

# FABLES

PIRATES OF THE AETHERIAL EXPANSE



THE LOST CONSTELLATION  
EPISODE 3 OF 6



GHOSTFIRE  
GAMING

5E  
COMPATIBLE







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EPISODE 3

## THE LOST CONSTELLATION



GHOSTFIRE  
GAMING



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# WELCOME TO FABLES!

You hold in your hands the third episode of *Pirates of the Aetherial Expanse*, a story of pirates and empires seeking fortune, glory, and freedom upon the starlit seas of the Astral Plane. Each episode of this Fable contains about four game sessions' worth of thrilling fifth edition adventure, enough to entertain a weekly group of roleplaying game (RPG) players until the next episode arrives a month later.

## YOU ARE A GAME MASTER

As Game Master (GM) of a Fable, you have the power of a storyteller, telling tales of heroism and adventure to a rapt audience. Imagine yourself dressed in the clothes of a traveling bard, your face cast in glowing firelight as you weave a tapestry of words. Your words draw those who sit around the fire with you into another world, a world where they aren't just the audience of a tale, but actors and storytellers themselves.

The GM's role is to establish the setting of each scene in this Fable, introduce and roleplay its nonplayer characters (NPCs), and play monsters and villains that long to bring a swift end to the heroes' adventures. The players at your table are storytellers in their own right. Though they embody a single character each while you embody many, the players have the power to make decisions that will change the world forever. The best GMs are willing to improvise, even ignoring the text of a Fable when necessary, to ensure the characters' actions have consequences—for both good and ill.

**If you don't plan to run this Fable, stop reading now. What follows is for the Game Master's eyes only.**

## RUNNING THIS FABLE

Fables is an episodic adventure series using the fifth edition of the world's first roleplaying game. To play, you need the free fifth edition System Reference Document, or the books that make up the fifth edition core rules. This Fable takes place upon the Aetherial Expanse, a sea of shimmering starlight home to strange creatures and unpredictable magic. This expanse is a small corner of the Astral Plane, the plane which connects all other planes of existence. Powerful magic is usually required to travel great distances through the zero-gravity reaches of the Astral Plane, but the Aetherial Expanse is unique: a substance called aether forms a sea of roiling magical power that allows conventional seacraft from the Material Plane to sail through this magical realm.

This new setting is described in the *Aetherial Expanse Setting Guide*, included with episode 1 of this Fable. Before beginning this Fable, you should familiarize yourself with the locations, NPCs, and lore of the setting, as well as the new nautical rules found in the setting guide.

Additionally, the following information will help you run this Fable as GM.



## EPISODES AND CHAPTERS

A Fable is a complete story, released in six monthly episodes. Each episode is an arc of this overall story that presents a miniature sandbox environment. An episode is designed for a specific range of levels. As the GM, you're empowered to run an episode for characters of a higher or lower level than recommended, but be prepared for a more challenging or easier session unless you alter the challenges and monsters the characters face.

The characters can explore each episode's region at their leisure. An episode typically has three to four chapters, which each contain enough game content to fill one or two game sessions. Each chapter describes a specific location within an episode's sandbox environment, or it could represent a linear series of encounters that drive the plot forward.

## MONSTERS, MAGIC, AND MORE

When you see text in **bold**, that's the Fable's way of telling you a scene or location contains a monster or NPC that's ready to fight. New monsters and NPCs in Fables are usually found in appendix A: New Monsters of the episode in which they appear. If a monster's name appears in bold but isn't followed by "(see appendix A)" or a similar pointer, then that monster's game statistics are found in the fifth edition core rules.

When you see text in italics, that's the Fable's way of telling you that you're looking at the name of a spell (like *hideous laughter*) or a magic item (like *winged boots*). Most spells and magic items are found in the fifth edition core rules. New spells and magic items are described in an episode's appendixes as well, indicated by a "(see appendix B)" pointer.

*When you see boxed text like this, the characters have likely entered a new area or triggered an event such as an NPC entering the scene. This text is meant for the GM to read or paraphrase aloud to the players to set the scene.*



## RUNNING A PIRATE CAMPAIGN

*Pirates of the Aetherial Expanse* is a story about larger-than-life piratical heroes in a realm where magic is a daily fact of life. Magic pervades the Astral Plane, and in the Expanse, waves of aether, a substance sometimes called "liquid magic," washes upon the shore of every island.

As the GM, you can consider it your role to communicate the tone of this campaign to your players. Because this is an RPG campaign, you don't need to be tonally consistent the way a book or a movie does, but playing this story as a dark fantasy dirge when its tone is intentionally high action and swashbuckling might make players feel awkward or confused.

Three major elements in this story inform its tone, and you and your players will probably have more fun if you keep these elements in mind while prepping and running each chapter of this Fable:

**Heroic Piracy.** The characters are the heroes of this story. They're pirates, meaning they plunder and kill, but the fact that they do bad things as a matter of course doesn't make them any less the heroes when they save a civilization or defeat an evil empire at the end of the day. The thing that separates heroic pirates from villainous ones is a moral code. If your players are having a hard time feeling like heroes, having their captain devise a code of honor that dictates who they slay, who they spare, and who they steal from could be a way to establish a more heroic tone without losing the moral ambiguity that makes pirates so fun to play.

**Supernatural Drama.** Magic pervades the Aetherial Expanse, affecting every part of life on the sea. As GM, your NPCs and custom story hooks (if you want to create adventures beyond the episodes of this Fable) should consider what it's like to live in a world that frequently and chaotically defies what you know about it, and where supernatural mystery fills every corner of the map. Likewise, players should consider what their character's relationship to magic is; do they take comfort in its all-encompassing power, or is the unexplainable a constant threat?

**Emotional Grounding.** The danger of stories that engage in high-action heroism is that they can feel hollow or unmotivated. The best way to keep your story grounded is to include moments of heavy emotions to ground your heroes and villains. The best villains don't just twirl their mustaches seeking to cause capital-E evil. In this adventure, the villains are power-hungry colonialists seeking to expand their empire for the betterment of people that look and act like them. Heroic pirates aren't pirates just because they want a merry life of rum and adventure, but because something about their life was painful enough to set them on this challenging path. Find moments to allow your NPCs and player characters to express these real emotions and motivations.





## THIS FABLE'S STORY

This primer on the story and backstory of *Pirates of the Aetherial Expanse* will help you tell a compelling and cohesive narrative from episode to episode.

### OVERVIEW

In this Fable, a group of castaways band together to form a ragtag pirate crew after a devastating ship battle in a distant corner of the Aetherial Expanse. The characters likely come from a variety of backgrounds, factions, and statuses within their former ships' hierarchies. A character may have been a pirate to begin with, but could just as easily have been an officer aboard a brigantine of the mighty Karelagne Empire, or a privateer flying the flag of the mercantile Kingdom of Ayris.

Separated from their former factions, these characters begin a new life of piracy aboard a salvaged ship, lured by the promise of adventure, fabulous wealth, and possibly even revenge against the faction that lured them into a doomed battle in the first place.



## BACKSTORY

Long ago, in an age lost to all record or living recollection, aether began to form in a corner of the Astral Plane.

### Aetherggenesis

A group of planefarers traveling between realms were killed by the tempestuous forces of the Astral Plane. However, their defiant spirits refused to die. Lost in space, these spirits coagulated into a silvery mass that drifted across the plane. Over the aeons, more and more lost souls were absorbed by this gestalt of spirits, until it grew so large that its individual spirits lost their sense of self, and became a mass of impotent thoughts and desires. The gestalt became less like a spirit or a being, and more like the sea; shimmering, placid, and occasionally wracked by furious storms.

Other planefarers named this sea of magical, spiritual energy "aether." Hurtling comets lodged in its aetherial surface and formed islands, which sank to the depths. The magical power of these planar comets caused liquid aether to crystallize into a solid form, which people would come to call aetherium. Solid aetherium crystal buoyed these comets back to the surface, and islands began to grow and form in the Aetherial Expanse.





## Astrium and the Cosmic Turtles

Creatures of the Astral Plane, as well as creatures from other planes banished to the Astral by magical mishap or experimentation, found their way to the Aetherial Expanse. Over centuries, the magic of this realm caused them to mutate and adapt to their new home. The greatest of these creatures were the cosmic turtles. Tales of the earliest surviving plane-faring civilizations say the cosmic turtles were once ordinary beasts no larger than a human fist, but that over centuries of exposure to aether, they gained the capacity for great wisdom and grew so large that islands could form upon their backs. Nevertheless, cosmic turtles are now believed extinct, for no sailor of the Expanse has seen one for a century.

These scant surviving myths come from records of a civilization of Astrium, a great city inhabited by plane-faring giants that was lost many centuries ago. Legend says the giants made their home in the center of the Aetherial Expanse—but the center of this realm holds only the Maelstrom, an immense aetherstorm which rages without end. If Astrium ever existed, its magical secrets, and the astral titans that discovered them, have been lost forever.

## Arrival of the Kingdom of Ayris

As the plane between the planes, the Astral Plane is an easy realm for mages to create highly stable portals to. It's also a place where enterprising plane-farers can most easily find new portals to hitherto unknown worlds. Controlling a liminal plane such as the Astral has been the giddy dream of countless empires across history.

About a century before this Fable begins, two mighty nations from different worlds on the Material Plane discovered the secret to creating stable portals to the Aetherial Expanse, the only part of the Astral Plane they could explore by using their naval ships (with mild arcane adjustments) to sail through the aether. Of these two nations, the first to enter the Expanse was the Kingdom of Ayris, a tiny coastal nation on its home world, which prospered as a realm of traders that its warlike neighbors maintained good relations with.

Ayris kept a small naval fleet at home, but protected its homeland with a well-paid mercenary army and an equally well-off navy of privateers. The boldest of these warriors for hire were offered huge sums to enter the Ayrisian mages' portal to the Astral Plane and go on the adventure of a lifetime, guarding Ayrisian settlers, botanists, geologists, and explorers as they hunted for new, valuable resources across the Expanse.

They found this resource in the form of aetherium. Though the aether itself was overflowing with magical power, actually immersing oneself in it for long caused horrific poisoning and quick death. Crystallized aether, however, was stable, nonpoisonous, and easily



transportable. Ayriissian mages longed for the substance to advance their experiments, and the kingdom's warlike neighbors all but salivated at its destructive potential.

## Invasion by the Empire of Karel

A scant decade after the Kingdom of Ayris began colonizing the Aetherial Expanse, a new contender entered the scene: the Karelagne Empire. Hailing from another world on the Material Plane, the vast Empire of Karel had likewise discovered the potential of aetherium to enhance its military capabilities and catapult its technology centuries into the future in an instant.

Equipped with a navy that, if mustered in full, could stretch across the horizon uninterrupted, the Karelagne Empire swept across the Astral Plane, and engaged the Ayriissian colonists and their privateer navy in a bitter war that raged for decades—one that ended in a stalemate driven by both war-weary nations' desire to return to hunting for aetherium.

## Rise of the Drakes

The Astral Plane is hostile to mortal life, and no humanoid creature is native to the Expanse. Over the centuries, however, countless people have been lost on its deserted islands, and the spirits of those who die at sea are claimed by the roiling consciousness of the aether. Bodies lost at sea have been known to rise again, inhabited by a restless spirit broken off from the aether's gestalt consciousness. These astral emergents (see the *Aetherial Expanse Setting Guide*) are few in number and have only scattered communities, but they call the Expanse their home—and no one has more right to do so than them.

Defectors were common during the War of the Invaders, as the emergents called it. Many of these defectors took their ships and settled on islands where a handful of emergents had already made their settlements. Defectors and emergents banded together to form pirate crews that harried imperial and kingdom vessels alike for wealth and the resources they needed to survive.

Of these pirates, the most feared was Captain Teruko the Drake, and her ship, the *Drake*, which shared her epithet. The *Drake's* crew settled on an island cluster far from the military encampments of the Kingdom of Ayris and the Karelagne Empire, and declared it a free haven for pirates across the Expanse. Following Captain Teruko's death, her islands were named the Isle of Drakes. And in the decade since the War of the Invaders ended, jobless sailors have flocked to the Isle of Drakes in search of fortune and glory in the only way they know how; sowing death across the sea.

## PIRATES OF THE AETHERIAL EXPANSE

This is a brief summary of the six episodes of this Fable.

### Episode 1: Treasure of Shipgrave Reef

A group of shipwrecked sailors must band together to form a makeshift crew, and test their nascent bonds of fellowship against the allure of treasure within Shipgrave Reef.

### Episode 2: Come Sail Away

The characters depart Shipgrave Reef and travel to the Isle of Drakes, a pirate haven in the Aetherial Expanse. They can explore its inhabited islands before settling on its citied central isle and using it as a base of operations.

### Episode 3: The Lost Constellation

Tensions between the Kingdom of Ayris and the Karelagne Empire heat up as zealots are discovered kidnapping astral emergents for devious experimentation. Gather allies, gather tools from dangerous outposts, and save the day!

### Episode 4: Lost to the Aether

The characters become involved in the affairs of the Sistren of the Constellation Isles, and must swim, climb, and cut their way through the Fallen Isles on the hunt for an ancient merfolk palace that contains a world-changing artifact. But not before they tread water with trouble like merrow, angry merfolk, a double-crossing swashbuckler, and more.

### Episode 5: For Whom the Stars Toll

The characters learn of an impending apocalypse as the Reaper, an ancient sea witch, starts harvesting souls from across the Aetherial Expanse. After developing symptoms of reaper's curse, the characters must stop her and defeat the true evil behind the scenes.

### Episode 6: Legends of the Seas

The Reaper's actions in episode 5 have goaded the power-hungry Karelagne Empire to hunt down a superweapon lost beneath the aether and launch a final assault against the pirates. To stop the empire, the pirates must ally themselves with the Kingdom of Ayris, or all will be lost!



## INTRODUCTION

In this episode, the characters meet Nadia, a Sistren of the Isles, an all-female pirate faction whose members are astral merfolk or descended from astral merfolk. Nadia has received news that another Sistren named Beliene died in a pirate attack off the coast of the Monstera Cluster. She recruits the characters to help her travel there and retrieve Beliene's remains.

But all is not as it seems: Beliene is alive and well—and is a traitor to the Sistren. Working in league with the Nth Degree, a group of Karelagne zealots, Beliene has been kidnapping astral emergents and delivering them to the Nth Degree for vile experimentation. The characters must reckon with Beliene, and then collect magical items and allies to lay siege to the Nth Degree's headquarters.

