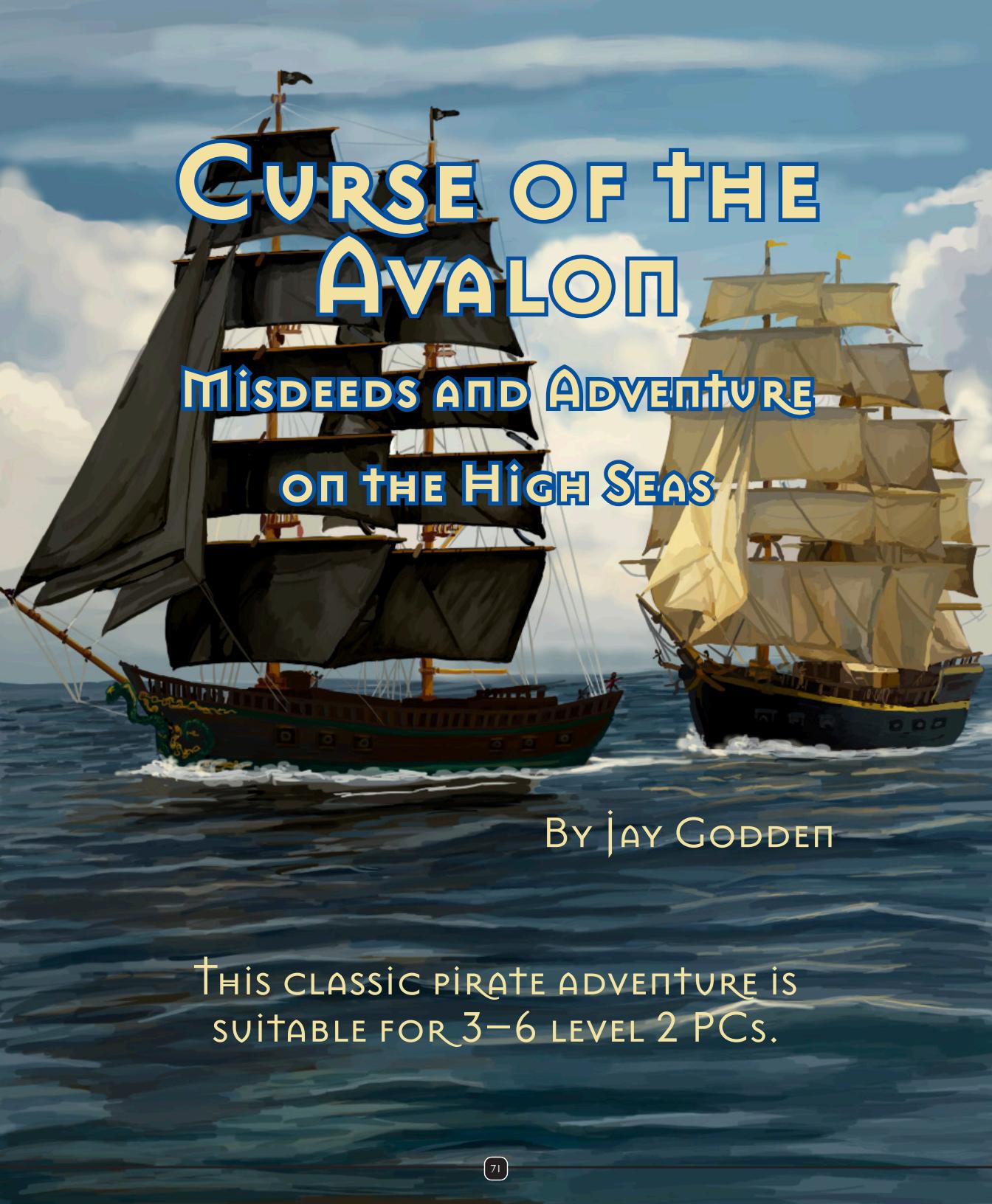
Curse of the Avalon

Misdeeds and Adventure on the High Seas

By Jay Godden

This classic pirate adventure is suitable for 3–6 level 2 PCs.

Curse of the Avalon

Misdeeds and Adventure on the High Seas

How to Use This Article

This article contains a full heal-up's worth of nautical encounters for adventurer tier. The party will compete with the nefarious pirate crew of the *Jade Serpent* to find the fabled treasure of the cursed *Avalon*.

This article draws inspiration from the Battle Scenes books published by Pelgrane Press. If you own any of those books (*High Magic & Low Cunning, The Crown Commands,* or *Fire & Faith)*, then the structure of this article will be familiar to you. Note that fewer encounter design options will be provided than in the official material. If you wish to make an encounter suitable for a level above or below how it's written, simply add or subtract 1 to all monster attacks and defenses, and multiply all monster damage and hit points by 1.25 or 0.8.

What follows are sample encounters for second level PCs, tied together to form the backbone of an adventure with a nautical theme. You can string these encounters together to run a short campaign, bulking them out with connecting scenes of your own design. You could run one of them as an isolated encounter as part of an adventure without a broad pirate theme, using the encounters as set pieces between your own encounters and scenes. Or you can just use one of the encounters as inspiration for your own, or insert it when your players surprise you and you need an ocean-themed encounter at the drop of a hat.

This article will probably be most useful for pinching ideas from. Please, pinch away without care! In the encounters are monsters, terrain features, magic items, and story hooks aplenty. The thought that some of these might filter into your games, removed from the context of these encounters, pleases me to no end.

Tone

This adventure assumes that the party is the important crew and officers of a fantastical pirate ship. This is a fairly sanitized form of piracy compared to historical examples, with a primary focus on swashbuckling, freedom, adventure, and scallywags committing minor crimes with a wink and a tip of the hat.

The adventure could be modified to fit a darker tone of campaign, where your pirates are true criminals, or even morally reprehensible. You could also use these adventures for a game about privateers, or the so-called "good guys" of pirate settings, but remember that privateers are really just pirates sponsored by someone powerful.

The assumption that the party is composed of the most important people on the ship isn't necessarily set in stone; maybe the captain and quartermaster are NPCs instead. Historically, at least in the Caribbean during the Golden Age of piracy, decisions about where the ship would go and what it would do were usually voted on by the whole crew, so this doesn't strip much player agency. Check out advice online about running campaigns in a military setting where the PCs take orders from superiors, for tips and pointers on running this sort of game.

Black Powder

A classic component of pirate media is black powder, flintlock pistols, grapeshot cannons, and all their wondrous variants. In a narrative sense, a lot of the power of firearms is replaced by magic in a typical 13th Age story. The strategic need to develop a cannon isn't there if a ship's mage casting *fireball* is a reasonably common sight on the Midland Sea. Depending on how common magic is in your Dragon Empire, the presence of offensive spellcasters may stifle or spur on the development of black powder weapons. If you do wish to introduce black powder, consider making it common and simply reflavoring ranged weapons and certain spells as rifles and pistols. Alternatively, make black powder very rare, and not yet widely available.

Consider a PC whose One Unique Thing is that they have stumbled upon the (appropriately fantastical) recipe for black powder. In my experience, setting your campaign right at the birth of black powder weapons can be interesting, setting up terribly powerful ships with the blasted remains of their foes. The acquisition of powerful black powder weapons can form part of the narrative development of the campaign, with an early flintlock rifle using magic item rules. At a high enough level, when your ship gets cannons, you can suddenly breeze past encounters with mundane low-level ships as a quick montage. The adventures in this article will assume that black powder is not yet widely used.

Wondrous Item

Flintlock Rifle: Once per battle, make the below attack against a nearby or far away enemy as a standard action. You can recharge this item's power early by spending a standard action to reload.

Attack: Dexterity + Level + 1 vs. PD
Hit: Level d10 damage
Miss: —
  Natural 1: Explosion! Take half damage from shrapnel and flames. You must take the rifle to an expert to repair it before you can use it again.

Random Pirate Themed Magic Items (1d20)

1. Boots of Sure Feet (*13th Age p. 289*)
2. Gloves of Ambidexterity (*13th Age p. 289*)
3. Pendant of Water Breathing (*13th Age p. 291*)
4. Rope of Entangling (*13th Age p. 295*)
5. Cloak of Shelter (*13 True Ways p. 235*)
6. Gloves of Sure Fingers (*13 True Ways p. 236*)
7. Skullcap of Wit (*13 True Ways p. 236*)
8. Necklace of Cups (*13 True Ways p. 236*)
9. Haughty Rapier (*13 True Ways p. 238*)
10. Cloak of Misdirection (*Book of Loot p. 15*)
11. Bountiful Jar (*Book of Loot p. 21*)
12. Spirit Fetish (*Book of Loot p. 45*)
13. Unremarkable Armor (*Book of Loot p. 52*)
14. Surestep Sandals (*Book of Loot p. 53*)
15. Roguish Cap (*Book of Loot p. 53*)
16. Boots of Water Walking (*Book of Loot p. 57*)
17. Swirling Cloak of the Swashbuckler (*Loot Harder p. 59*)
18. Lens of Discovery (*Loot Harder p. 59*)
19. Butter Knife (*Loot Harder p. 60*)
20. Sack of Looting (*Loot Harder p. 61*)

Curse of the Avalon

The *Avalon* is a ship whose fate has been shrouded in mystery for decades. Its captain, Coaltooth, went mad and disappeared into the islands of the Spray during a full moon when the infamous ethereal mists that give the islands their name obscure its jagged rocks. Neither Coaltooth nor any of the crew of the *Avalon* were ever heard from again. You could let your players know about the *Avalon* through a sea shanty they overheard, have a crazed witch give them a warning about its fate, or simply ask your players what myths they already know about the *Avalon* and where they heard them. Players may wish to tie backgrounds or One Unique Things to the *Avalon.*

Seven myths about the Avalon to overhear in a seedy bar in Shadow Port:

1. Its captain wasn't mad. He sold his soul to a devil and tried to get out of the deal by sinking his ship. Powerful infernal magic weapons went down with it.

2. The mists around the Spray are actually leaks into this world from a pocket dimension called [redacted] where an unintelligible horror rules over a sunken kingdom of madness. The *Avalon* must have been transported there.

3. Coaltooth always had a flair for the dramatic. He retired to go live in the Wild Wood. The Spray is protected by water elementals during the full moon, and they owed him a favor. He called in that favor to throw people off the scent. How you get an elemental to owe you a favor, I don't know

4. The sunken wreck of the *Avalon* prowls the ocean floor, feeding on other wrecks like a crab on dead fish and accumulating a king's bounty's worth of salty coins.

5. The *Avalon* went down with a treasure of incalculable value: the Broken Trident of Jaq the Giantslayer.

6. The crew of the *Avalon* killed their captain before he could wreck the ship, but they were cursed for breaking the contract they signed in blood. They forever roam the Midland Sea as unquiet shades, but they always come back to the site of the wreck, bringing more gold and trinkets to add to the sunken hoard.

7. The ship is still out there, forever trapped in maddening mists. The crew would surely give a handsome reward to anyone who could release them from their fate.
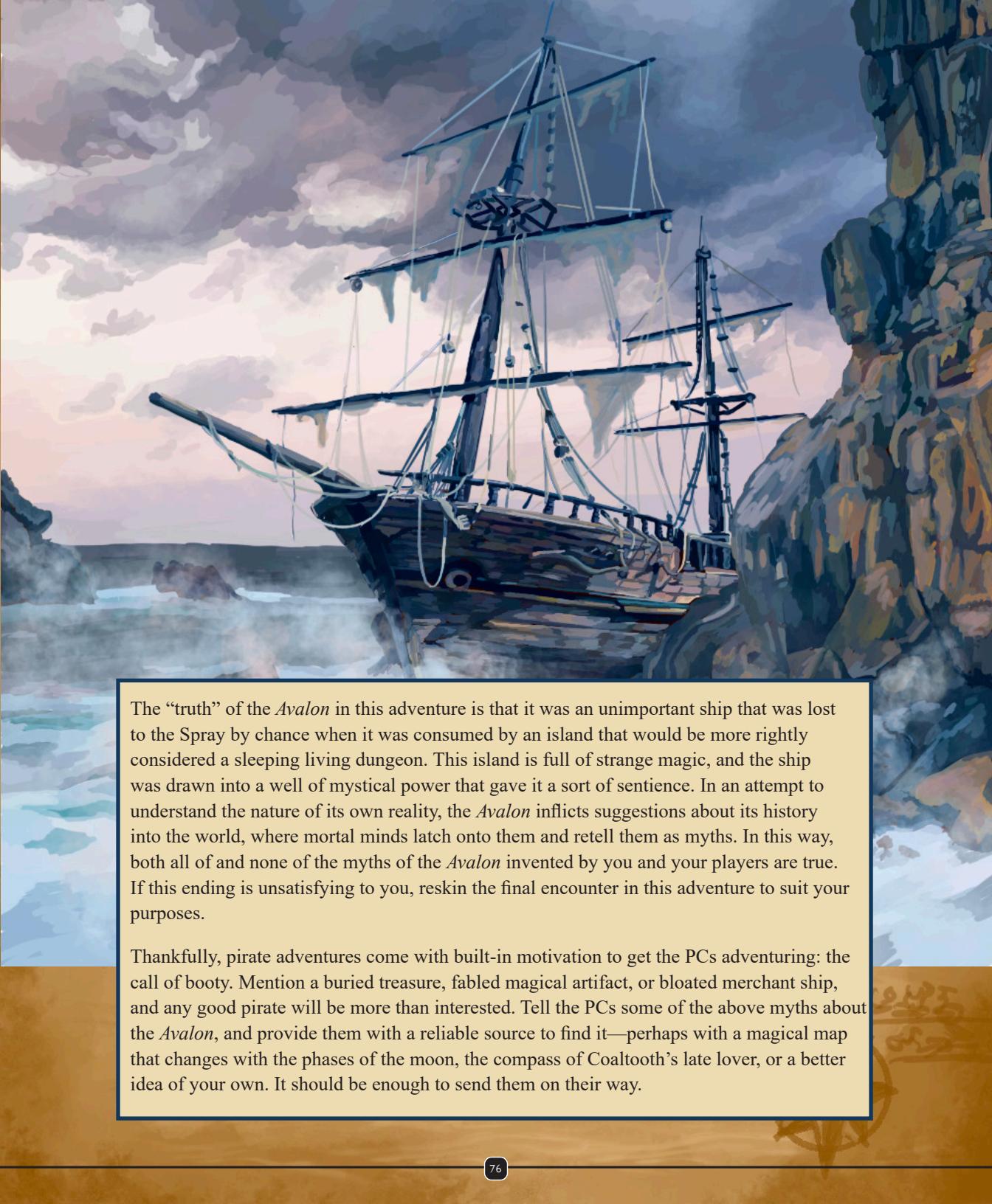
The "truth" of the *Avalon* in this adventure is that it was an unimportant ship that was lost to the Spray by chance when it was consumed by an island that would be more rightly considered a sleeping living dungeon. This island is full of strange magic, and the ship was drawn into a well of mystical power that gave it a sort of sentience. In an attempt to understand the nature of its own reality, the *Avalon* inflicts suggestions about its history into the world, where mortal minds latch onto them and retell them as myths. In this way, both all of and none of the myths of the *Avalon* invented by you and your players are true. If this ending is unsatisfying to you, reskin the final encounter in this adventure to suit your purposes.

Thankfully, pirate adventures come with built-in motivation to get the PCs adventuring: the call of booty. Mention a buried treasure, fabled magical artifact, or bloated merchant ship, and any good pirate will be more than interested. Tell the PCs some of the above myths about the *Avalon*, and provide them with a reliable source to find it—perhaps with a magical map that changes with the phases of the moon, the compass of Coaltooth's late lover, or a better idea of your own. It should be enough to send them on their way.