### SISTREN OF THE ISLES

Though the pirate faction known as the Sistren of the Constellation Isles is present across the Aetherial Expanse, even having headquarters on several islands, its true home is the Constellation Isles. The recorded history of the Sistren starts around 500 years ago, when female Humanoids descended from astral merfolk built a home base on Kesforth Island. Their purpose was to protect the seas around the Constellation Isles, keeping them safe and healthy. In the years since its foundation, the preservation of a free and healthy ocean has become one of the Sistren's core tenets; a tenet each member does their best to uphold.

## CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

In this episode, the characters must undergo a variety of fetch quest-based challenges. This episode begins with a straightforward first chapter, segues into a recovery mission, and then provides an open-ended exploration and social environment before coming to a climatic end.

The characters gain a level (to a maximum of 7th level) each time they complete two of the following objectives:

- The characters escape Beliene's ship, the *Fanged Stallion*, at the end of chapter 1.
- The characters save Acorn, an astral emergent kidnapped by Beliene, in chapter 2.
- The characters capture or kill Beliene in chapter 2.
- At the end of chapter 3, the characters gather allies to help with the assault on the Nth Degree's secret headquarters.
- Successfully besiege the Nth Degree's island compound in chapter 4.











## CHAPTER 1: WHAT REMAINS

The characters are pulled from their drinks and merriment  
by a Sistren of the Isles' plea for help.



## THE NTH DEGREE

The Nth Degree, a group of Karelagne zealots, has risen to prominence in the Aetherial Expanse. It has set up headquarters on a small island earth by flame of the Windcrown Isles. Most recently, it has been kidnapping astral emergents and conducting vile experiments on them, convinced that the secret to conquering the Aetherial Expanse lies within the closest thing to a native lifeform this strange shimmering sea has ever had.

Whispers of the Nth Degree's activities have begun circulating in taverns and on ship decks, especially among those who employ astral emergents as deckhands or call them friends. Astral emergents are becoming ever more nervous, and for safety, some are moving to large cities controlled by anyone other than the Karelagne Empire. Ayris considers the zealots' actions contemptable.

The Karelagne Empire is aware of the Nth Degree's activities, but is turning a blind eye for as long as possible, as the Nth Degree's experiments have recently borne fruit: it has discovered how to craft artificial aetherium crystals, providing the Empire with a limitless source of wealth.

For more information on the Nth Degree and its operations, see chapter 4.

## STARTING THE ADVENTURE

This adventure begins in the Seven Stars Tavern on the Isle of Drakes' Velstarrón Island. Here, pirates of all sorts mingle, make deals and trade information, and play liar's dice to pass the time. If the characters played episode 2 of this Fable, they likely ended their adventure on Velstarrón. However, any tavern in the expanse will do.

### A PLEA FROM NADIA

The characters are approached by Nadia Feem (see appendix A), a young half-astral merfolk woman and a Sistren of the Isles. Recently, she received news that a fellow Sistren and lover of hers, Beliene, was killed when her ship was attacked by pirates off the coast of the Monstera Cluster.

She needs to travel there to retrieve Beliene's remains and return them to the Constellation Islands. The ship she normally travels on, the *Coral Cutlass*, is undergoing maintenance and she needs a ship and a crew as soon as possible. She's willing to pay handsomely, and any help the party can provide will put them into the good graces of the Sistren of the Isles.

If the characters ask how much pay she's offering, Nadia says "Half now, half when we return Beliene's remains to the Constellation Isles," then gives them a sly grin, slides a large, heavy coffer across the table, and opens it to reveal a pile of platinum and gold coins. "That's half." A character who makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence check estimates the coffer holds 500 gp worth of coins.

The letter Nadia received reads as follows:

*Sorry that this letter brings you sad news, I hope you have a cup of tea to help process this. Eventually, I'll tell you everything, but Beliene is dead, not by friend, of course, but by foe. While sailing the sea airward of Monstera we met some arrogant and unruly pirates. They surprised us by launching an attack despite their flying the whites. If you're able to come gather what remains, I venture we shall be here for a bit longer. But I encourage you to make haste, the winds are picking up.*

*Sincerely,  
A Friend*

Give the players the Nadia's Letter handout from appendix C. Sharp-eyed players may discover the phrase spelled out by the first letter of each line: "She is alive." If the players don't notice it themselves, the character with the highest passive Wisdom (Perception) score discovers it. Neither Nadia or the Sistren have noticed this, so deep is their grief. Nadia is unaware who this "Friend" who sent the letter is, and she admits to some suspicion, but can think of no reason why anyone would send false information.

The "friend" is Terrol, a privateer sent to spy on a Karelagne ship. Terrol is explained in further detail in the "Terrol the Storyteller" section later in this chapter.

### HOOKING THE CHARACTERS

If the characters are ambivalent about Nadia's cause, consider the following options to motivate them:

- Nadia offers to double the pay. This earns her ire and she leaves the characters as soon as the business with Beliene is concluded, unless the characters get back into her good graces before then.
- The characters overhear a rumor that Beliene owned pages from the journal of famed explorer, Aloysius Dumas. The pages supposedly lead to his lost treasure. Going after Beliene's remains means potentially finding these pages—and the treasure. See the "Aloysius Dumas" section for more information. The notes are discussed further in chapter 2.
- If the characters ignore Nadia and head on another quest, their ship is waylaid by Beliene's vessel (see the "Friends and Liars" section, below), and the events of the "Rat Trap" section, later in this chapter, take place.



## Roleplaying Nadia

Nadia Feem is a wayfinder for the Sistren of the Isles. She's fiercely loyal to the other Sistren, and is heartbroken over the loss of Beliene. She's still a bit shellshocked at the news, and often gets lost in thought and memory while en route to claim Beliene's remains. Though she holds none of the typical braggadocio or swagger of a pirate, she's confident and self-assured, especially on the deck of a ship. She wears a star-shaped amulet of motherpearl, the sign of her membership in the Sistren of the Isles.

### MOTHERPEARL

A common crafting material in the Constellation Isles is motherpearl, an opalescent material visually similar to mother-of-pearl. Motherpearl is as hard as steel, but much lighter, making it an ideal material for weapons and armor. Motherpearl is only found in abundance in the Constellation Isles.

The Sistren are especially fond of motherpearl, and most of their weapons and tools are made from it. Their symbols of membership and friendship are always made from motherpearl.

## SEARCHING THE AETHERIAL EXPANSE

Nadia arrives at the character's ship at the agreed time, carrying a slatted wooden crate containing an unnamed **ship cat** (see appendix A). The cat is gray with white stockings and skull-like white face markings. The cat is Nadia's gift to the crew for helping find her friend Beliene.

**Espionage.** The life of a feline spy is a tricky one. If a character sends out a ship cat to gather information, they must roll on the Ship Cat Complications table.

### SHIP CAT COMPLICATIONS

D12	COMPLICATION
1	Another ship cat convinced your cat to stay on its ship and it has left your service.
2	Your cat convinced another ship cat to move aboard your ship.
3	Your ship cat doesn't send images of what it saw or it sends useless images.
4	Your ship cat saw something distressing and refuses to go out again for 3 days.
5–12	No complication.





## TRACKING BELIENE'S REMAINS

Nadia uses items to focus her abilities as a wayfinder, and she can help the crew traverse the first few legs of the journey without complications. Nadia uses the following items in conjunction with the letter in her wayfinding:

- A set of fish-cartilage dice with paddle boards carved into them.
- An engraved compass with a motherpearl arrow that Beliene gave to Nadia.
- A playbill for an Ayrissian musical, complete with Beliene's snarky comments about the actors written in the margins.
- A silver ring that Nadia gives no explanation for if asked. The ring was a gift from Beliene, who wears a matching gold ring.
- Three letters she received from Beliene (see below).

During their travels, Nadia shares the items she's using to track Beliene's remains if the characters show interest. When discussing Beliene or the items, she's obviously dealing with strong emotions. Nadia never quite cries, but grief is etched on her face and in the shake in her voice.

## LETTERS FROM BELIENE

Beliene's three letters contain information about a mutual friend's birthday, about the feather stars (see "Beliene's Stars," below), and about the movements of the Karelagne Navy—although after Beliene's betrayal, it's unclear whether this information is still useful or not (it isn't). One letter also hints at Beliene's discovery of several pages from Aloysius Dumas's journal.

Nadia is interested in finding the journal pages, though with a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check, she's willing to include them in the adventurers' rewards for helping her retrieve Beliene's remains. On a failure, Nadia won't let the characters keep the pages, but they can read them and make copies on the trip back to the Constellation Isles.

A character who makes a successful DC 16 Intelligence (History) check knows the information provided below about the famed Aloysius Dumas. Reduce the DC to 10 for characters from the Karelagne Empire.

## Aloysius Dumas

A famous Karelagne explorer, Aloysius Dumas sailed the Aetherial Expanse over 200 years ago. He made many remarkable discoveries, and was able to travel the seas with great ease and speed, something he attributed to an artifact he possessed, an artifact he refused to name or describe. Aloysius mysteriously disappeared on a voyage. His ship, his body, and the artifact were never recovered.

During this episode, the characters have a chance to find where Aloysius hid this powerful artifact, the Blinking Wheel, and potentially discover hints about his fate. See "The Blinking Island" in chapter 4 for more information on Aloysius Dumas.

## BELIENE'S STARS

While the characters are on deck, they might notice something unusual in the waters; a long and colorful line that almost looks like a gigantic feather rising from the depths. A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check is required to notice it unprompted, but any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 13 or higher notices Nadia gazing curiously into the water. With a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character notices what she's looking at—the strange feather. If asked, Nadia points it out with a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

Nadia isn't sure what it is, but in one of Beliene's letters, she mentioned seeing enormous feathery sea stars in the sea. Outside of Beliene's letters, Nadia had never heard of such a thing, which made her hesitant to reveal it; she wasn't sure if it was real or if her grief over Beliene's death made her imagine things.

These feather stars are real, but even with a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Nature) check, all a character knows is that whatever this creature is, it doesn't seem to belong here.

*Rippling through the waves, the feather star-like creature undulates with the tide. This immense arm of the creature continues down into the dark depths, but you know it must be so big that your ship floating above it is akin to a fly hovering around a dragon.*





## FRIENDS AND LIARS

Nadia navigates the ship to the general area indicated in the letter with ease, but she can't pinpoint an exact location: the ship's navigator must make **three** successful DC 15 Intelligence (Navigation) checks to find Beliene's ship, a Karelagne merchant vessel. If the navigator rolls three failures before finding the ship, roll on the Travel Complications table (see the "Navigation and Travel" section in the New Mechanics part of the *Aetherial Expanse Setting Guide*). After resolving the complication, the characters spot Beliene's ship.

Nadia has an extension for the characters to add to their ship's flag to let other ships know they're allies of the Sistren. Nadia adds this extension as they approach the unfamiliar ship.

*As you approach the merchant vessel, the **Fanged Stallion**, you see figures moving across the deck to prepare for your arrival. As one figure steps up to the bow, Nadia gasps.*

*"It's her," Nadia says through her tears. "It's Beliene." Nadia points to a merfolk with a bandana and a tricorn hat on their head.*

Beliene (NE, female astral merfolk **gladiator**) cheerfully welcomes the group aboard the merchant vessel and embraces the sobbing Nadia.

## ROLEPLAYING BELIENE

Beliene Delaney was a Sistren of the Isles for just over a year, but she's been a member of the Nth Degree for much longer, and infiltrated the Sistren to gather intel and potentially recruit others to her cause. While there, she and Nadia became lovers. She once harbored hopes of recruiting Nadia into the Nth Degree, but after a time, she realized Nadia would never join such a ruthless organization.

When the characters first arrive, Beliene finds it prudent to maintain her Sistren ruse with Nadia, and is friendly, genial, and happy to see her again. She welcomes the party aboard the *Fanged Stallion* with gusto. She's charming and entertaining, telling tales and listening to the characters' stories with rapt attention.

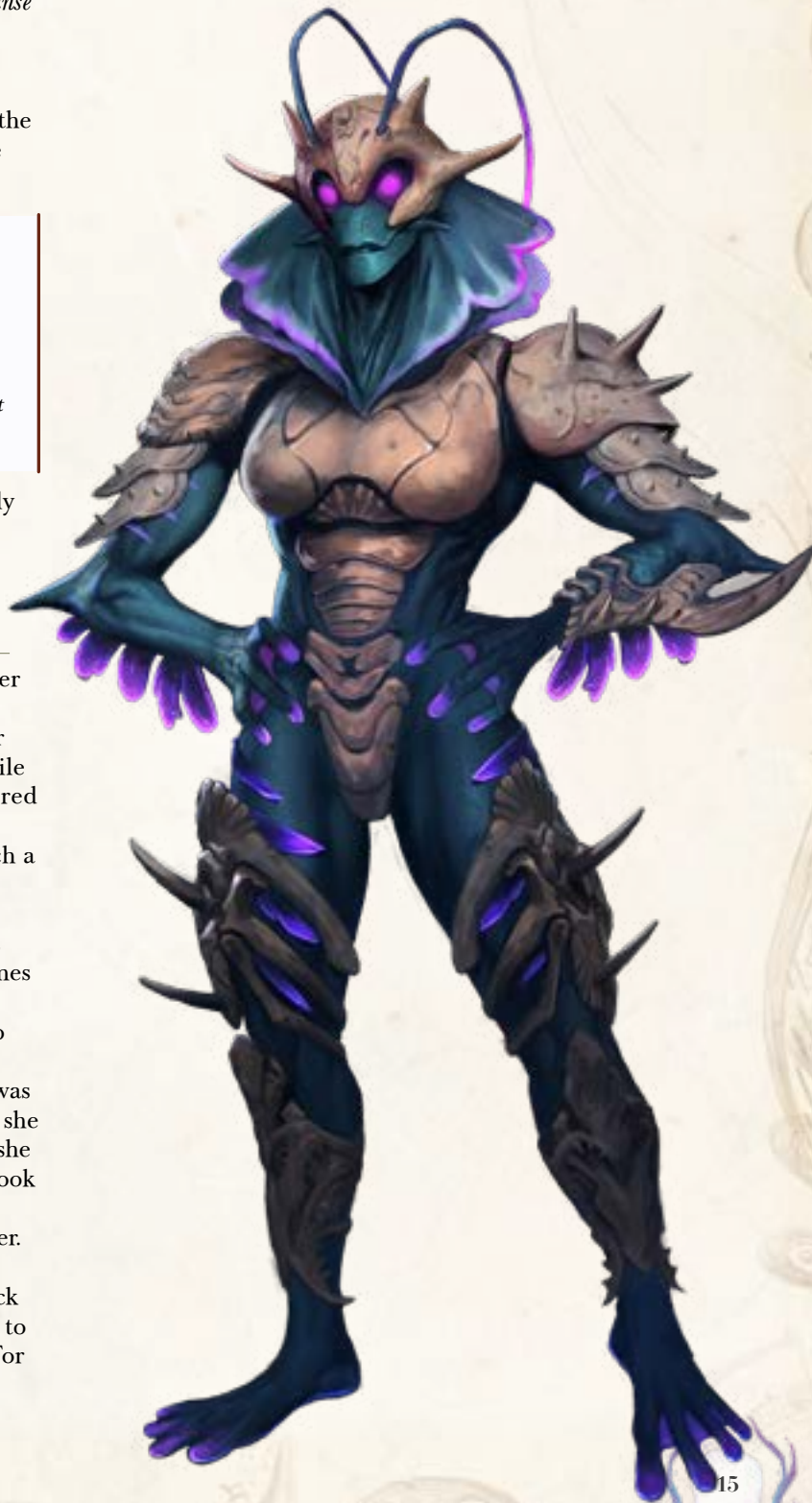
Beliene explains that the ship she was on originally was indeed attacked, but she was the sole survivor. She says she doesn't know who sent the letter or why someone said she was dead. She insists the characters join the crew that took her in for a meal so she can hear of their travels and so they can perhaps get to the bottom of who sent the letter.