The drama of this adventure comes from competing against the crew of the *Jade Serpent*, so however you introduce the adventure, do it in a way that gives *both* crews the information they need to find the wreck at the *same time*. A fortune teller in the bar that both ships' captains frequent drops a hint, a dream is sent by the ghost of Coaltooth to both quartermasters, or a bounty is given to both crews from the same sponsor to retrieve the magic amulet said to have sunken with the ship. The crew of the *Jade Serpent* is intended to be a blank canvas. Encourage your players to suggest names, roles, uniquenesses, and relationships for them. This can help reinforce what a "normal" pirate ship looks like in your Dragon Empire, and what is weird or standard about the PCs' ship.

The PCs are given reliable information about the location of the wreck of the *Avalon*, but so is the rival crew. Start them off with the race scene below through Shadow Port, or any other dingy docks in your Dragon Empire.

Leaving Port

"You down the last of your grog, snatch the glowing map the weird stranger left you, and sprint out into the night. Looking around, you see torches illuminating oily, narrow streets, as the half-cut crew of the Jade Serpent burst out of the door next to you. You glance across at them, and start running for your ship.

At this time of night, there's only one harbor officer on duty, whoever gets to them first will have an hour's head start on the other crew."

This encounter has different win conditions than a typical 13th Age fight. Instead of defeating the enemies, *one* member of your party needs to reach the harbor officer before a member of the *Jade Serpent* can get to them. Dealing enough damage to someone to reduce them to 0 hp doesn't kill them, it just makes them stop being able to run for their ship. They could be trapped, injured, or feel so drunk that they may as well be dead. If a PC *would* like to try to kill some of the other crew, remind them that they know murder is only legal in Shadow Port if you have a signed writ from a Guild Agent, or allow whatever level of wanton slaughter is right for your campaign.

Make it clear to the players that only one of your crew or the enemy crew needs to reach the shoreline in order to win, as this is where the sole night shift harbor officer will be working. You can go back to collect any fallen or injured crew members while the harbor officer is processing your documents. Remember, both parties have more crew members back at their ships.

# of PCs	Captain Goldcloak	Master of Arms	The Runaway Monk	Pirate Crewman
3	1	1	1	0
4	1	1	1	4
5	1	1	1	6
6	1	1	1	8

Captain Goldcloak

"That treasure is rightfully mine since I want it the most!"

3rd level troop [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +11

Flashy Rapier +9 vs AC—7 damage

Natural 16+: Dazzling Illusion. The target takes a penalty to skill checks equal to the current escalation die until they spend a move action to confirm what is real or illusion.

Miss: Captain Goldcloak makes a disengage check as a free action.

R: Throwing knives (one nearby enemy or far away enemy at -2 to attack) +8 vs AC—8 damage

Swashbuckle: Once per battle, as a quick action, Goldcloak can pull off a daring stunt the likes of which others can scarcely conceive. He can make an attack as part of this stunt, but must spend a standard action and roll to hit as usual. Consider using this stunt to bypass an obstacle that could be overcome with swashbuckling flair and acrobatic abandon.

Skilled combatant: Captain Goldcloak receives the following bonuses to skill checks. Agility: +8; brute force: +6; mental: +6.

.

AC	18	
PD	18	**HP 50**
MD	13	

Master of Arms

"Stick 'em, lads!"
2nd level leader [HUMANOID]
Initiative: +5
Cutlass +7 vs AC—7 damage, any allies that attack the target before the end of the master of arms' next turn gain +1 to attacks

R: Sling +7 vs AC—4 damage

Move it!: Once per battle as an interrupt action on an ally's turn, an ally can pop free from one enemy.
Board 'em!: Once per battle as a quick action, 1d3 nearby allies can take a free move action, provided they end their movement engaged with a PC.
Skilled combatant: The master of arms receives the following bonuses to skill checks. Agility: +4; brute force: +8; mental: +6.

AC	18	
PD	12	**HP 36**
MD	18	

The Runaway Monk

Eerie silence.
2nd level spoiler [HUMANOID]
Initiative: +8
Spear +8 vs AC—6 damage
Natural even hit: The runaway monk can pop free as a free action.
Natural odd hit: The target has disadvantage on disengage checks (save ends).

Ki blocker +7 vs PD
Natural even hit: The target is hampered until the end of the monk's next turn.
Natural odd hit: The target is weakened until the end of the monk's next turn.

Martial Artist: Once per battle, the runaway monk can treat a natural even hit as a natural odd hit, or vice versa.
Skilled combatant: The runaway monk receives the following bonuses to skill checks. Agility: +10; brute force: +4; mental: +8.

AC	18	
PD	15	**HP 40**
MD	13	

Pirate Crewman

"'Ere we go again."
1st level mook [HUMANOID]
Initiative: +5
Knife +6 vs AC—4 damage
Special: For every 2 mooks still in the fight, one can make a *harpoon and net* attack as a quick action.

C: Harpoon and net +6 vs PD—2 damage
Natural 12+: The target is grabbed.
Natural 16+: The target also loses their next move action.

AC	17	
PD	15	**HP 7 (mook)**
MD	11	

Mook: Kill one pirate crewman mook for every 7 damage you deal to the mob.

The Race

The race from the bar to the harbor officer won't be a straight line. Instead, both parties will be twisting and turning down dark alleys, flying over rooftops, swinging from loading cranes, and tumbling through market stalls. Instead of trying to represent the intricacies of all of this movement, in true 13th Age fashion the race can be abstracted. Both groups start out with a *Race Advantage* of 0, and at the end of each round, one group will advance by 1 depending on who gets the most points during the round (consider letting the enemy crew win ties to up the stakes!). This represents the crew guiding the moving combat into areas of the town they know better, tiring out the rival crew, and eventually simply outpacing them. The race is won when one group has a *Race Advantage* 4 points higher than the other group (this number can be changed, increasing it to increase the expected length of the encounter), or if all of the members of one crew are defeated and can't run anymore.

Which group wins each round and increases their *Race Advantage* depends on who successfully spends the most move actions *Racing* that round. If a combatant is unengaged, they can expend their move action to increase their crew's tally for that round. If they are engaged, they can roll a disengage check as part of the move action. Success will pop them free from that enemy and increase their crew's tally for that round; failure means they stay engaged anddon't successfully

Race. Engaged combatants can also accept opportunity attacks in order to guarantee being able to add a tally to their crew's score, becoming unengaged in the process. Obstacles (below) may mean that a successful skill check is also needed to add a tally. If you would like, you can reward clever plays, enemies' natural 1's, or other features with a tally point, but limiting it to *Racing* helps keep it clear.

Keep the tallies of each crew where everyone can see them, to help people make decisions about whether to focus on *Racing* or doing something else with their action. All tallies return to 0 at the start of the round, and the crew with the most points on their tally gets to add 1 point to their *Race Advantage*.

Players can describe *Racing* in any way they wish; it doesn't have to be sprinting ahead of the pack. Remember that the *Race Advantage* mechanic is abstract and doesn't have to represent the real geometry of the combat. All of the combatants are assumed to be moving through Shadow Port at a roughly similar pace through the combat, until there is one clear winner, and that group pulls ahead. If your group would prefer more simulationist racing rules, consider adapting the *Chase* mechanics in Pelgrane Press' *Night's Black Agents*.

Obstacles

At the start of each round except the first, a new obstacle appears in front of the moving combat. When combatants use a move action to *Race*, and there is an obstacle ahead of them, they must succeed at an appropriate skill check to not be heavily delayed by the obstacle. Failure doesn't necessarily mean the combatant is stuck behind the obstacle, just that they didn't get past it fast enough to get any advantage this round.

You can roll randomly on the table below, design your own obstacles, or source ideas for them from the players. Try to reward genre appropriate ways of bypassing obstacles; riding on top of barrels is easier for pirates than dodging them on the ground, for example.