A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Beliene is lying. In truth, she orchestrated the attack on the Sistren vessel she was on, staging her own death to she could leave the Sistren without rousing suspicion. For

more information on Beliene and the letter, see "Terrol the Storyteller" in chapter 2.

After the characters discover the truth about Beliene and her cover is blown, Beliene's demeanor changes. She may still hold an air of geniality, but it comes with an undercurrent of menace and cool detachment.

Beliene is loyal to the Nth Degree and to the Karelagne Empire, and is unwavering in her dedication to seeing her people rise to greatness.



## THE CREW AND THE RUSE

Beliene is the true captain of the *Fanged Stallion*, but when she spotted Nadia aboard the approaching ship, she quickly ordered her crew to act as if she were a guest, so she can discern Nadia's intentions and make the characters and their ship easier to capture, if necessary. The most important crewmates are listed below.

### "Captain" Windhowler

"Captain" Windhowler (LE, male tiefling **veteran**) wears a tricorn hat and a large blue jacket with golden trim and golden buttons. His antelopian horns curl in a neat spiral around his ears while his dark-brown hair kisses the top of his shoulders. His skin is a soft fuchsia color and his forked tail pokes out from a slit in his jacket.

Windhowler is actually the first mate and is only pretending to be the captain. The situation makes him slightly uncomfortable, but occasionally he gets carried away enough and clearly loves his own voice enough that it's plausible Windhowler is indeed in charge.

**Tattoos.** Windhowler's hands bear a litany of nautical tattoos, such as an anchor and a ship's wheel, as do his chest and arms. On the left side of Windhowler's neck, hidden under the collar, is a single *N*-proof of his allegiance to the Nth Degree.

**Treasure.** Windhowler keeps a keyring on him at all times. It holds a single iron key that opens the door to his bunk (area S6 of the *Fanged Stallion*).

### "First Mate" Gemma

Gemma (LN, female gnome **veteran**) is a brown-skinned gnome with hay-colored hair held in a tight, low ponytail by a leather string. Her black pants, held up by suspenders, show off her muscles while her navy shirt is unbuttoned halfway to reveal a black-and-white-striped tank top. Her boots have knife sheaths and her hands are adorned with fingerless leather demi-gloves.

Gemma is actually the quartermaster, but is having a great time bossing the other crew around in her temporary role, and isn't making herself popular in the process.

**Treasure.** Gemma keeps a keyring on her person at all times. The ring holds two iron keys: one to her bunk, and one to the ship's magazine (areas S6 and S10 of the *Fanged Stallion*).

### Chef Jarobe

Jarobe (N, male human **veteran**) is the *Fanged Stallion*'s chef. His food is known for being tasty even if rations are low. It's an open secret that Jarobe uses several minor magical items including a correct-temperature pot stirrer and a magical pantry that opens a portal up to other people's pantries at random so he can use spices while at

sea for long periods. Dressed in loose-fitting black clothing for easier cooking, his short, textured hair peaks out from his bandana. His dark-brown skin contrasts with his salt-and-pepper hair and the bright turmeric and ground ginger that sometimes dusts his hands. Some of the crew describe him as a kitchen golem, but only because they never see him elsewhere unless asked specifically to be.

### Sailor Wiley

Sailor Wiley (LN, nonbinary half-elf **sailor**; see appendix A) is in the crow's nest when the characters first come aboard. They wear a gray cotton shirt, a blue vest, black pants, and short, silver-buckled mod boots. A silver-threaded kerchief is knotted at their throat. They enjoy the sun, the ocean, and partying when they're able. Wiley came from nothing, pulled from poverty and ruin by the Karelagne Empire. His fervent loyalty to Karel makes him a wonderful zealot for the Nth Degree.





## PRISONERS BELOW

Nadia and the characters aren't the only people on the *Fanged Stallion* besides the crew; two prisoners languish in the brig—Terrol, the privateer “friend” who sent Nadia the letter about Beliene’s “death,” and Acorn, an astral emergent with strong druidic powers. Acorn is being taken to the Nth Degree’s island for experimentation.

If the characters attempt to explore the ship at any point, they can encounter Terrol and Acorn in the brig. Refer to “The *Fanged Stallion*” section later in this chapter for the ship’s layout. For more information on Terrol and Acorn, see chapter 2.

## EVENTS ON THE SHIP

Aboard the *Fanged Stallion*, several events can occur, listed below.

### Crew Interactions

If the characters talk to any of the crew aboard the *Fanged Stallion* and make a successful DC 14 Charisma check, roll on the *Fanged Stallion* Rumors table.

With careful observation and a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character notices the crew look at Beliene with reverence and respect. If asked about it, they say that in the short time they’ve known Beliene, she’s wormed her way into their hearts, but a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check proves something seems off.

## FANGED STALLION RUMORS

d6	RUMOR
1	Beliene carries a drawing of a woman that looks like Nadia on her person.
2	Wiley claims they once rode with a ship that spotted an island getting wiped away into nothingness, but the rest of the crew blame it on Wiley’s love of grog.
3	The last astral emergent to crew with this ship broke Jarobe’s heart, but don’t mention it or he’ll oversalt the food with his tears.
4	Beliene once punched an astral creature that was attacking her in its face and it followed her like an obedient dog for the rest of its days.
5	Gemma never plays liar’s dice because she doesn’t like gambling, but some suspect it’s really because she’s a poor liar.
6	The grog aboard this ship is powerful stuff. If you aren’t a heavy drinker, you may not want to try it.

### Dinner and Conversation

“Captain” Windhowler invites the characters to stay aboard for a meal and socialization. If the characters accept, they’re fed a reasonably tasty meal of fresh

fruits, hard cheeses, and crusty bread. Dinner is held on makeshift tables set up on the deck for the occasion.

This is a good opportunity for the characters to pry information out of Beliene, the “captain,” or the “first mate.” All three are pleasant and cheerful, but deftly steer conversation away from any topic that might reveal the truth, such as the attack on Beliene’s ship. A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals when these characters are lying or being evasive.

### Grog and Games

After dinner, or if the characters decline the meal, Beliene and rest of the crew invite the characters to join them in a game of liar’s dice. Any of the crew (except Gemma) are willing to play, and they insist on a minimum bet of 5 gp, but will match whatever the characters bet. While playing, the crew drinks, laughs, and tells tall tales, attempting to one-up each other with the most outrageous thing they’ve seen on the Aetherial Expanse.

Beliene and Nadia sit very close to one another during dinner and drinks. During the festivities and storytelling, one laughs and knocks on the table twice, the other replies with two knocks, and the light from the lanterns catches on the silver ring Nadia used as part of the wayfinding. With a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, the character notices that Beliene has a matching ring, also worn on the right middle finger.

**Toast.** At the end of the game, the crew insists on a toast to celebrate the new camaraderie and Beliene and Nadia’s reunion. If any character doesn’t want the offered grog, a crew member offers something else instead; with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check, a character notices a few of the crew look a little annoyed the character won’t drink the grog, but they don’t comment on it and if anyone asks, they wave it off and continue with the revelry.

The characters’ grog is laced with a sedative. It doesn’t take immediate effect, but once the characters settle down for a long rest, it may make it difficult for them to rouse from their slumber. See “Rat Trap” for more information.

### Goodnight, Sleep Tight

Nadia has no desire to immediately leave the *Fanged Stallion*. She attempts to talk Beliene into joining her aboard the characters’ ship and leaving, and Beliene insists she will . . . after they get some sleep. She mentions slyly to Nadia that the captain has graciously allowed her the use of his cabin for the night, if Nadia would like to join her.

Talking Nadia out of staying the night aboard the *Fanged Stallion* requires a successful DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

When the characters start a long rest, proceed to “Rat Trap.”



## THE JIG IS UP

If at any point the characters get wise to the goings-on aboard the *Fanged Stallion* and attempt to call out Beliene or any of the crew, the crew immediately drop the ruse and attempt to grapple and subdue the characters. Proceed to “Rat Trap,” below.

If the characters don’t get wind of the shenanigans, but attempt to part ways before they take a long rest, Beliene loses her patience and orders her crew to attack. Proceed to “Rat Trap,” below.

## RAT TRAP

When this scene begins, the sedative in the grog takes effect and potentially leaves characters disoriented and uncoordinated. Each character who drank grog as part of the toast must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or have disadvantage on attack rolls, saving throws, and ability checks for the next 8 hours.



If the characters were taking a long rest, they have a rude awakening when someone tries to grab them. Two **sailors** (see appendix A) per character attempt to grapple the party and drag them aboard the *Fanged Stallion* and into the brig. If they’re unsuccessful, they attempt to subdue the character through combat.

If all the characters fight off their attackers, the sailors dash back to Beliene’s ship and attempt to uncouple the ships and escape.

## Where’s Nadia?

During the kidnapping attempt, unless she was persuaded not to stay the night, Nadia is asleep in the captain’s quarters of the *Fanged Stallion* with Beliene. If the characters discover Nadia there, Beliene maintains her friendly ruse only as long as she needs to get the drop on the characters or to allow her crew to get into position to capture the characters more easily.

## UNARMED AND UNARMORED

Being ambushed while asleep puts the characters at a distinct disadvantage: they likely aren’t sleeping in their armor and their weapons may not be to hand. Be sure to keep this in mind when calculating ACs and attacks during the kidnapping attempt.

Additionally, some characters might find themselves locked in the *Fanged Stallion*’s brig (see “Breaking Out,” below) while others remain free. In this case, give the characters ample opportunity to free themselves and each other, but you can also bring in Nadia, Terrol, or Acorn (see area S9) to help if things get hairy.

## Breaking Out

If the characters end up in the brig, Terrol and Acorn are no longer there, having used the kidnapping attempt as a distraction to escape.

Should all the characters find themselves in the brig, Beliene arrives shortly after with two more of her crew hauling Nadia between them. Nadia is thrown in her own cell.

*Beliene lets out a heavy, dramatic sigh. “I really wish you hadn’t coming looking for me, Nadia,” Beliene says as Jarobe and Windhowler throw a tied-up Nadia in a cell.*

*Nadia leaps to her feet. “I swear, Beliene, let me out or I’ll—”*

*Beliene raises a hand, cutting her off. “Careful, Nadia. You’re in no position to make threats. I gave you a chance, and you denied me.” She turns and walks toward the door, then knocks her ring twice on the metal door handle. “You shouldn’t have come,” she repeats before walking out.*

Beliene leaves two **sailors** (see appendix A) at the bottom of the stairs to the brig to keep an eye on the characters. Any plans of escape must take them into account.

Each character is in a different cell, but the cells share the same design. If a character breaks out of a cell (see area S8 in “The *Fanged Stallion*” section), they can assist others in breaking out without the need for an additional ability check.

Once a character breaks out, however, the two sailors attempt to grapple them back into their cell. After the guards are defeated, escaping the ship requires a successful DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) group check. On a failure, another two **sailors** arrive to force the characters back into the brig.

## Unexpected Aid

As the characters make it to the top deck, a fire breaks out. A figure rushes toward the group from the direction of the fire and tells them they need to hurry.

The figure is Terrol (CG, nonbinary tiefling astral emergent **veteran**) (see “Terrol the Storyteller,” below), and they tell the group it’s time to get moving and lead the charge back to the characters’ ship. If the characters seem hesitant to trust Terrol, she offers to let them lock her in their brig until they come to a decision, but they must get off the *Fanged Stallion* now.

## Terrol the Storyteller

If the characters struggle with planning or enacting their escape, introduce Terrol sooner by having them distract and take out the guards and helping the group out of their cells.

Once Terrol boards the characters’ ship, she insists they must flee immediately before Beliene’s ship attacks. Terrol briefly explains they’re a privateer who was hired to spy on the *Fanged Stallion* but refuses to share more until they’re safely out of range of Beliene’s ship.

If the characters insist on keeping Terrol in the brig, they go willingly, but if the characters haven’t decided to trust her and release her by the time they make their first stop at a port, she breaks out in the night and escapes their ship.

For more information on Terrol, see “Terrol’s Tale” in chapter 2.

## Home Free

If the characters avoided capture, Terrol escapes during the attempted kidnapping and sneaks aboard the characters’ ship, but reveals herself right away and asks for help escaping from Beliene. They helped an astral emergent named Acorn escape, too, but saw Acorn leap from the ship and swim in another direction.

At the same moment, Nadia rushes from the *Fanged Stallion* with a sailor hot on her heels. If the two ships are still rafted up, Nadia yells for the boards to be pulled up

and to start moving. She runs the length of the *Fanged Stallion*’s bowsprit before swinging over to the characters’ ship on a rope while shouting for the crew to move.

## HELP FROM BELOW

Before the characters or Beliene’s crew can flee or attack, a disturbance in the sea rocks both ships.