Eight example obstacles:

1. A group of orphans accosts you and starts begging you for money, blocking the narrow street. (DC 20 check to talk them down, or spend some gold to get straight past them.)

2. An oil slick makes for hazardous terrain to traverse, slow down or risk falling amongst the rats! (DC 20 check to keep your balance; DC 15 to slide across it on a shield.)

3. A pallet of ale barrels is knocked free. Barrels are rolling down the hill! (DC 20 to dodge between them; DC 15 to ride them.)

4. New local development: a shack has been built in the middle of what was once a busy thoroughfare. You can't go around it… (DC 20 to climb over it; DC 15 to burst through the door and apologetically squeeze past the people inside until you reach the back door.)

5. An Otyugh lumbers between a sewer grate to a trash heap over the cobbles. Getting close means risking getting slapped by a tentacle. (Take 15 damage to run straight past, or DC 20 to dodge past.)

6. Narrow, dark, busy, and maze-like alleyways slow your movement to an agonizing back-and-forth crawl. (DC 15 to leap onto the rooftops, but subsequent DCs might be harder; DC 20 to work out the fastest way through the streets.)

7. The rooftop shortcut collapses under your weight, dropping you in a smoke-filled gambling den.

8. It's The Fuzz!

Tactics

Captain Goldcloak will try to stay unengaged, instructing allies to intercept, leaving him free to *Race* and throw knives at the PCs, or even trade down his standard action and *Race* twice.

The master of arms uses *board 'em lads* to get as many mooks engaged with the PCs as possible, limiting their ability to *Race*, then alternates between focusing on fighting and *Racing* herself.

The runaway monk will focus on attacking PCs unless a good opportunity to *Race* presents itself. If Captain Goldencloak is reduced to 0 hp, they will focus entirely on *Racing*.

In general, don't trade down standard actions to *Race*, instead focusing on continuing to fight the PCs. If the players start double *Racing*, you can follow their lead to keep up with them.

These enemies will show up again later in the game, so getting some rival banter happening now will make the payoff better later on. Lead by example with this.

Icon ideas

Good ways to mechanically let icons shine is to allow PCs to bypass obstacles without a skill check, making passing obstacles a step easier for your allies for a turn, or turning a close loss in the race one round into a win. Icons shouldn't be able to increase or decrease the *Race Advantage* points themselves.

Icon results with the Prince of Shadows could be leveraged for a local recognising you and nonchalantly tripping up one of your competitors, or knowledge of a rat-run or back alley that will let you dodge an obstacle.

Consider whether relationships with the High Druid could be mediated through the animal totem on your ship's masthead. Maybe the magic of the masthead lets you intuit a quicker path through the streets to get to it quickly, allows you to make double use of your next move action, or gives you some stunt related to the type of animal it represents.

Results with the Three could see you making your way through Shadow Port's "Little Drakenhall," a neighborhood the crew of the *Jade Serpent* certainly aren't welcome in!

Relationships with the Emperor might mean the local "law" are sympathetic to you, and you know who's palm to grease to get through a private mansion or past a group of guards.

Maybe one of the crewmembers of the *Jade Serpent* is in the same Diabolical or Priestly cult as you, and tries to sabotage their allies' efforts.

Rewards

As reward for winning this encounter, your pirate crew gets to leave the port first and gains a good lead. This will affect the showdown encounter later on, and you can award additional narrative benefits as you see fit.

Leads out

Beaten and bruised and huffing and puffing, the winner of the race bursts into the harbor officer's hut. She sleepily begins filling out the necessary forms for you to leave. What's the point of having a haven for pirates, thieves, and ne'er do wells, if it has its own bureaucracy! If the PCs lose the race, you can offer them the chance to break out of Shadow Port early and take a campaign loss. They will be on the run from the Prince of Shadows' network, and any icons with the Prince won't apply for the rest of the adventure. At the end of the adventure, any points PCs had with the Prince should come back as conflicted or negative. If the PCs win, the crew of the *Jade Serpent* begrudgingly waits in line behind you.

As your PCs leave the port, consider whether now would be a cool time to introduce some classic pirate scenes. Montages (see the 13th Age GM's Screen ahd Resource Book) could be a fantastic way to get everyone on board with the nautical style. Everyone is generally familiar with pirate media; consider drawing from *Pirates of the Caribbean, Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*, Amazon's *Black Sails, Treasure Island*, The *Princess Bride*, and many others. Don't be afraid to lean into the romance of the sea, lovingly describing the golden light of dawn reflected in the glassy ripples of the ocean. Now could be a good time to include some scenes of your own. Maybe the crew encounters a sea monster or gets thrown into a cyclone.

Attack on the High Seas

"Your barrelman calls down from the crows nest, 'Sail's on the horizon, Cap'n! They're gaining on us!'"

While out at sea, it's only appropriate that the crew encounters an enemy vessel of some sort. This encounter will suggest some ways to run a low tech ship vs. ship combat in 13th Age, and provides some different mechanics depending on which icons are at play in your group. The enemy ship's crew includes a mage who manipulates the wind and the waves to intercept the PCs' ship rapidly.

The enemy ship doesn't use artillery, whereas the PCs' ship may include ballistae, catapults, and crossbows wielded by the crew. When the enemy ship gets into range of the ship's big artillery, ask each PC what they are doing to prepare for the ensuing combat. They may want to take the wheel and maneuver the ship to their advantage, giving a penalty to enemy attempts to board. Perhaps they want to give a speech to their crew, causing the escalation die to start on 1. If they find some way to disrupt the mage's weather magic, the enemy crew will lose some actions during the combat. Maybe they want to shoot with a catapult! Shooting artillery should be high risk, high reward. Make the skill check for doing so (usually Intelligence if the PC is an engineer, or Dexterity if they're a marksman) ridiculously hard, and let success be significant, possibly removing an entire enemy from play. A hard success may be a glancing hit on the enemy ship.

Next, the enemy ship will be in attack range. Let PCs and enemies that can target far-away enemies get a pot shot off before rolling initiative. Anyone that doesn't want to make an attack can take some other action to prepare to be boarded, as above. Note that one piece of artillery shouldn't be able to be fired twice, reloading will take too long.

After this, roll initiative, and proceed with combat as usual, starting both ships next to each other and the two crews nearby, unless specified otherwise. It will usually be an easy save to successfully board a ship. There will likely be more mooks on both sides of this conflict than those represented in the battle, where faceless enemy pirates fight against the PCs' boatswains and crewmembers. Feel free to describe these little combats going on around the PCs' main conflict. For a more involved approach, consider using the mass battle rules *(Eyes of the Stone Thief* p. 168, or on Pelgrane Press' website).

# of PCs	Pirate Captain	Ship's Mage	Archer	Crew Member	Pirate Crewman
3	1	1	2	3	0
4	1	1	3	6	0
5	1	1	2	6	1
6	1	1	2	10	1

Iconic Variants

Orc Lord: The enemy ship is a Viking-style orc longboat on a raiding mission. All of the pirates have their crit range expanded by 3 with melee attacks.

Elf Queen: An infamous drow cutter stalks the seas in search of sailors to sacrifice to dark gods. Critical hits by the non-mook pirates deal normal damage but cause targets to make last gasp saves; on the fourth failure they fall into a catatonic state and cannot be roused by mundane means. The champion also deals 5 ongoing poison damage with his first hit.

Dwarf King: Powered by steam and with a hull of wrought metal, these dwarves were banished from their homes and live a hateful life where they cannot set foot on the ground. All the dwarf pirates deal 2 miss damage, and seem enraged as they do so. The ship is outfitted with a prototype cannon of sorts. Roll a d20 when the ships are within artillery distance of each other. On a natural 1, the cannon explodes, killing a random dwarf pirate. On an 11+, the PCs' ship is hit, disrupting some of their preparation efforts. On a 16+, a random PC is hit by the cannon or flying debris, immediately reducing them to 50% of their maximum hit point value. On a natural 20, two random PCs are hit.

The Emperor: A group of privateers with a warrant seek the PCs' arrest. Give all the crew members the following attack.

R: Rain of crossbow bolts +6 vs AC—4 damage

Natural 16+: The target chooses to either lose their next move action as they take cover from the rain of fire or to be vulnerable to ranged attacks until the end of the crew member's next turn.

Diabolist: A living demonic ship is full of fanatic, deep sea monstrosity–worshiping cultists. Give all of the non-mook pirates a random demon ability (*13th Age* p. 209).

Lich King: A gray, almost-ethereal hull carries a soulless group of undead pirates, mostly crewed by indentured skeletons. All the pirates are considered undead, and are vulnerable to holy damage. When a non-mook enemy would be reduced to 0 hp, they can instead choose to absorb the unlife essence of any mook in the battle, destroying the mook, and leaving them with 1 hp. The crew members of this ship can swarm onto the PCs' vessel with ease; saves for boarding attempts are one step easier for them (usually automatically succeeding, instead of an easy save).

Prince of Shadows: The enemy ship is the *Jade Serpent*! Replace the pirate captain with Captain Goldcloak, the musician with the master of arms, and add the runaway monk as an additional enemy. The *Jade Serpent* chasing down the PCs after leaving port could be a fun story beat, but consider the implications on the next scene if the crew are defeated. Having them flee with their tails between their legs might be a better option. Make sure to read ahead before using this variant.

Pirate Captain

2nd level troop [HUMANOID]
Initiative: +7

Rapier or mace +7 vs AC—7 damage
   Natural even hit: A nearby ally can make an attack as a
     free action, dealing half damage on a hit.

R: Heavy Crossbow +7 vs AC—10 damage
   Limited use: 1/battle

Flow like waves: Once per battle as a quick action,
   the pirate captain can instruct 2d3 allies to attempt a
   disengage check as a free action.

AC	18	
PD	16	**HP 34**
MD	16	

Champion

4th level wrecker [HUMANOID]
Initiative: +8

Flailing axes (2 attacks) +9 vs AC—7 damage

R: Throwing axe —9 damage

Feel No Pain: The Champion ignores the first 10 points
   of damage they receive in a round.

| AC	18	
PD	18	**HP 64**
MD	13	

Musician [Reinforcement]

2nd level leader [HUMANOID]
Initiative: +7

Club-like drumstick +8 vs AC—7 damage

Boarding drums: All nearby creatures (allies and enemies)
   add half of the escalation die (rounded up) to their
   attacks, instead of what they would normally use.

AC	21	
PD	14	**HP 28**
MD	14	

Archer

1st level archer [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +5

Knife +5 vs AC—4 damage

R: Crossbow +7 vs AC—5 damage

Special: If the archer takes no action other than using their crossbow attack in a turn, enemies are vulnerable to that attack.

AC	17	
PD	15	**HP 27**
MD	11	

Crew Member

1st level mook [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +5

Cutlasses, knives, and hammers +5 vs AC—4 damage

Spear +7 vs AC—4 damage

Natural 16+: The crewmember can make a *cutlass* attack as a free action against the target.

Limited use: The crew member must successfully board a ship to make a *spear* attack.

AC	17	
PD	15	**HP 7 (mook)**
MD	11	

Mook: Kill one crew member mook for every 7 damage you deal to the mob.

Ship's Mage

2nd level caster [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +4

Rotten club: +6 vs AC—4 damage

C: Call of the depths +6 vs MD—The target must choose whether to take 6 psychic damage or take a move action towards (or eventually into) the ocean, triggering opportunity attacks if they are engaged

R: Salty curse +6 vs PD—Any healing the target receives from any source for the rest of the battle is halved.

Weather mage: The mage is assumed to be constantly focusing on manipulating waves and winds to the benefit of their boarding party. A PC with an appropriate background could attempt to counter this, giving some penalty to the advancing enemies.

AC	16	
PD	12	**HP 40**
MD	16	

Tactics

The crew members and champion will rush on board as soon as possible, trying to make use of their spears, while the captain holds back for a round and uses their crossbow. Archers, the mage, and the optional musician will stay on their own ship and provide support to their allies, only resorting to melee if they are boarded themselves.

Icon Ideas

Relationship dice with the Prince of Shadows could be leveraged to swing from ropes and falling beams in order to easily maneuver between the two ships.

A High Druid relationship could give you some control over the weather, allowing you to disrupt the enemy mage's powers and give you an additional turn of ranged attacks before rolling initiative.

Perhaps your experience as a siege engineer for the Crusader or Emperor allows you to target weak points in the enemy ship with your artillery.

If your PCs have icon dice to use with the iconic variant used, you might be able to shake the boarders' resolve and have them hesitate before engaging you. Broadly speaking, icon dice might represent a personal relationship with someone on board the enemy ship that could be used for narrative purposes.

Rewards

If the PCs defeat their enemies and have time to loot their hold, they may find a chest almost bursting with silver: 2,000 pieces of. Some of the pirates may have also been carrying magic items. Roll randomly or choose an appropriate item from the pirate magic item table at the start of this article. The PCs may also find a map or document that leads them to new adventures, pointing them to lost treasure, a bounty contract, or permission to trade in a type of contraband.

The Showdown

"The misty islands and jagged rocks of the Spray rise up from the horizon, beckoning you forward to dash yourselves on unseen hazards. The full moon rises and a fell intelligence seems to hang in the mist."

The crew follows its map, dreamquest, magic compass, or whatever navigation aid it's using. The PCs safely navigate through the dangerous rocks and mists of the spray, until they come upon an island that is not documented on any map sold around the Midland Sea. This island is eerie, unsettling, and strange. Consider giving it unique and odd features, such as waves crashing in the wrong direction against its shores, the sand on the beach lightly covering piles of human skulls, or a bizarre carnivorous plant loudly devouring giant insects. Ask your players what unnerving detail their PCs notice as they approach the island.

Assume that your PCs will take a smaller rowboat from their ship to the shore, leaving behind their more faceless NPC crew members while they make up an elite shore party. Now would be another great opportunity for a montage if you wanted to bulk out the scenes on the island, or for you to include your own homebrew encounter. Strange giant monsters or the unquiet dead of shipwrecked sailors would be thematically appropriate options. This portion of the adventure draws on themes of stories such as Treasure Island, so emphasize feelings of wonder and exploration, and the tension of knowing the *Jade Serpent* crew are not far ahead or behind you.

After some time of picking through the dense jungle of the island, accompanied by some relevant skill challenges if you wish, the PCs hear or are otherwise made aware of the presence of the crew of the *Jade Serpent.* It is possible that depending on your PCs they may wish to ally with the rival crew and share the loot of the island among themselves; this might be possible after a tense negotiation, and always risks the *Jade Serpent* turning on you at the worst possible moment. If the PCs won Encounter 1, *Leaving Port*, then the rival crew are downhill from them, picking through the undergrowth, and haven't spotted the PCs yet. Inform the players that they will have time to set up an ambush. If the PCs lost that encounter, then they are not aware of the rival crew until they are ambushed. Use 13th Age's rules for surprise, and allow for any traps or plans that the PCs have made to trigger, too. If the enemies are going first, trigger the 2 traps below:

Whipping Palm Trees: DC 15 skill check to notice; **+8 vs PD (two random PCs)**—10 damage; *Natural 16+*: Flying coconuts. The target is also dazed. Single use.

Rope Net: DC 20 skill check to notice; **+10 vs PD (one random PC that was not targeted by the *whipping palm trees*)**—target is caught in a net and lifted up off the ground. This hampers the PC and prevents them from taking move actions until they or an ally spends a standard action to free them. Enemies may struggle to attack the trapped PC, as they are out of range of many melee attacks. Single use.