*A long, red, feathered tendril reaches up from the sea, water cascading off it; so much water that it sounds like a waterfall. The gargantuan tendril sways before it hurtles down with a spine-chilling speed between the two ships, rocking them both violently and nearly capsizing them.*

Each character must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. Water sloshes onto the deck making it harder to keep one’s footing and creating difficult terrain.

Any character who spoke with Nadia on the journey here and saw the strange creature in the ocean recognizes this as one of Beliene’s feather stars.

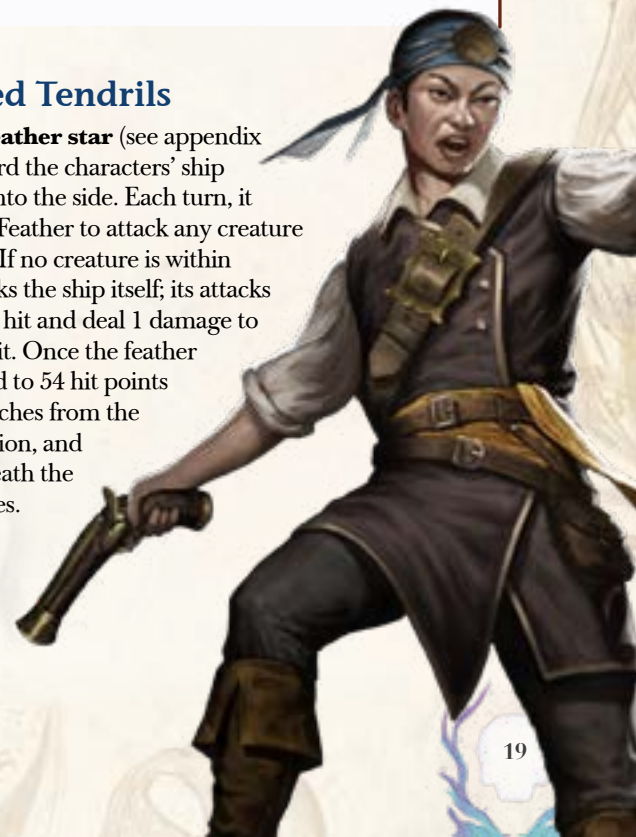
Though Nadia doesn’t know what the feather star can do, she suspects the characters would be better off escaping from it rather than fighting it, a suspicion confirmed by the *Fanged Stallion*’s immediate flight.

*The Fanged Stallion’s sails swing around as the pirates work to move the ship. They move much faster than expected, away from yet another long tendril slowly unfurling itself from the ocean to scrape at the stars.*

*“We best make waves, I don’t know this beast’s intent!” Nadia calls to the characters as they all stare up the tendrils in horror.*

## Feathered Tendrils

The **young feather star** (see appendix A) leaps toward the characters’ ship and latches onto the side. Each turn, it uses Radiant Feather to attack any creature within reach. If no creature is within reach, it attacks the ship itself; its attacks automatically hit and deal 1 damage to the hull per hit. Once the feather star is reduced to 54 hit points or less, it detaches from the hull as a reaction, and vanishes beneath the aetherial waves.





## Called from the Depths

Acorn called the feather star to the ships in an act of desperation as he attempted to flee the *Fanged Stallion*. Acorn doesn't entirely understand why he's able to summon Aetherbeasts and aetherial creatures so easily, but he finds he has a peculiar kinship with creatures of all types from the Aetherial Expanse. He assumes it's because of his own genesis from the aether, but he hasn't met any others like him.

## THE FANGED STALLION

While the characters are aboard the *Fanged Stallion*, the crew do their best to keep them on deck and within eyesight. If any character slips belowdecks, however, clues and captives await them.

You may also require the *Fanged Stallion* map and location details in chapter 2, depending on the characters' actions.

## FANGED STALLION FEATURES

The *Fanged Stallion* has the following general features:

**Wooden Construction.** The *Fanged Stallion* is primarily made of wood.

**Doors.** Unless otherwise stated, doors are 6 feet tall, 4 feet wide, and have AC 15, 15 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage.

**Ceilings.** The ceilings belowdecks are low and claustrophobic. The exposed beams are 6 feet high and the ceilings are 8 feet high.

**Lighting.** Unless stated otherwise, each area is dimly lit by oil lanterns hanging from ceiling beams or hooks. The lanterns can shed bright light or dim light or be extinguished with a turn of the key knob on its side.

**Crew.** Unless stated otherwise, the *Fanged Stallion*'s crew are **sailors** (see appendix A).

**Firepower.** The ship is armed with six culverin and a prow-mounted Karelagne coilgun.

## Item of Note: Figurehead

The *Fanged Stallion*'s figurehead is a horse, with obviously sharp teeth and a somewhat devilish appearance, rearing up from the waves. A star is mounted on its chest, which a character who makes a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check can tell is newer and doesn't quite match the figurehead's finish.

The star (AC 15, 8 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage) is a recent addition that hides a compartment containing the ship's passage medallion (see appendix B). Finding the hidden compartment requires a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

## FANGED STALLION LOCATIONS

The following areas are keyed to the *Fanged Stallion* map.

### S1: Main Deck

The *Fanged Stallion*'s main deck is 80 feet long, 30 feet wide, and has two masts. In the center is a removable, 10-foot-square latticed panel for loading and unloading goods from the lower decks (area S4). Four small rowboats, large enough to fit six people each, sit upside down and tarped over; two near the bow, and two aft.

### S2: Captain's Quarters

Double doors open from the main deck into the captain's chambers. The doors are locked when Beliene isn't in her chambers or when she's asleep. Beliene keeps the key on her at all times, but the locks can be picked with a successful DC 17 Dexterity check using thieves' tools.

Read the following when the characters enter:

*The captain's quarters are cramped but extravagant. A round dining table with four chairs sits in the middle of the room, made of dark, polished wood of the finest quality. A wide, heavy desk of the same make is tucked behind the table, in front of colorful stained-glass windows and beneath the low ceiling of the loft above. Papers and maps are strewn across the desktop. Behind the desk, two bookshelves are bolted to the walls either side of the windows, the books secured by leather straps. Two staircases rise to the left and right, leading to a balcony overlooking the dining area. A chandelier hangs above you, glowing with soft magical light.*

Save for an unlit candelabra, the dining table is bare. A small wooden chest sits on one corner of the desk beside a small leather notebook and a golden conch shell. With a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) or DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character notices the edge of the desk is particularly well oiled in one section. Pushing on this area pops out a hidden compartment.

**Conch Alarm.** The golden conch shell on the desk is an alarm bell. If the top of the shell is tapped twice, an alarm sounds, alerting everyone aboard. Tapping it again twice silences it. If a something is wedged between the lip and the clapper so it can't ring, the alarm won't sound.

**Bookshelves.** The bookshelves hold several financial volumes for the merchant vessel facade, as well as novels featuring titles such as *The Triumph of the Pirate Queen* and *Waves and Wanderlust*. With a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check, a character notices dust on the bookshelf, but not in front of *Colonizers Be Damned* and *Yo Ho Home: A Guide to Making Your Bunk More Than a Bed*.







**Treasure.** *Colonizers Be Damned* holds several Ayrissian star charts folded between its pages, and a flattened *spell scroll of invisibility* used as a bookmark, tucked in by Beliene for a rainy day. *Yò Ho Home: A Guide to Making Your Bunk More Than a Bed* has a special case that includes a *folding boat*. The secret compartment in the desk hides Beliene's correspondence with the Nth Degree.

## A LITTLE LIGHT READING

*Colonizers Be Damned* is a popular tome in the Aetherial Expanse and beyond, speaking on the evils of colonization, including the subjugation of indigenous peoples and the stripping of lands of their natural resources for imperial benefit. Beliene's writing disgraces the margins with her own sophomoric thoughts.

*Yò Ho Home: A Guide to Making Your Bunk More Than a Bed* contains tips on bunk sprucing and décor. Should a character take the book, give them the *Yò Ho Home* handout from appendix C.

## S2a: Captain's Loft

The upper loft serves as Beliene's bedchamber.

*Upstairs, an elaborate four-poster bed sits before wide windows that overlook the sea behind you. A vanity with a mirror sits to one side of the bed, and a wardrobe stands to the other. The center of the loft is open and overlooks the dining table below. Above, the chandelier glows softly. Two closed doors wait silently toward the bow, one on the left and one on the right.*

The two doors open onto a balcony overlooking the main deck, with stairs that lead down to the deck or up to the helm. These doors are locked with the same key as the captain's quarters, and can be unlocked with a successful DC 17 Dexterity check using thieves' tools.

The windows on this level open with a latch, and can be pulled open to let in a breeze.

**Beliene.** Depending on when the characters enter this room, it may be empty, or Beliene (**gladiator**) may be asleep in bed. If they enter before the kidnapping, the room is empty. During the kidnapping, Beliene can be found sleeping in Nadia's company. If the characters are sneaking aboard at night in chapter 2, Beliene is sleeping alone.

**Treasure.** The wardrobe holds five sets of common clothes and three sets of fine clothes. The vanity draws hold a comb and mirror set made of shimmering motherpearl worth 35 gp.

## S3: Storage

This area holds extra sails, rigging, buckets, mops, and other items necessary for running and maintaining the ship, as well as foodstuffs and barrels and skins of water.

## S4: First Lower Deck

The first lower deck is stifflingly hot. Portholes line the port and starboard walls, allowing in a light breeze that doesn't lessen the heat from the galley. Six culverin are strapped down beside portholes. Two removable, 10-foot-square latticed panels in the ceiling and the floor lead up to the main deck and down to the crew's deck (areas S1 and S6).

## S5: Galley

The galley kitchen sits at the bow, directly beneath area S3. An iron stove commands the far side of the room, radiating heat day and night. Herbs of all sorts hang from the ceiling rafters alongside heavy pots and pans, and in the corners, sacks of flour, barrels of salted fish, and other foodstuffs are piled up. The scents of hot metal and baking things fill the space.

Chef Jarobe (**veteran**) is in this room, day or night, either cooking or sleeping on a pile of flour sacks. The only time he's absent is during the kidnapping attempt. If the characters enter this room during the kidnapping attempt, Chef Jarobe recognizes them and attacks; otherwise, he's friendly and welcoming, if a bit territorial about his kitchen, and he doesn't like anyone touching his stuff.

## S6: Crew's Deck

The air in this deck is stale, but not as hot as in the deck above. Hammocks hang from the rafters in long lines, and barrels and sacks are strapped down along the walls. A single long table with stools fills the space between the masts, standing partly atop the latticed panel leading down to area S9. The latticed panel in the ceiling leads up to area S4.

## S7: Officers' Quarters

These private bunks belong to Windhowler the first mate (port side) and Gemma the quartermaster (starboard side). The stark rooms hold only a small bed and a chest of drawers bolted to the wall each. Both rooms are locked day and night; access requires stealing the respective key from Gemma or Windhowler, or picking the lock with a successful DC 14 Dexterity check using thieves' tools.

If the crew is asleep, either before the events of "Rat Trap" or if it has been 1 hour since a successful kidnapping attempt, Gemma and Windhowler (**veterans**) are asleep in their beds, and it requires a successful DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid waking them. On a failure, the characters wake v or Windhowler, who pulls a longsword from beneath their bed and attacks. If combat breaks out in these rooms or just outside, it wakes the other officer, who joins the fight 1 round later.



## S8: Spare Bunks

These rooms hold four bunks each, kept empty in case of important company. None of the crew sleep here, for fear of Windhowler's wrath.

## S9: Brig

The lowest deck is dark and damp. When the characters first descend the staircase, it looks as if there's nothing in this room save barrels and sacks, but a glance past the mainmast step shows otherwise.

A double row of metal cages fills the space between the masts. Each cell is 5 feet square and is separated from the other cells by bars. Each cell holds a dirty bucket and a blanket. The cell doors can be forced open with a successful DC 15 Strength check, or unlocked with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools.

**Prisoners.** If the characters arrive in the brig prior to the events of "Rat Trap," earlier in this chapter, the brig contains two prisoners: Terrol (CG, nonbinary tiefling astral emergent **veteran**; use she/they pronouns), and Acorn (LN, male human astral emergent **druid**). The two are suspicious of the characters at first, assuming that they're more of Beliene's zealots, and it requires a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check to get them to answer questions without first releasing them from their cells as an act of trust. If released, Terrol and Acorn will answer the characters' questions, but insist that they hurry, as things will go sideways if the crew discovers them.

If the characters mention Nadia or the Sistren, Terrol's demeanor changes immediately, and they tell the characters what little they know: Beliene is secretly in league with a group of Karelagne zealots that is kidnapping astral emergents for insidious purposes.

If the characters release Terrol or Acorn and are discovered, Beliene and the crew become hostile and attack. They attempt to imprison the characters and recapture Acorn and Terrol, triggering the events of "Rat Trap," earlier in this chapter.

**Treasure.** A ring of keys hangs from the mainmast on the side closest to the stairs. The keys open the cell doors.

## S10: Magazine

Though not a military vessel, the *Fanged Stallion*—like most ships in the Aetherial Expanse—is armed. The magazine provides storage for black powder, cannonballs, and other items of maritime warfare.

**Explosives.** If any of the black powder in this room is ignited, the entire magazine detonates in a devastating explosion (see the "Explosion!" section of the New Mechanics part of the *Aetherial Expanse Setting Guide*). If the magazine explodes, seawater begins flooding into the brig, and the ship immediately begins to sink.

## REPUTATION ADVANCEMENT

This section explains the impacts on the characters' reputation following their actions during this chapter.