# of PCs	Captain Goldcloak	The Runaway Monk	Storm-warden	Master of Arms	The Boxer	The Barrelman
3	1	1	1	0	0	0
4	1	1	1	1	0	0
5	1	1	1	1	1	0
6	1	1	1	1	1	1

Captain Goldcloak

"We'll see who's the better cap'n now there's no port rules to protect ya!"

3rd level troop [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +11

Flashy Rapier +9 vs AC—7 damage

Natural 16+: Dazzling Illusion. The target takes a penalty to skill checks equal to the current escalation die until they spend a move action to confirm what is real or illusion.

Miss: Captain Goldcloak makes a disengage check as a free action.

R: Throwing knives (one nearby enemy or far away enemy at -2 to attack) +8 vs AC—8 damage

Swashbuckle: Once per battle, as a quick action, Goldcloak can pull off a daring stunt the likes of which others can scarcely conceive. He can make an attack as part of this stunt, but must spend a standard action and roll to hit as usual. Consider using this stunt to bypass an obstacle that could be overcome with swashbuckling flair and acrobatic abandon.

Murderous: Once per battle as a quick action, Captain Goldcloak can pick an enemy, and his crit range with attacks against that target is expand by 2 until the end of the battle.

AC	18	
PD	18	**HP 50**
MD	13	

The Runaway Monk

Eerie silence.

2nd level spoiler [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +8

Spear +8 vs AC—6 damage

Natural even hit: The runaway monk can pop free as a free action.

Natural odd hit: The target has disadvantage on disengage checks (save ends).

Ki blocker +7 vs PD

Natural even hit: The target is hampered until the end of the monk's next turn.

Natural odd hit: The target is weakened until the end of the monk's next turn.

Martial Artist: Once per battle, the runaway monk can treat a natural even hit as a natural odd hit, or vice versa.

AC	18	
PD	15	**HP 40**
MD	13	

The Boxer

Cauliflower ears and a fighter's stance.

1st level blocker [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +3

Tussle +6 vs PD—4 damage and the target is grabbed

Beatdown +10 vs AC (one grabbed enemy, the grab bonus is included in the attack)—6 damage and the target is dazed until the end of the boxer's next turn

Dirty Tricks +6 vs AC (one dazed enemy)—10 damage

AC	16	
PD	14	**HP 40**
MD	10	

Stormwarden*

*Adapted from *blue sorcerer (13th Age Bestiary* p. 21)*
Maniacal, thunderous laughter.

3rd level caster [HUMANOID]
Initiative: +9
Coral Staff +8 vs. AC—6 damage

Minor Spell

R: Lightning fork +8 vs. PD—6
lightning damage
Natural hit or miss: The stormwarden
can target a different nearby enemy
with the attack.

Major Spell

**C: Breath of the Blue +8 vs. PD
(one nearby enemy)**—10 lightning
damage, and at the start of the target's
next turn, 1d6 nearby allies of the
target take 4 lightning damage

**C: Chaos orb +8 vs. MD (1d3 nearby
enemies)**—8 cold damage
Natural even hit: The stormwarden
gains one use of the target's racial
power, if any. It must use that
power by the end of the battle or
lose it, and it can't use the power
this turn.

Power-monger: When the stormwarden
starts its turn and it didn't gather
power the previous turn, choose
whether it will gather power or cast
a spell this turn. When it chooses to
cast a spell, roll a d20 to see if it uses
a minor spell or a major spell: **1–10**:
minor spell; **11–20**: major spell.
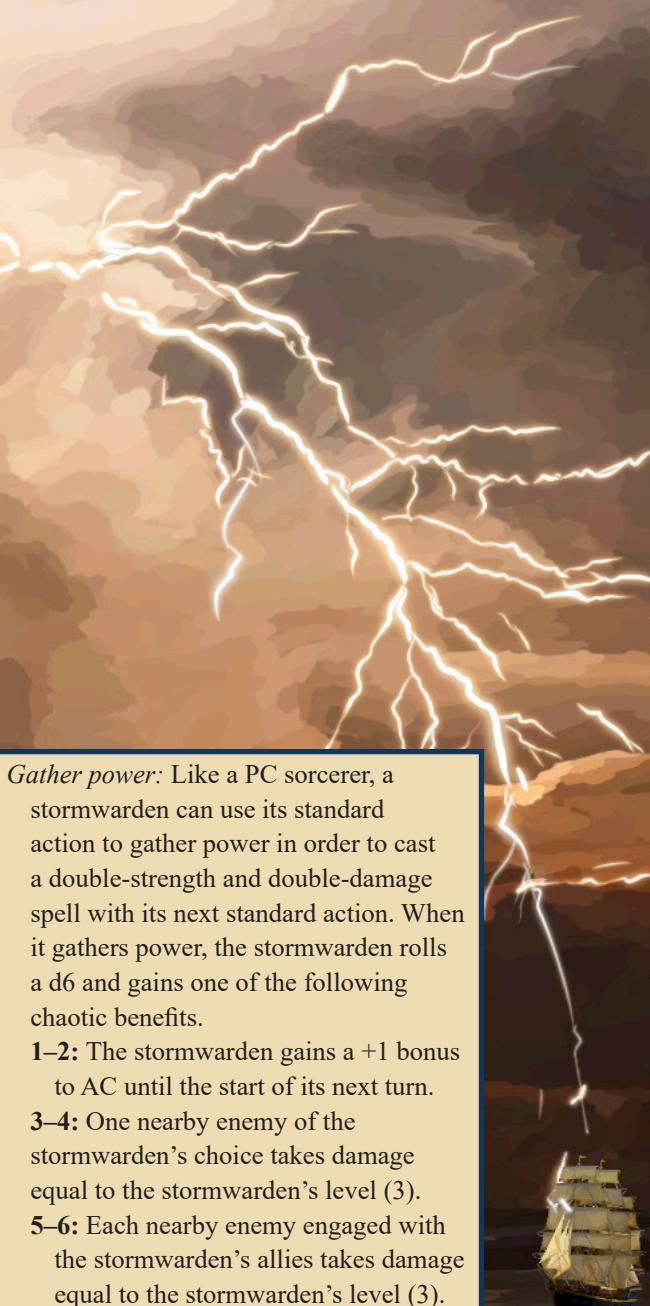
Gather power: Like a PC sorcerer, a
stormwarden can use its standard
action to gather power in order to cast
a double-strength and double-damage
spell with its next standard action. When
it gathers power, the stormwarden rolls
a d6 and gains one of the following
chaotic benefits.
1–2: The stormwarden gains a +1 bonus
to AC until the start of its next turn.
3–4: One nearby enemy of the
stormwarden's choice takes damage
equal to the stormwarden's level (3).
5–6: Each nearby enemy engaged with
the stormwarden's allies takes damage
equal to the stormwarden's level (3).

AC	18	
PD	14	**HP 48**
MD	17	

Master of Arms

"Take no prisoners!"

2nd level leader [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +5

Cutlass +7 vs AC—7 damage, any allies that attack the target before the end of the master of arms' next turn gain +1 to attacks

Natural 16+: An ally can make a basic attack as a free action.

R: Sling +7 vs AC—4 damage

Move it!: Once per battle as an interrupt action on an ally's turn, an ally can pop free from one enemy.

Board 'em!: Once per battle as a quick action, 1d3 nearby allies can take a free move action, provided they end their movement engaged with a PC.

AC	18	
PD	12	**HP 36**
MD	18	

The Barrelman

A dark elf hunter with eagle-eyed aim.

2nd level archer [HUMANOID]

Initiative: +9

Elegant Blades +6 vs AC—4 damage

R: Creaking Bow +8 vs AC—7 damage

Nastier Special

Roll with advantage: When the barrelman makes *creaking bow* attacks, it rolls the attack twice and chooses the higher result.

AC	18	
PD	16	**HP 35**
MD	12	

Hungry Dire Boar [Reinforcement]

Thundering out of the undergrowth, drawn by the sounds of battle, appears this oversized, monstrous pig.