### Helping Nadia

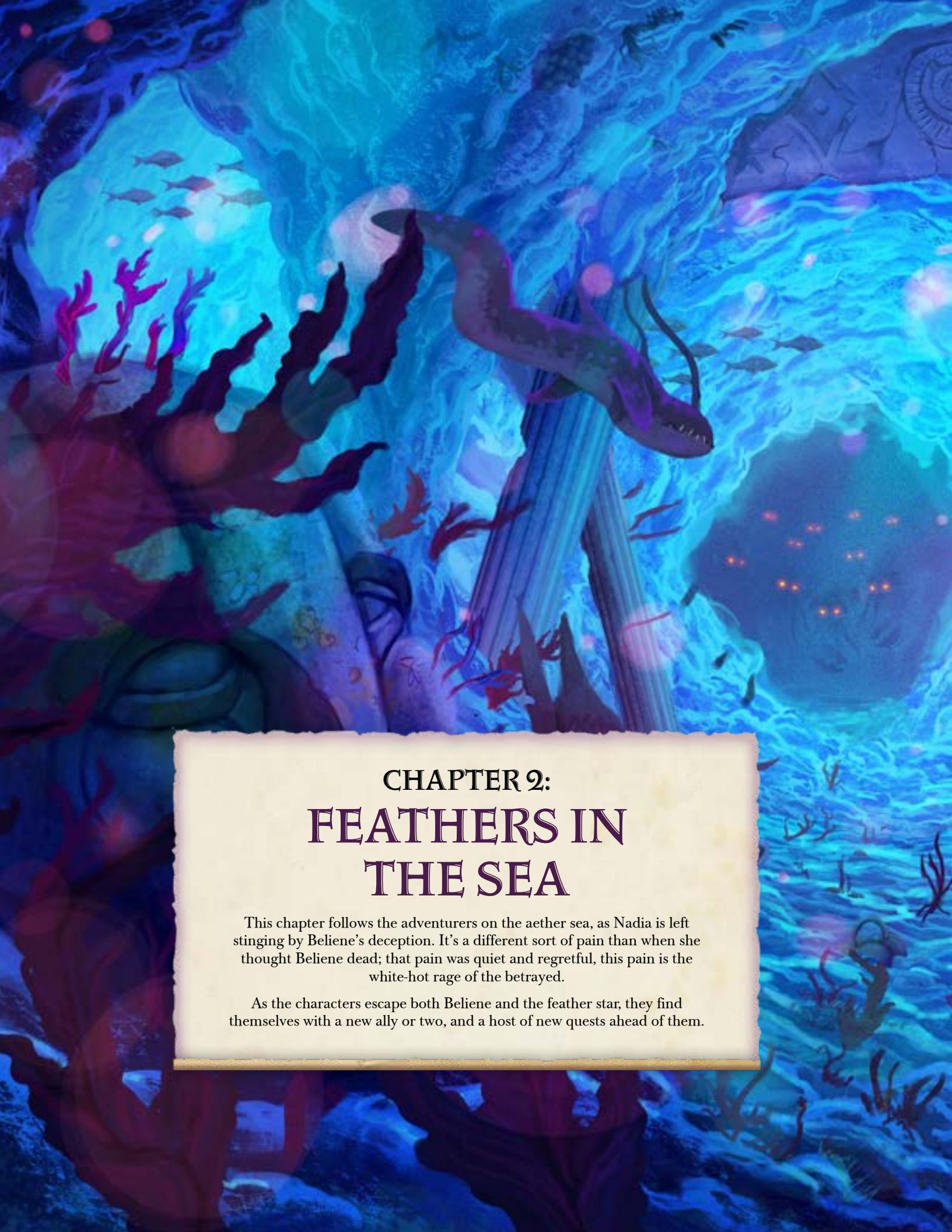
If the characters agreed to help Nadia without making her double the pay, they gain 1 good reputation.

### Charging Double

If the characters forced Nadia to pay double to secure their help, they gain 1 evil reputation.







## CHAPTER 2: FEATHERS IN THE SEA

This chapter follows the adventurers on the aether sea, as Nadia is left stinging by Beliene's deception. It's a different sort of pain than when she thought Beliene dead; that pain was quiet and regretful, this pain is the white-hot rage of the betrayed.

As the characters escape both Beliene and the feather star, they find themselves with a new ally or two, and a host of new quests ahead of them.







## SETTING A COURSE

Once the characters are safe from the mysterious feather star, they can gather their wits and figure out their next steps. Terrol, the tiefling astral emergent, has her own tale to tell, and she's willing to lay it all bare if she thinks it'll help her win over the characters.

### TERROL'S TALE

Terrol's demeanor may vary depending on how the characters treat them, but they share the following information regardless.

- Terrol is a privateer hired by an Ayrissian investigator to infiltrate and spy on the *Fanged Stallion*.
- Beliene faked her death by destroying the Sistren vessel she was on, but she expected the news to make it back to the Sistren much slower than it did.
- Terrol recognized Beliene when she came aboard, having dealt with her before Beliene infiltrated the Sistren, when they were both working as privateers. The two often argued over their loyalties (Beliene to Karel, Terrol to herself), and came to blows more than once. Terrol hadn't seen Beliene for at least three years before she stepped aboard the *Fanged Stallion*.
- Terrol sent the letter to the Sistren once Beliene came aboard and they realized they were out of their depth and needed to escape. Shortly after the letter went out, Beliene finally realized why Terrol seemed familiar, and had Terrol imprisoned in the brig.
- Beliene has always been a spy for the Nth Degree, and Terrol learned that Beliene had decided it was time to leave the Sistren now she had the information she needed.
- While Beliene's crew was distracted with kidnapping the characters, Terrol helped Acorn, another astral emergent who Beliene had imprisoned, to escape. Terrol asks the characters to help find him before something bad happens to him.
- In three days' time, Beliene is meeting with an Nth Degree contact in Port Kaylo to pass on the information she gathered on the Sistren, and could inform it of Terrol's spying. If the Nth Degree feels Terrol knows too much, it might relocate its base of operations, or at least fortify its defenses against a potential attack.

## Stolen Nth Degree Correspondence

While on the *Fanged Stallion*, after releasing Acorn, Terrol pilfered a few items of note from Beliene's cabin before things got out of hand. Terrol freely shares these with the characters and Nadia.

Included in these items are two journal pages (see below) as well as letters from other Nth Degree members that allude to experiments being conducted on astral emergents. The letters state the process is "progressing quite nicely," but additional subjects are required to increase production.

### Aloysius Dumas's Notes

The two pages recovered from Aloysius Dumas's journal mention a strange island in the air-by-flameward corner of the Aetherial Expanse, as well as details about an artifact he left there. Beliene was interested in the notes for the mention of an astral emergent community, and she saw such a location as an easy target for the Nth Degree's needs. A magic artifact would just be a bonus. These pages are included as handouts in appendix C.

The first journal page reads:

*so close to the edge of the Aetherial Expanse. Some strange magics must be set over the entire island, to make it flicker and blink so. I asked Erinaronda about it once, and she simply shrugged, saying it had always been the way of things here. Nevertheless, I always make sure to be back on the water before fogfall, and I only sleep on the **Albatross** . . . While traveling back and forth from the village to the shore eats up a good portion of my time, I refuse to be caught up in that strange fog ever again. When it washed over me, and then away again, it felt as if I'd lost a part of myself. It was as if no time had passed, yet it also felt like an eternity floating in a lack of existence. I had no edges, and my mind was no longer my own. Needless to say, it was unpleasant.*

*In a pleasant development, however, it seems Erinaronda and a few of the other villagers have begun to remember me, and recall bits of our previous conversations. I don't understand why their memories of me are returning now, but I'll accept the blessing for what it is.*

*Once she recalled our first conversation, I asked Erinaronda if she'd like to leave the island with me the next time I went. She smiled, though it seemed a bit sad to my eyes, and simply said no. When pressed, she said her place, and her people's place, was on the island. As a community of astral emergents, I suppose they don't find the fogfall as distressing as I do, though I can't imagine they find it pleasant. I'll have to ask Erinaronda about it when I'm next ashore. We*



The second journal page reads:

*debated with myself for some time, and have finally decided to leave the Blinking Wheel behind when I go. I do so with no great zeal, however. Though it has unquestioningly been quite a boon to me in my travels, if it were to fall in the wrong hands, it could empower a tyrant of the seas—and Unammon knows few pirates or zealots on these waters need the incentive.*

*I shall travel home without the use of the artifact. May the waters be calm, may Unammon keep me in her intentions, and may Qoz continue to slumber.*

*Erinaronda has agreed to protect it for me, and to only relinquish it to one who has the proper passphrase, contained herein, to the value of three. Blessings to her and all the astral emergents of the Blinking Island.*

**Encoded Pages.** In the second page, Dumas discusses the Blinking Wheel, a powerful artifact he left on the Blinking Island for safekeeping. The letter contains a Caesar cipher, with the underlined letters spelling out an encoded phrase. The encoded phrase reads as follows: “wkh zlgq nqrzv wkh zdb.” To solve this puzzle, the characters must shift each letter backward in alphabetical order by three, hinted at by Dumas’s comment in the letter: “contained herein, to the value of three.” For example, “w” becomes “t” and “b” becomes “y.”

The decoded message reads “The wind knows the way” and is the answer to Erinaronda’s riddle in chapter 3.

If the players are stumped by this puzzle, you may give them hints with a successful DC 18 Intelligence check. Suggested hints include pointing out the underlined letters if they haven’t already noticed them, and replacing one encoded letter with its decoded letter.

### GETTING THE PAGES

If Terrol couldn’t have acquired the journal pages, or isn’t with the party, consider the following work-arounds:

- Nadia swiped them while fleeing Beliene’s quarters.
- Acorn has them, and can hand them over when he’s rescued.
- One of the characters may have found them if they searched the ship.

## TERROL’S REQUESTS

Terrol appreciates the characters’ help, but she insists that they can’t let Beliene escape. Beliene could pass off whatever information she has on the Sistren to the contact she plans to meet in three days. With her knowledge of Terrol’s spying, Beliene could also warn the Nth Degree of the potential leak, meaning the zealots could be prepared for any attacks, or move their base of operations, leaving Terrol with outdated intel.

Terrol’s plan is to:

- Chase down Beliene and the *Fanged Stallion*.
- Sneak aboard to discover what Beliene does with the astral emergents she kidnaps.
- Figure out why Beliene was spying on the Sistren.
- Kill Beliene and sink the *Fanged Stallion*.

Though they want more information, Terrol would also be happy just to sink the ship from afar and eliminate Beliene without the need to go aboard. Terrol has no gold on hand to offer the characters, but suggests they can loot Beliene’s ship once they catch up with the *Fanged Stallion*.

Terrol also wishes to rescue Acorn, and suggests he may have skills that could help the characters on their quest to stop Beliene. Certainly, he couldn’t have gotten far, and tracking him down won’t put them too far behind Beliene.

If pressed, they offer the characters 50 gp for the rescue of Acorn and another 50 gp for stopping Beliene, though they need to go to Port Kaylo to pay the characters.





## NADIA'S REQUEST

Nadia wants to apprehend Beliene so she can be taken back to the Constellation Isles for judgment by the Sistren. She also wants to find out why Beliene is targeting her organization, and inform her superiors about Beliene's betrayal and plot to destroy the Sistren. Nadia believes that the Sistren can defend themselves from any Karelagne zealots, but capturing, killing, or otherwise stopping Beliene from passing on her information to her contact in Port Kaylo is the most pressing issue.

If the characters require further motivation to pursue Beliene, she offers to double the agreed pay. If the characters already coerced Nadia into doubling the pay in chapter 1, she reminds them about how much she's paying them, and that they can't have the rest of the pay until the job is completed to her satisfaction.

*Nadia plays with a braid momentarily before whipping it back over her shoulder.*

*"This information must get back to the Sistren of the Constellation Isles. They must be made aware of Beliene's . . . betrayal. If she could convince us of her loyalty for so long, how many other Sistren members are—" Nadia breaks off. "We need to stop Beliene first, that's time sensitive. Perhaps there's more to learn from her documents."*

*Nadia heads to her bunk, "I need some sleep, wake me when you need me."*

## Tying Up Loose Ends

Nadia and Terrol have both offered quests to the characters, and now they must choose how they'll get involved. Though both have rewards they can offer to sweeten the deal, neither will beg for help and will instead simply ask to be let off as close to the Isle of Drakes as possible so they can seek help on their own.

## FINDING ACORN

If the characters agree to find Acorn, Terrol knows that Acorn used the distractions to escape the *Fanged Stallion*. They saw him in the aether, swimming air by flame prior to the feather star attack. Terrol suggests they start sailing air by flame to try to find him.

Acorn summoned other creatures when he summoned the feather star, and several aetherwolves found him and helped him to a tiny piece of land not far from where the ships were.

## Acorn's Deserted Island

The island Acorn ended up on is a small spit of land with minimal foliage, no more than 20 feet by 30 feet. It has a cluster of palm trees and some scrubby grasses, and is the only land as far as the horizon.

Creatures of all kinds dot the small beach and swim in the aether around the island, called to the location by Acorn's aetherial cries.

*The island is so small, it seems more like a small copse of trees sitting atop the water than a real island. Despite its small surface area, it teems with life; small creatures pull themselves from the aether to follow the sandy footprints, birds, and other winged animals land on the trees and circle above.*

*Balanced atop a palm tree sits a shirtless human astral emergent, Acorn. His skin shifts in color as a constellation of his past trauma traces its way from his left shoulder down to his right leg. He's in his thirties and has a handsome, angular face and a well-earned ale belly. His strong legs dangle as he speaks in soft tones to a cooing fuchsia aetherdactyl.*

Acorn (**druid**) is sitting shirtless among a palm tree's fronds with his chemise drying next to him. He's petting the head of an **aetherdactyl** (see appendix A).

If the characters attempt to swim ashore or pull a dinghy up and Terrol isn't with them, Acorn jumps down from the tree and brandishes a driftwood club. With a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check, a character can convince

Acorn they come in peace and on Terrol's advice. If any of the characters is an astral emergent, reduce the DC to 13. On a failure, Acorn refuses to join them, and will attack the characters if they set foot on his island. He's suspicious of the characters, and doesn't wish to be a prisoner again.

If combat breaks out, several creatures (see appendix A) fight alongside Acorn:

- Three **aetherdactyls**
- Four **aetherwolves**
- A **giant aetherwolf**



If Acorn previously met the characters and deemed them trustworthy, he agrees to go with them without a check.

### KILLING ACORN

If the characters kill Acorn, Terrol is furious with them, and leaves the party at the next opportunity.

If the characters leave Acorn's body behind, it isn't there if they return to search for it later. If the GM wishes for Acorn to reappear in later episodes of this Fable, his resurrection can remain a mystery.

If the characters bring Terrol along, Acorn remains suspicious of the characters but joins them. The fuchsia aetherdactyl accompanies Acorn. If the characters attempt to drive it away, it grows distressed, as if it can't bear to be parted from Acorn after their short time together. Acorn takes the time to thank each animal that answered his call and asks the characters if they have any treats they can spare.

*Terrol clasps the upper forearm of Acorn once they're together and he does the same. "Hey there, Lil' Nut, glad to see you in one piece."*

*Acorn scoffs while leaning in for a hug. "I told you not to call me that," he says with a grin. A bit more softly he says, "Thank you for your help."*

*Terrol nods and gives him a small close-lipped smile. "Let's go."*

Acorn lacks any significant wounds from his escape, aside from some burns and bruises, and is thirsty and hungry for something other than coconuts and the stale food Beliene threw at him. He appreciates anyone who offers him an alcoholic drink, he professes love to anyone who offers to let him launder his clothes, and jokingly proposes marriage to whoever shows him a real bed.

Once he's safe on the character's ship and is sure no one's going to imprison him, Acorn tells the story of how he was abducted.

Once a fighter for hire, Acorn now is a weapon seller for a merchant on Windcrown. Because of his previous experience with the blade and still-muscular physique, he could easily impress the wealthy, connect with the dangerous, and show the inexperienced a thing or two.

While in his dinghy delivering an order to an offshore customer's home near the port, he was approached by Beliene. "She musta had someone swim up behind my boat while she distracted me with conversation. Not a bastard alive could take me from the front!"

He woke up out to sea on Beliene's ship, missing his delivery package, his purse, and his favorite green hat.

## WRANGLING THE PLANS

Whether the characters rescue Acorn or not, if they decide to pursue Beliene, plans must be made. Terrol enthusiastically supports any plan to sink the *Fanged Stallion* that involves fire. They note that the ship has explosives and black powder stored in the magazine on the lowest level, on the same deck as the brig. Igniting the magazine would destroy the ship, but the magazine is below the water line, so it must be fired from within, which presents its own challenges.

Acorn knows that his ability to call on the feather star could also be of use, though he's reluctant to offer up that information immediately. With a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion), Acorn agrees to call a feather star and have it either attack the ship or serve as a distraction while the characters do their work, though they insist that they can't control the feather star, and it may attack either ship if called. On a failure, Acorn agrees to call the feather star only once all other options have been exhausted.

### NOTHING TO CHASE?

If the characters already captured or killed Beliene, or they destroyed the *Fanged Stallion* in chapter 1, skip to "Sending Word to the Sistren," later in this chapter.

## Pursuing Beliene

As Beliene is heading to her rendezvous at Port Kaylo, the easiest route is a straight line from where the characters first found the *Fanged Stallion* and their destination. Trailing Beliene's vessel takes two travel legs, and requires the ship's wayfinder to make a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Navigation) check (for the tracking itself). On a failure, the characters can pick up her trail again by asking around in local ports of call, but the journey takes an extra travel leg.

If Nadia is still with the group, she can use her wayfinder skills to track Beliene easily, no check required.

## Sneaking Aboard

For the detailed layout of the *Fanged Stallion*, see "The *Fanged Stallion*" in chapter 1.

Terrol is aware of the *Fanged Stallion*'s normal schedule and rhythms, and is confident they can coordinate the best time to sneak aboard the ship. They suggest they could stop a distance from the *Fanged Stallion* and take a rowboat the rest of the way.

**Stealthy Approach.** Approaching the *Fanged Stallion* unseen while its crew is asleep requires a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check while in or on the aether. Anyone sneaking onto the ship must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check as they board or Wiley spots them from the crow's nest.



**Captain's Cabin.** The windows in the area S2a have been left open to let in the night air, and a low light flickers within.

Nadia informs the characters of a small golden conch shell on Nadia's desk that serves as a magical alarm. If tapped twice, it sounds. If a piece of paper or fabric is wedged between the lip and the clapper so it can't ring, the alarm won't sound. See "The *Fanged Stallion*" in chapter 1 for more details.

## Sinking the Fanged Stallion

Sinking the *Fanged Stallion* can be done a number of ways, and this is an opportunity for the characters to get creative or engage in some good old-fashioned naval warfare. After sneaking aboard, the characters could set a fuse for the explosives in the hold and run for it, or they can convince Acorn to summon a feather star—though that brings its own risks, as the star may attack their ship as well.

## A Captured Beliene

If the characters capture Beliene, she bears her captivity with dignity and glaring eyes. If the characters interrogate Beliene, they find her a tough nut to crack; her zealotry means she would rather die than betray the Nth Degree and the Karelagne Empire.

Nevertheless, Beliene can be goaded into letting information slip if the characters insult the Karelagne Empire, hers or her crew's skills, or by questioning her relationship with Nadia.

If the characters obtain information from Beliene via magical means or trickery, they can learn the following information, though Beliene may not divulge it all in one go:

- The Nth Degree headquarters is on an island earth by flame of the Constellation Isles. From above, it looks almost like an inverted N, which inspired the group's name.
- The island has many defenses, including four towers armed with long guns, and is crawling with zealots.
- A magical ward that damages all ships and craft as small as a rowboat protects the island.
- The wards need a few seconds to recharge after discharging. The Nth Degree hasn't figured out how to close this gap in security, but is confident that it doesn't matter.
- Nth Degree ships bypass the ward by using a passage medallion, a large wood-and-metal disk designed to temporarily deactivate the wards. The *Fanged Stallion's* passage medallion is hidden inside its figurehead.
- The Nth Degree's leader is Rider Uton, a human man who's devilishly skilled with a blade, and as cold and ruthless as an astral storm.
- Rider Uton sometimes moonlights under various aliases, including as the merchant Lucius Archimedes, as the

Ayrissian Sailor Fortune, or as the pirate Fie.

- The Nth Degree's experiments on astral emergents have been successful; they can now produce artificial aetherium crystals. Beliene doesn't know how the process works, that's Ugkin and Parnetty's domain.
- Two mages calling themselves Doctor Ugkin and Doctor Parnetty are the masterminds behind the astral emergent experiments. They have a fiercely competitive relationship built on mutual respect and admiration. Beliene suspects they'd be married to each other if they weren't both married to their work.
- All Nth Degree members have an *N* tattooed somewhere on the left side of their body.
- Somewhere on the island's earth by flame slopes is a secret tunnel into the lab.

## If Beliene Escapes

If Beliene fends off the characters and escapes on the *Fanged Stallion*, she heads to Port Kaylo to meet with her contact. As soon as she arrives there, she sends the *Fanged Stallion* back out to sea, with instructions to circle the Maelstrom once and then return for her.

If the characters also head to Port Kaylo, Beliene stays hidden from them, and passes her information and the characters' descriptions to her contact, Rider Uton—the Nth Degree's leader. The characters may encounter Rider Uton in Madame Isabeau's, later in this chapter.





## SENDING WORD TO THE SISTREN

Whether Beliene is captured, killed, or escapes, Nadia is adamant about getting her information to the Sistren of the Isles. Traveling to Port Kaylo is the easiest way to do this, as a Sistren ship will probably be docked in the harbor there, or at least nearby, and they may even have a chance of intercepting Beliene if she escaped. If the characters don't wish to stay in Port Kaylo, Nadia asks to be dropped off.

If the characters captured Beliene rather than killing her, Nadia suggests she could rally at least a few Sistren ships to help assault the Nth Degree's headquarters, if the characters aim to do that.

### PORT KAYLO

Kaylo is a small island that was uninhabited until an Ayrissian trading company founded Port Kaylo between two of the island's large hills; now, it's a bustling hub of seafaring trade and commerce. On one hill stands Fort Bantor, endlessly watching over Port Kaylo, the other hill holds a rich vein of aetherium crystal rumored to traverse the entire island. The island is under the Karelagne Empire's control and the corrupt rule of Governor Manta "Seabear" Gunthorpe.

### Contacting the Sistren

Fortunately, a Sistren ship is anchored just outside Port Kaylo: the brigantine *Rack and Ruin*, captained by Leona Rackham (NG, female half-astral merfolk **veteran**), a high-ranking Sistren of the Isles. Leona is thrilled to see Nadia, and welcomes her and—once Nadia vouches for them—the characters aboard her ship.

Leona pulls some crates up in a circle on the deck and leans in, listening to Nadia's story of Beliene and the Nth Degree with increasing concern, and looks over any items or evidence offered to her. Once Nadia finishes her tale, Leona presses her lips in a thin line.

*"Well now, that's some bad business indeed. Beliene, turned traitor." Leona smacks her knee and leans back and looks at you. "And you say you helped our Nadia here? Well, thank you for that. I'm sure she's already offered to pay you for your help, but you can count on some extra from me."*

Leona pulls aside a crewmate and whispers something to her. The crewmate nods and runs off, returning a few minutes later with a small coffer, which Leona offers to the party. Inside the coffer is 300 gp.

**If Beliene Was Captured.** Nadia is interested in helping the characters eliminate the threat the Nth Degree poses, but is hesitant to drag Beliene back to the zealots' base of operations unless necessary.

Leona offers to take Beliene to the Constellation Isles for safekeeping until this business with the Nth Degree is handled. The characters may also decide to keep Beliene on board to see what additional information they can pry out of her. Either answer is acceptable to Leona, as long as she gets custody of Beliene at the end of things.

Leona also offers to see how many ships are at the Sistren headquarters when she returns, and will contact Nadia via sending if any are interested in joining the cause.

Leona then clasps Nadia by the forearm and gives her a nod. "Go do good work. Make us proud."

## KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE

As part of the plan to save the astral emergent prisoners and destroy (or claim) the Nth Degree headquarters, the characters may wish to recruit others to their cause. Along with Nadia's connection with the Sistren of the Isles, Terrol has an in with the Ayrissians, and reminds the characters that not all Karelagne sailors agree with the zealots' ways. The characters may also want to garner support or make allies with other pirates or privateers who hold no specific loyalty. Each option has its risks and rewards.

The closest and easiest way to recruit ships, gather information, and listen to current gossip would be to visit Madame Isabeau's, a bar and gambling house in Port Kaylo. Terrol or Nadia can suggest this option, or a character with an appropriate background would know it already.

### TERROL'S CONNECTIONS

If Terrol is still with the party, they have the option to reach out to their Ayrissian contacts to recruit help for raiding the Nth Degree's headquarters. Terrol feels no loyalty to the Ayrissians, however, and is concerned that any help Ayris offers will come with too many strings attached—and there's no guarantee Ayris would allow the lab to be destroyed if it deems the information within valuable.

If the characters want Terrol to attempt to recruit Ayrissian ships to their side, Terrol needs twenty-four hours to get in touch with their contact and to relay the appropriate information. They'll return to the characters' ship or to a designated location afterward.



## MADAME ISABEAU'S

Madame Isabeau's is a remarkably clean faux dive bar. The establishment is comprised of a large, circular room with a circular bar in the center serving drinks of all sorts. There are six tables of games: flotilla, dirtnaps and bonesacks, liar's dice (see appendix D for these games' rules), blackjack, and poker. Additional tables and cushioned chairs line the circular wall, and a balcony runs the entire perimeter of the room, overlooking everything.

**Bouncers.** If combat breaks out, any patrons not involved retreat. One round later, four bouncers (**veterans**) arrive, and attempt to end the combat by force or by threat. Whoever started the fight is ejected—physically, if necessary.

## GETTING THE LAY OF THE LAND

The characters can take their time when they enter Madame Isabeau's and don't rouse much suspicion if they simply drink and watch the crowd—most patrons come here to watch and be watched. Though humans are the most represented race at the venue, there are plenty elves, tieflings, halflings, and dwarves, as well as astral emergents and merfolk enjoying themselves too.

The characters can chat to the bartender, Doddie, (**commoner**) who enjoys small talk. With a successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Doddie points out who in the room is of the Karelagne Empire, the Kingdom of Ayris, or is possibly a pirate or at least a privateer.

The characters can also circulate and play games, or just listen to the chatter and gossip. When the characters listen for gossip, roll on the Gossip table.

## GOSSIP

d8	GOSSIP
1	A lot of astral emergent regulars have stopped showing up to taverns and other establishments in Port Kaylo.
2	More adventurers have disappeared looking for the Mermaid's Tears.
3	The Karelagne Navy is doing sweeps and shaking down any ship that looks pirate or Ayrissian.
4	The Karelagne Navy is frustrated with the Nth Degree and its tactics.
5	A privateer ship recently returned with tales of a disappearing island air by flame of Windcrown.
6	Some astral emergents are selling or even abandoning their small, isolated islands to move to cities where they'll be safer.
7	The Nth Degree is moving a lot of cargo through Velstarrón Port, far from any Karelagne authority.
8	An Nth Degree ship clashed with a merchant vessel just off the earthward coast of the central Windcrown isles. The Nth Degree ship lost, and was left half-submerged on a reef just off the coast.

## RECRUITING OTHER SAILORS

The characters can chat to the other patrons and attempt to find captains and other sailors willing to join forces with them against the Nth Degree, or simply to gather more intel on the zealots for their own use. Each NPC below has a condition that must be met before they, and their assets, can be recruited.

### Cora Styx

Cora Styx (CG, female tiefling **sailor**; see appendix A) is a server who's diligent about checking on the character's drinks. She's bubbly and cheerful, but talk of the Nth Degree immediately casts a shadow over her face. She says the waters aren't safe for astral emergents, or for any free-blooded sailor, these days.

One of Cora's friends, Kita, is an astral emergent, and went missing several weeks ago. She fears the worst for her friend, and she wishes fire and brimstone on the Nth Degree. She heard the Ayrissians sank one of the Nth Degree's ships just a few days ago, off the earthward coast of the central Windcrown Isles. She hopes the zealots' bodies rot in the depths.

With a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Cora tells the characters that the Nth Degree's island is surrounded by a ward that destroys ships. She saw it happen during her own time on the waters with a "privateering" (read: pirate) fleet. One of their ships strayed too close to the island, and a wall of energy sparked and flared up, sinking the schooner nearly instantly. Unfortunately, she doesn't remember the island's exact location—she was only a deckhand, not a navigator—only that it was in the seas flameward of the Maelstrom.

If the characters explain they're going to assault the island, she tells them everything without the need for a Charisma check, and begs them to bring her friend Kita home, if she's still alive. Kita is a tiefling astral emergent with tightly curled pink hair, and her right horn is missing its tip.

### Dr. Nani Driftright

Dr. Nani Driftright (NG, female half-elf **veteran**) is a medic on a merchant ship, but formerly worked for the Karelagne Navy. She's amazing at bluffing, and is playing at the flotilla table.

Nothing surprises her upon hearing about the Nth Degree, characters who make a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check are certain Dr. Driftright isn't telling them everything. If the check succeeds by 3 or more, the characters realizes Dr. Driftright already knows what they're telling her about the Nth Degree.