3rd level troop [BEAST]

Initiative: +6

Goring Tusks +11 (+13 if the boar moved to engage the target) vs AC—13 damage

Natural 16+: The boar can make a *bash* attack against a different target as a free action.

Minor Spell

R: Lightning fork +8 vs. PD—6 lightning damage

[Special trigger] **Bash +8 vs PD**—The target is weakened until the end of the boar's next turn

Bestial durability: When an enemy's attack has an effect on the dire boar other than damage, the boar can roll an immediate hard save (16+); on a success, it negates that effect.

One dire feature: Roll randomly (*13th Age* p. 206) unless you know this beast's story already.

On its own side: The hungry dire boar determines its targets randomly among all other combatants in the encounter, PC or enemy.

AC	16	
PD	14	**HP 120**
MD	10	

Tactics

Have the enemies make liberal use of their environment, clambering atop large boulders for advantages to hit, swinging on vines to avoid interception, or leaping from tree to tree to stay out of melee range. This will encourage your PCs to do the same. If the *Jade Serpent's* crew members are surprised, feel free to run them sub-optimally, perhaps each enemy attacking the nearest PC. If the *Jade Serpent's* crew has a surprise round, then the runaway monk will be the elected acting enemy, and the enemies will fight sensibly, focusing on one or two enemies at a time.

If you include the boar reinforcement, you can use it to even the playing field. Feel free to ignore the requirement for it to target a random enemy for the first round it appears, targeting a member of whichever crew seems to be losing. The *Jade Serpent's* crew members will surrender if it's clear that they will lose in a fight to the death, and a PC prompts it. The boar may flee if it's staggered and hasn't killed anyone yet.

Rewards

If Captain Goldcloak is defeated, you can take his *Compass of Safe Harbor*. This is a wondrous magic item that it will always point towards a safe location for you to take your ship. However, each compass has a different definition of "safe," which can only be worked out through trial and error. The rival crew also has an adventurer tier healing potion and a small, glass bottle containing a lightning bolt—a collector's item, or possibly a ritual component.

The Wreck of the Avalon

After defeating the rival crew, the PCs make their final push into the island and come upon an eerie sight. Over the top of a ridge, they see a lake covered by swirling mists. They can just make out a tiny island at the center of the lake. The huge, ominous remains of a ruined ship dominates the island. Feel free to make the PCs feel as though the lake might be dangerous for them to traverse through in order to up the tension, but don't actually punish the PCs just for approaching the final boss.

The ship is animated, brought to a sort of half-sentient state by the magic of the island, and it will instinctively try to attack and kill anyone that approaches it that is not native to the island.

The Mists: The Mists obscure vision and trick the mind. During this entire scene and battle, all saves are one step harder (max 16+) for PCs *and* enemies. PCs might be able to negate this effect through icon relationships or One Unique Things.

The legends were true: Thanks to the magic underpinning the island, stories and myths can start to take on a physical truth. Each round during combat, ask *one* player, rotating between them, what myth about the *Avalon* their PC is most scared of. Then have all PCs make a DC 20 skill check to disbelieve that myth. On a failure, for that round a negative effect related to that myth affects the PCs. On a success you can begin to reveal the nature of the magic to them. The negative effects should be roughly on par to a nastier special, and you can use those for inspiration. Once the players understand what is going on, they can each attempt to manifest a myth they want to believe in; this requires a DC 20 skill check. Failure means nothing happens this round, but you can try again in the future. The power level of successfully manifesting these should be like a minor iconic benefit. Try to make sure they don't last for more than a turn.

Examples of negative mythic effects:

- The souls of sailors haunt and defend the *Avalon*. The PCs' attacks have a 50% chance to be intercepted by a misty ghost this round.

- The *Avalon* exists partially in this realm and partially in a realm of horror, unphysics, and madness. PCs that miss this round must make the attack again vs. an ally, as they mistake their friends for foes.

- A terrible weapon was sunk with the ship. All attacks by the *Avalon* this round are made with advantage (roll twice and take the better result).

- The *Avalon* was sunk by a tempest. The storm rages around you, and you cannot use the escalation die this round.

- The *Avalon's* figurehead is a carved dragon. Let it recharge its creeping dread immediately as if it were a breath weapon.

Examples of positive mythic effects:

- The water here becomes rejuvenating to mortal flesh. The PC can immediately heal using a free recovery, growing the body part of a sea creature in the process.

- You release a sailor from their endless fate, and they show you the ship's weak point in thanks. Your attacks against the Avalon either ignore resistances or have their crit range expanded by 2.

- You were (or are now) destined by birth, design, or the position of stars, to receive the spoils of this island. Gain an incremental advance to represent this renewed heroism.

- Increase the escalation die by one as flowers of new life begin to blossom among the hull of the ship.

- Remembering (or inventing) the legendary rope swinging actions of Captain Coaltooth, you pull off a stunt as if you had the *swashbuckle* talent, but without momentum requirements (*13th Age* p. 128).

# of PCs	The *Avalon*	Sharktapus
3	1*	0
4	1	0
5	1	3
6	1	6

Constricting ropes can only target 2 nearby enemies; reduce the *Avalon's* max hit points to 120.

The Avalon

With a horrific creak and the splintering of wood, the wrecked ship before you groans into life. The rotting planks of the hull resemble a vast upturned ribcage, and the mists swirling about in its depths seem to occasionally take the form of sailors before they are snatched away on a fell breeze. The masts of the ship begin to swing rapidly in terrifying arcs, and old ropes start to coil and snipe from all over the wreckage out towards you.

Huge 3rd level spoiler [CONSTRUCT]
Initiative: +6
Vulnerability: Fire

C: Constricting ropes and ensnaring rigging (3 nearby enemies) +8 vs PD—6 damage, and the target is grabbed. Enemies grabbed by the *Avalon* take 3 damage at the start of their turn.

Crushing wooden beams +12 vs AC (one grabbed enemy, the grab bonus is included in the attack)—7 damage
Natural 16+: The attack deals no damage, but the target is drawn into the center of the wreck, where they begin to be crushed and drowned. The target must begin making last gasp saves, where four failures mean that the *Avalon* has drowned you within its hold, and you die. Success on a 16-19 breaks the PC free, but a 20 means you can tear through the hull and deal damage equal to your melee basic attack as you break free.
Quick use: This power only requires a quick action (once per round) instead of a standard action.

C: Creeping Dread +7 vs MD (1d3 random nearby or far away enemies)—16 damage, and if the target has fewer than 20 hit points after the attack they are weakened; if they also have fewer than 10 then they cannot add the escalation dice to their attacks (save ends both, remember saves are a step harder while in the Mists)
Limited use: 1/battle
Room in the hold: The *Avalon* can grab up to 3 enemies simultaneously.
Beached: The *Avalon* cannot take move actions.

Nastier Specials
Wide-reaching opportunist: When a nearby enemy moves, roll a save (one step harder in the Mists); on a success, the *Avalon* takes an opportunity attack against them as an interrupt action.
Wooden body: The *Avalon* is resistant to non-magical attacks (12+) and poison (12+).
The Ship of Theseus: 3 times per battle, the *Avalon* can heal 20 hit points as a quick action.
Native: The *Avalon* ignores the effects of the Mists.