Dr. Nani Driftright knows the Nth Degree is causing all sorts of trouble for the Karelagne Empire and for astral emergents. She and her ex-wife broke up partially because of money troubles the Nth Degree could have solved. Dr.

Driftright didn't tell her ex, Ridley Ono, the entire truth because of her pride.

With a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Dr. Driftright tells the characters she turned down a job with Doctor Parnetty, a founding member of the Nth Degree, because she considered Parnetty's ideas on organ harvesting from still-healthy patients abhorrent.

She won't help if Ridley Ono is helping, unless the character persuading her wins at flotilla during the night, as this gains her respect for the character's strategic mind. Alternatively, the character may attempt to talk Dr. Driftright into swallowing her pride and talking things out with her ex-wife; with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, the Doctor reluctantly agrees to come along even if Ridley Ono is involved.

**How She Can Help.** If the Charisma check above as successful, Dr. Driftright offers to get the characters closer to the imprisoned astral emergents once they reach the Nth Degree compound by pretending she has reconsidered Doctor Parnetty's job offer.

## Mr. Wheel

Mr. Wheel (NG, male human **sailor**; see appendix A) is the dealer at the dirtnaps and bonesacks table (see appendix D). He was a pirate, but went straight when he nearly lost his life in the raid that took his legs. Now, he works at Madame Isabeau's, and though it's safer, he occasionally misses the excitement of the pirate life. He and his old crew often sailed the seas flameward of the Maelstrom, and he knows the winds and currents there well.

Mr. Wheel hears a lot at his casino table, and he reveals that the Nth Degree has infiltrated many different seafaring factions. He isn't sure what its end goal is, save for the rise and glory of the Karelagne Empire, and doesn't understand why anyone would go through all that trouble just to kidnap astral emergents.

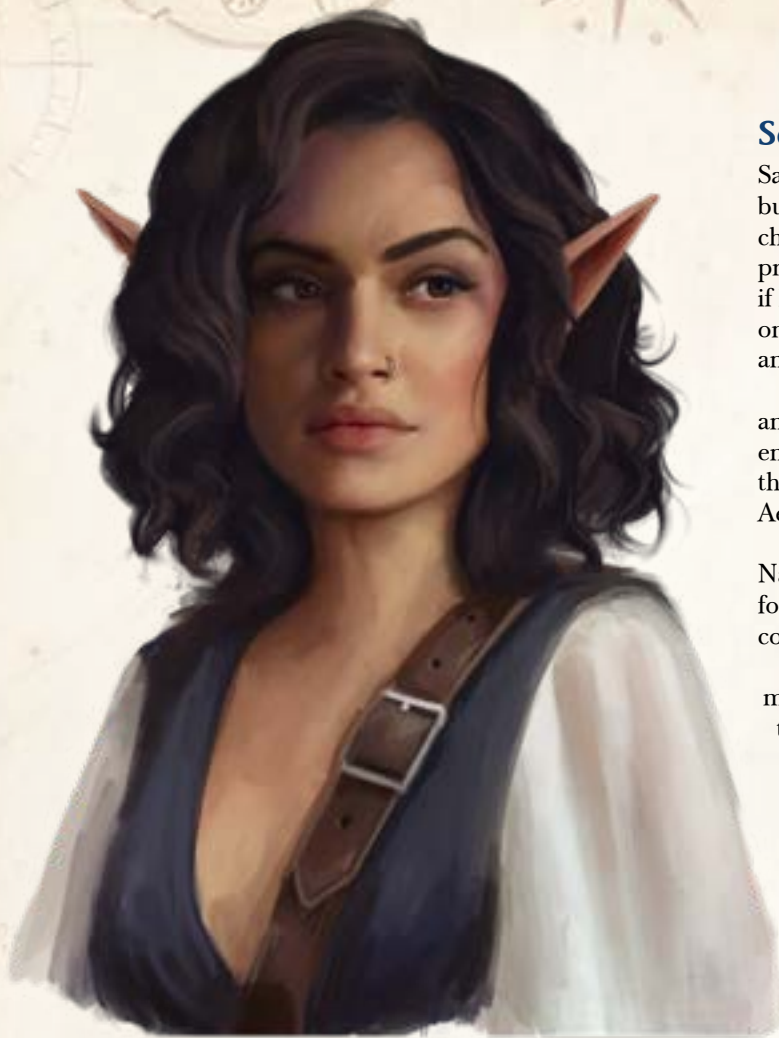
With a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Mr. Wheel leans in and reveals in a low voice that the key to recognizing an Nth Degree member is their tattoo. Every Nth Degree member has an N tattooed on the left side of their body, and it's usually easy to access in case they need to show it to another zealot.

Mr. Wheel can be talked into joining up if the characters regale him with their own stories.

**How He Can Help.** Mr. Wheel can talk his old pirate buddies, the crew of the *Skull Tithe*, into joining up, if they're allowed to plunder the island for its valuables afterward. Whether he's aboard the *Skull Tithe* or the characters' ship, Mr. Wheel can aid in navigating to the Nth Degree's island.







## Ridley Ono

Ridley Ono (CN, female elf **scout**) is the first mate of the Ayrissian *Osprey's Roost*. She used to be married to Dr. Driftright.

Ridley and the rest of her all-elfen crew love the sea, but excel at overland exploration. She boasts that there's no better bunch for sneaking, tracking, and sniping.

With a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Ridley confides that her ex, Dr. Driftright, used to work with one of the Nth Degree at a hospital. She bitterly tells the characters that the Nth Degree member is part of the reason they split up. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals Ridley's lingering feelings of love for Dr. Driftright amid the hurt and the anger.

Ridley only helps if the characters also talk Dr. Driftright into helping, in the hope that the mission will give her a chance to patch things up with her ex-wife.

**How She Can Help.** Ridley can provide an Ayrissian ship, but her crew can also help if they make landfall, scouting ahead of the characters and taking out any zealots in the island's jungle.

## Sailor Fortune

Sailor Fortune (NE, male human **assassin**) claims to be but a humble, unranked Ayrissian sailor, but he's highly charismatic and tells amazing stories. Sailor Fortune is practically holding court, hovering between two tables as if he can't be bothered to choose a game. He wears rings on practically every finger and has a winning smile for anyone he talks to.

If the characters talk to him about the Nth Degree and their activities, he emphatically insists that the astral emergents should be protected at all costs. He curses the Karelagne Empire for its attempts to colonize the Aetherial Expanse at everyone else's expense.

Recently, Sailor Fortune relieved some Karelagne Navy members of their valuables and saddlebags. He found some star charts, and a map with an island and its coordinates marked just earth by flame of Windcrown.

**How He Can Help.** Sailor Fortune can share the maps and charts with the characters and show them how the multiple entrances work to sneak in. They can also commit an additional galleon, the *Ebon Wake*.

With a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check, the characters can tell something is slightly off about Sailor Fortune and his stories, as if everything is a mixture of truth and lie, and each movement and facial expression is carefully curated. It's as if he's running an elaborate con.

**Traitor.** Sailor Fortune is actually Rider Uton, the leader of the Nth Degree. If recruited, he relays the group's plans back to the Nth Degree's headquarters via his *ring of sending* (see appendix B).

If the characters took Beliene prisoner and mention it to him, he attempts to rescue her if an opportune moment presents itself, otherwise he leaves her to her fate. Beliene knew what she signed on for, and the Nth Degree's work is too important to risk for one member.

**Rider Uton.** Rider Uton is the Nth Degree's leader, and works closely with Doctor Ugkin and Doctor Parnetty. He leaves the science and magic to them, and focuses on organizing the faction's ships, sailors, and raids around the Aetherial Expanse. He knows where every Nth Degree ship is at any given time, and which members are embedded in which factions.

Rider wears rings of all types on nine of his fingers. Most of the rings are mundane, though beautifully engraved, but the ring on his left index finger is a *ring of sending* (see appendix B), and the ring on his right little finger is a *ring of dimension door* (functions as a *cape of the mountebank*). His Nth Degree tattoo, a stylized *N* in black and red ink, is just below the inner bend of his elbow, hidden by his long sleeves.

Rider is cunning, devious, and will stop at nothing to see his organization—and the Karelagne Empire—succeed.

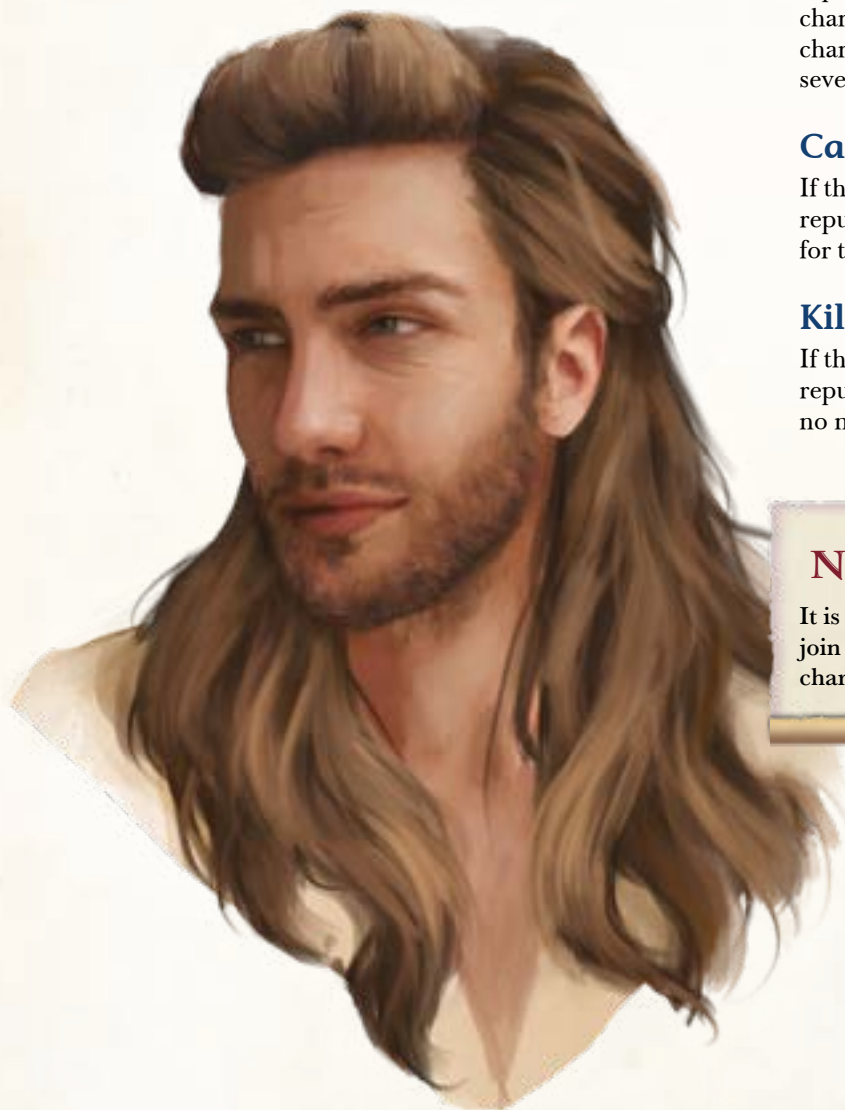
## Skitter LaMarc

Skitter LaMarc (LG, male human **veteran**), a Karelagne officer and a navigator, is playing at the dirt naps and bonesacks table, but he's terrible at bluffing.

Skitter LaMarc is on the hunt for any and all information on the Nth Degree because they're making the Karelagne Empire look bad. He didn't spend this long working his way through the service for extremists to tarnish that reputation. Skitter is horrified to hear about the zealots' experiments and hopes he never inadvertently aided them. He'll help if characters have a reputation of 5 good or higher and he thinks there's a profit to be made.

With a successful DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Skitter will get in touch with a friend, another Karelagne officer, who has access to a large number of mines and bombs for any assault on the Nth Degree's island.

**How He Can Help.** Skitter LaMarc can commit two ships to helping the characters. If the Persuasion check above was successful, he can outfit the characters' ship and others' with stronger artillery.



## MOVING ON

Once the characters have completed (or ignored) the quests for rescuing Acorn, stopping Beliene, and rallying support against the Nth Degree, an NPC ally suggests they make their way back onto the open sea—and their next quest.

If the characters decide not to raid the Nth Degree Island yet, they could search out the Blinking Island and Aloysius Dumas's lost treasure, or may simply go raiding to build up their ship's strength. In this case, they can always return to Port Kaylo and visit Madame Isabeau's at a future time.

## REPUTATION ADVANCEMENT

This section explains the impacts on the characters' reputation following their actions during this chapter.

### Rescuing Acorn

If the characters rescued Acorn, they gain 1 good reputation. Additionally, Acorn offers to aid the characters, at least for the short term. Tales of the characters' efforts to save lost crewmates filter through several ports, gaining them respect.

### Capturing Beliene

If the characters captured Beliene, they gain 3 lawful reputation. The Sistren of the Isles considers them allies for their efforts to go above and beyond.

### Killing Beliene

If the characters killed Beliene, they gain 3 chaotic reputation, and tales spread that their ship and crew show no mercy to those who wrong them.