AC	16	
PD	15	**HP 160**
MD	15	
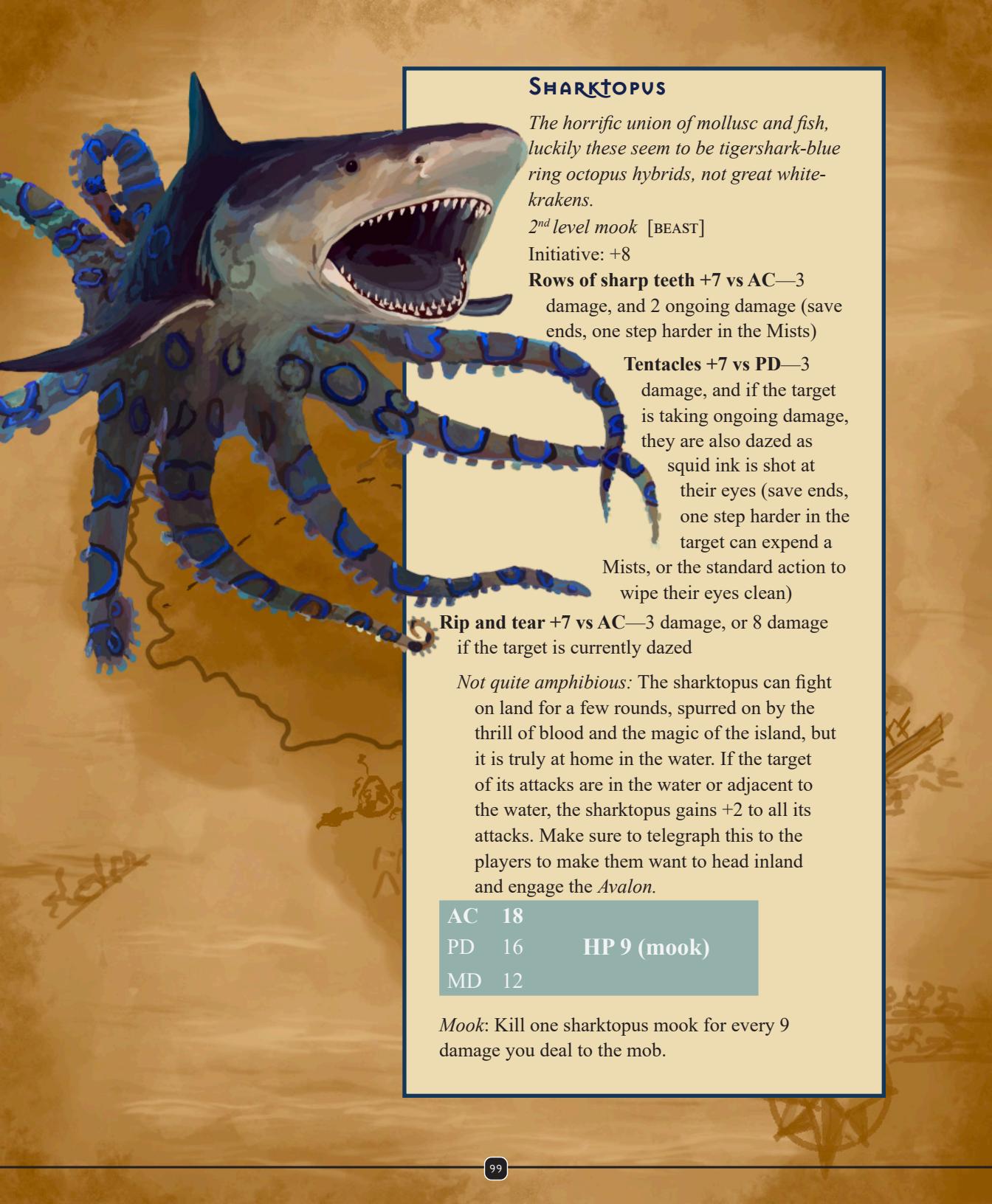
Sharktopus

The horrific union of mollusc and fish, luckily these seem to be tigershark-blue ring octopus hybrids, not great white-krakens.

2nd level mook [BEAST]

Initiative: +8

Rows of sharp teeth +7 vs AC—3 damage, and 2 ongoing damage (save ends, one step harder in the Mists)

Tentacles +7 vs PD—3 damage, and if the target is taking ongoing damage, they are also dazed as squid ink is shot at their eyes (save ends, one step harder in the Mists, or the target can expend a standard action to wipe their eyes clean)

Rip and tear +7 vs AC—3 damage, or 8 damage if the target is currently dazed

Not quite amphibious: The sharktopus can fight on land for a few rounds, spurred on by the thrill of blood and the magic of the island, but it is truly at home in the water. If the target of its attacks are in the water or adjacent to the water, the sharktopus gains +2 to all its attacks. Make sure to telegraph this to the players to make them want to head inland and engage the *Avalon*.

AC	18	
PD	16	**HP 9 (mook)**
MD	12	

Mook: Kill one sharktopus mook for every 9 damage you deal to the mob.

The Specter of Cap'n Coaltooth [Reinforcement]

Whether summoned from the depths by his ruined ship, collectively imagined into existence by the crew, or just taking a brief vacation from Hell, the ghostly figure of Captain Coaltooth stands before you, ripped clothes tattering in an unfelt wind, and hair sodden with brine.

3rd level wrecker [UNDEAD]

Initiative: +7

Vulnerability: Holy

Phantasmal blade +6 vs PD—10 negative energy damage

Natural even hit or miss: Each enemy engaged with Coaltooth takes 2 damage.

R: Greedy stare +6 vs MD—10 psychic damage, and if the target possesses a true magic item, deal 10 additional psychic damage. The target can choose to give up one true magic item to negate all of this damage. If they defeat the encounter, they will find their magic item easily among the wreckage. Once a PC has been hit by *greedy stare*, they cannot be targeted by it again.

<u>Nastier Specials</u>

Lifedrinker: When Coaltooth is staggered, a randomly determined nearby enemy spends a recovery, rolls their recovery dice, but does not gain any hit points. Coaltooth heals half the amount of hit points rolled on the recovery dice.

AC	20	
PD	18	**HP 40**
MD	15	

Tactics

If fighting alone, the *Avalon* begins by targeting what it would consider the enemies that will be the hardest to kill: those in heavy armor, beefy builds, or obvious melee acumen. It will use *constricting ropes* on these enemies until it lands a couple of hits, at which point it will use its *creeping dread* power, hoping to catch as many PCs as possible in the hit point threshold.

If any sharktopi are present, they will surround the tiny island that the *Avalon* wreckage is on and attempt to force the PCs to stay near to the *Avalon,* which cannot move itself. Telegraph to the players that the sharktopi will get worse and worse the more they successfully hit you, and that they fight better next to the water. This should have most PCs scurrying up the little beach and staying near the *Avalon*.

If Cap'n Coaltooth appears, he stays back using *greedy stare* on any PCs with true magic items. He may well take opportunity attacks from engaged enemies in order to steal a particularly powerful item from a nearby PC. Once he has attempted to grab everything on offer, or can't afford to take more opportunity attacks, he will start using his *phantasmal blade*.

Rewards

Crammed into tiny crevices around the island, the crew can come up with about 500 gold pieces worth of coins, gems, and precious metals. Much of the rest of the material wealth of the *Avalon* has been lost to time: rotted cloth, spoiled spices, rusted weapons, and ruined documents.

Inside the broken hull of the *Avalon* is a bowl of crystal blue water, emanating with a soft glow, set into the ground, about a foot wide and 4 feet deep. The characters feel waves of myth and legend and the fabric of stories flowing thro ugh them with each pulse of this light—ideas, new and old, popping up and fragmenting in their minds. By reaching their hand into the water, a PC can attempt to crystallize a mythical item from the ethereal waters. Items based on myths about the *Avalon* that have already been in play should be possible without any real issue. If the players make up new stories to fabricate the exact magic sword that they want, a skill check is called for, usually based on Charisma. A ridiculously hard success nets the item they describe (adventurer tier only); hard success grants a somewhat limited version of it; and an easy success may simply give them a random pirate magic item from the table at the start of this article, or a single use version of their request. Failure should mean they get nothing. To be guaranteed a reward, they can base their request on the story so far.

The water is capable of creating more than just magic items: wealth in the form of a heavy bag of cut gems, a destroyed piece of art or history with cultural or sentimental value, or other items that will go on to spur more pirate adventures for your crew are also entirely possible.

If the crew thinks to share the wealth of the *Avalon* with the crew of the *Jade Serpent* (if they're still alive!), they each receive a temporary positive relationship with the Prince of Shadows that lasts until the end of the next adventure.

ESCALATiON 6!

WILL RETURN