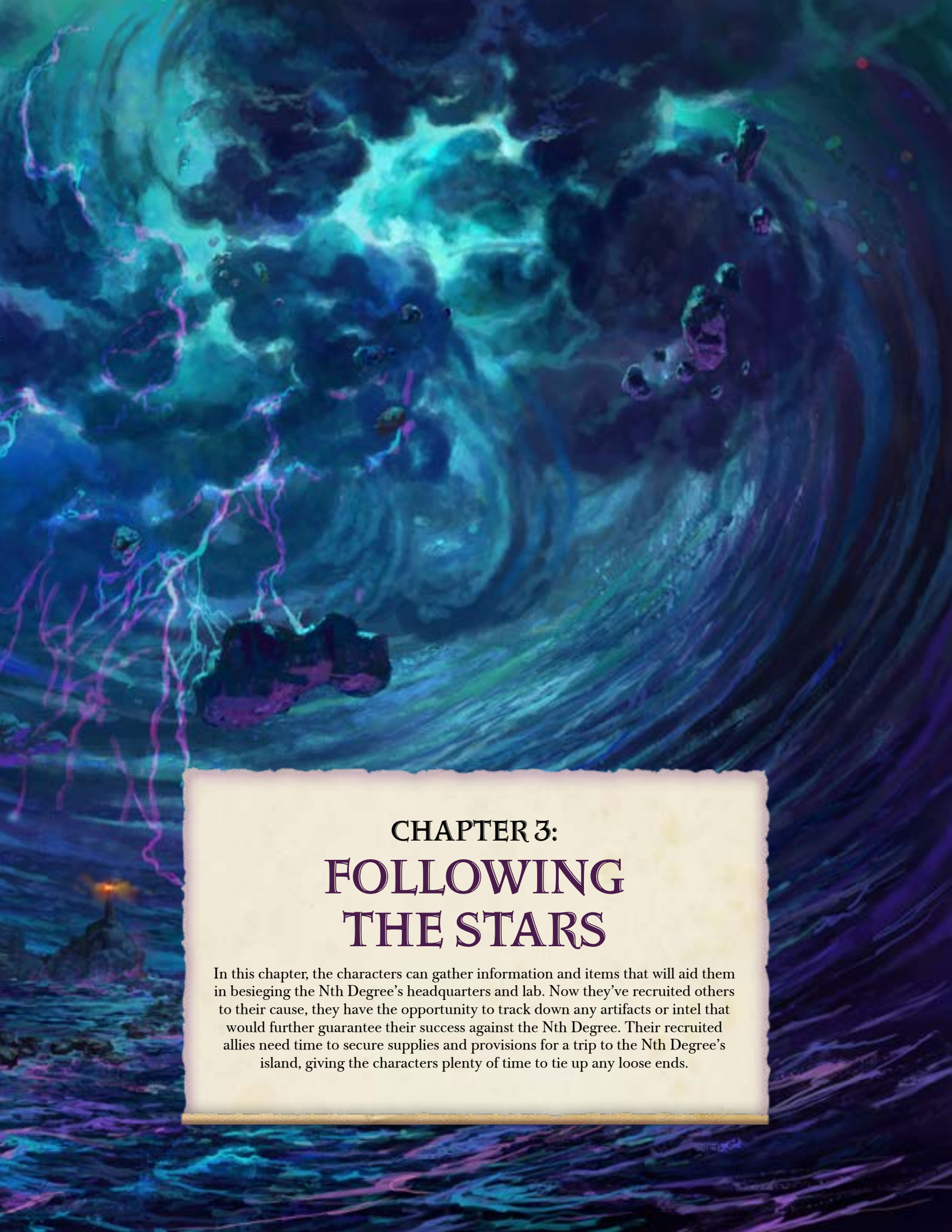
## NON-PLAYER CHARACTER OFFICERS

It is possible that non-player characters from this episode join the player's crew. GMs should give these non-player characters 3 officer ranks in stations of their choosing.









## CHAPTER 3: FOLLOWING THE STARS

In this chapter, the characters can gather information and items that will aid them in besieging the Nth Degree's headquarters and lab. Now they've recruited others to their cause, they have the opportunity to track down any artifacts or intel that would further guarantee their success against the Nth Degree. Their recruited allies need time to secure supplies and provisions for a trip to the Nth Degree's island, giving the characters plenty of time to tie up any loose ends.



## THE MAP UNFURLED

The characters have a lot of freedom, much like the pirates they are, to roam the sea and gather intel, artifacts, or even engage in some ship battles, if they wish. In this chapter, the characters might do the following:

**Adrift and Adroit.** Characters may run across other ships while out at sea, and may either flee or fight and potentially strengthen their own ship with loot and knowledge.

**Retrieving the Passage Medallion.** Characters can track down the wreck of the *Damnation* to retrieve the passage medallion they need to pass through the wards around the Nth Degree's island.

**The Lost Treasure of Aloysius Dumas.** Pursue the lost treasure of Aloysius Dumas and visit the strange Blinking Island; meeting the astral emergents who live there and potentially gaining a powerful artifact.

## ADRIFT AND ADROIT

The Travel Complications table (see the “Navigation and Travel” section in the New Mechanics part of the *Aetherial Expanse Setting Guide*) provides unique encounters that the characters may come across while chasing down any leads they find. Additionally, the characters may track down ships to attack if they wish to go a-plundering. Two target ships are provided, but feel free to craft your own or add additional ships if your party proves particularly bloodthirsty or unlucky.

When the party sets a new heading, they must roll an Intelligence (Navigation) check to see if they can find their way. On a failure, or when thematically appropriate, roll on the Travel Complications table.

### ENEMY SHIPS

The characters may run into a hostile ship while out at sea—or may search out a ship to attack and loot. Two such ships are listed below.

#### INS Acrimony

The Acrimony, one of the Karelagne Navy's floating training ships, is a frigate with a silhouette both foreboding and everlasting. Its deep-green metal hull and a figurehead of two clasped hands—one young and smooth, the other older and weathered—don't scream relaxation and recuperation. However, for soldiers and officers in training, or more often, officers that need to recover from injuries but aren't willing to go sandside, the Acrimony is a home away from home. Most of the fifty-two unranked crew are new recruits, who are overseen by eight high-ranking officers who serve as their professors.

This ship is made unique by its vegetation deck, with tendrils of ivy spilling around columns and floating

silently in the wind. Mental health doctors concluded that officers were likelier to dive headlong into their studies and training exercises if a small, nature-rich setting reminiscent of being on land was available. There's even a small garden for growing fresh vegetables.

While the *Acrimony* might seem easy pickings, new recruits are usually picked for their intelligence or physical prowess before training begins. However, a bounty awaits the bold.

**Treasure.** The biggest prize on board is a training manual that lists some of the Karelagne Navy's ship maneuvers. While many Ayrissian and pirate ships have mapped out some of the strategies, this manual contains several newer ones. If a character aboard a ship takes 12 hours to study the manual, that ship gains an extra Mettle die when battling Karelagne Navy ships. A ship can't gain more than one extra Mettle die in this way. In addition to the training manual, the *Acrimony* holds the maximum amount of supplies for a ship of its size.

#### INS Seek No Further

A beautiful brigantine that boasts a hull of reddish wood and crimson-kissed metal, the *Seek No Further* is one of the few mine-laying vessels in the Karelagne Navy. Small bulbs strung on the deck are lit in the company of other naval ships, especially if the *Seek No Further* is doing its dastardly job.

Armed to the teeth with mines, this ship comes standard with ten officer stations but runs nearly full with thirty-eight unranked crew. It leaves port with a full manifest, but laying mines is dangerous work.

With a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, the character notices the spellspun rigging (see the “Ship Upgrades” section of the *Aetherial Expanse Setting Guide*) on the *Seek No Further*. The ship has two culverins, two falconets, a swivel gun (port side), and a flamethrower (starboard side).

The captain of the *Seek No Further* is Damos Deutalos (LN, male human **veteran**) and his first mate is Litogena Scottos (LN, female half-elf **spy**).

**Armory.** If the party take the *Seek No Further* without sinking it, they can offload as many of the following mines (see appendix B) as their ship will allow.

- Ten standard mines
- Five imposter mines
- Five gazer mines
- A lamplighter mine
- An emotional mine



## RETRIEVING THE PASSAGE MEDALLION

The characters can retrieve a passage medallion from the recently wrecked Nth Degree ship the *Damnation*. The wreck can be found just off the earth-by-flame coast of the Windcrown Isles.

If the characters look for the *Damnation* and are setting sail from Port Kaylo, the wind and currents are favorable; have them make a DC 15 Intelligence (Navigation) check. On a failure, roll on the Travel Complications table (see the “Navigation and Travel” section in the New Mechanics part of the *Aetherial Expanse Setting Guide*). If they’re traveling from anywhere other than Port Kaylo, increase the DC to 18.

After the characters have resolved the results of the complication, if any, they find the wreck of the *Damnation*.

## THE WRECK OF THE DAMNATION

The battle between the *Damnation*, an Nth Degree brigantine, and an Ayrissian ship resulted in the *Damnation* being split in two just behind the foremast. The rear half of the ship sank into the depths, while the front half lodged on a tiny island. The only part of the ship above aether is 15 feet of the main deck, though it rests at an angle that makes walking on it near impossible.

When the characters spot the wreck, read the following:

*The flat, endless expanse of aether spreads out around you, glittering like diamonds and broken only by an unnerving sight: the sharp line of a bowsprit jutting up from the sparkling aether. Beneath the bowsprit, you can see a figurehead of a tiefling mermaid wielding a trident. Most of the ship, it seems, lies below the aether.*

Once the characters get within 15 feet of the wreck, if they make a successful DC 19 Wisdom (Perception) check, they can just make out its shape beneath the aether, and notice how it ends just after the foremast.

## Merrow Hunters

A shiver of eight **astral merrow** (see appendix A) lurk within the submerged portions of the wreck, drawn by the commotion and the opportunity to scavenge. They’re territorial and hostile, though they stay out of sight until an opportune moment, watching and waiting.

If the characters only row out to the figurehead and then leave, the merrow let them go without incident, content to loot the rest of the wreckage.

## The Medallion

The passage medallion is hidden within the chest of the *Damnation*’s figurehead—a fierce warrior woman with the upper half of a tiefling and the lower half of a mermaid. The medallion’s aura of abjuration magic can be noticed with detect magic.

The compartment that holds the medallion is too high up on the wreck to reach from a boat on the aether. Characters can climb to the figurehead with a successful DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check.

The chest of the figurehead hides a secret compartment (AC 15, 8 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage). Locating the compartment requires a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check, and opening it requires a successful DC 11 Dexterity check using thieves’ tools.





*Wreck Of The Damnation*

## WRECK OF THE DAMNATION FEATURES

The wreck of the *Damnation* has the following general features:

**Wooden Construction.** The *Damnation* is primarily made of wood.

**Doors.** Unless otherwise stated, doors are 6 feet tall, 4 feet wide, and have AC 15, 15 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage.

**Ceilings.** The ceilings belowdecks are low and claustrophobic. The exposed beams are 6 feet high and the ceilings are 8 feet high.

**Lighting.** A few magical lanterns still hang from the ceilings on the lower decks, and provide dim light unless otherwise noted.

**Uneven Footing.** Walking normally on any deck of the *Damnation* is impossible. Between the sharp angle and the wet boards, characters must make a successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check to climb the deck.

**Submerged.** Save for a few portions of the bow, most of the *Damnation* lies beneath the surface of the Aetherial Sea. Accessing these areas requires full submersion in the aether, and underwater fighting rules apply.



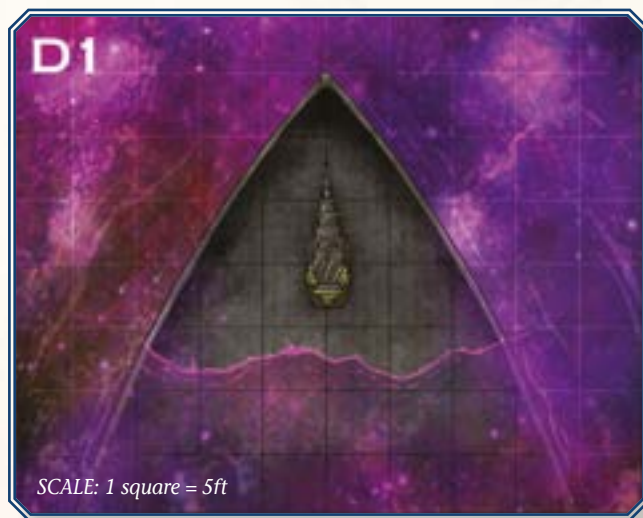
## WRECK OF THE DAMNATION LOCATIONS

The following areas are keyed to the Wreck of the *Damnation* map.

### D1: Forecastle

The frontmost and uppermost deck of the *Damnation* is the forecastle, though it's half-submerged in the aether. The bowsprit has a coilgun mounted to the deck.

**Treasure.** The characters can retrieve the coilgun by undoing the mounting. A successful DC 25 Strength (Athletics) check is needed to simply wrench the mounting from the boards, or they can take 10 minutes to unscrew the coilgun from its mooring.



### D2: Storage

The majority of this deck is underwater, and primarily consists of the storage area, but two portholes look out at the aetherline.

A character looking into this area from outside can see floating barrels and crates and bits of broken wood and rope. With a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check, they catch a glimpse of movement in the water. If the check succeeds by 4 or more, they see a large, finned shadow slip out of sight.

If the characters enter this room, read the following:

*The barrels, crates, and buckets that were once stored neatly in this room all float at the surface of the aether, creating strange sparkles from your underwater perspective and blotting out most of the light from above. A bundle of sturdy fabric floats in the far corner among the shattered debris. Before you have the chance to investigate further, a dark shape lunges out at you from the debris.*

The dark shape is an **astral merrow** (see appendix A) that attacks the characters as soon as they enter the room.

**Treasure.** A character who investigates the bundle of fabric and makes a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check or a successful DC 14 Intelligence check using water vehicles discovers a set of spellspun rigging (see the “Ship Upgrades” section of the *Aetherial Expanse Setting Guide*). The sails are aetherlogged and heavy, and require a successful DC 19 Strength (Athletics) check to haul out of the storage room and onto the deck.



### D3: Galley

The *Damnation's* kitchen was much like the *Fanged Stallion's*, but now everything lies in ruin; broken or tossed about by the battle and subsequent sinking of the ship.

**Treasure.** A character who looks through the wreckage and makes a successful DC 19 Intelligence (Investigation) check discovers barrels of grog (worth 3 supply points) and a *potion of healing* (greater).



### D4: Spare Bunks

These two rooms have four bunks each. The bed frames are still bolted to the floor, but the mattresses, pillows, and bedding are all floating in the top corners of the room.





## D5: Magazine

The doors to the magazine are both locked, and the keys lost to the depths. Picking the locks requires a successful DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, or they can be forced open with a successful DC 18 Strength check.

Three **astral merrow** (see appendix A) are in this area, two on the left and one on the right, as they were attempting to force their way through the doors when the characters' ship arrived. When the characters enter this level, the merrow attack.

The magazine is in a similar state of disarray as the rest of the ship, with barrels and casks floating in the aether.

**Treasure.** Along with the standard gunpowder and standard shot (half-depleted, due to the combat that sank the ship), the magazine holds five chainshot, ten carcass shots, and an aetherium shell.



# THE LOST TREASURE OF ALOYSIUS DUMAS

If the characters consult the journal pages Terrol provided in chapter 2, and pair them with the rumors of a disappearing island, they may wish to search for the mysterious island and the lost treasure of Aloysius Dumas.

The treasure, an artifact of great power, lies on the Blinking Island. The characters can piece together the rumors they heard and the clues in the journal pages to chart a rough course.

## NAVIGATING TO THE BLINKING ISLAND

Finding the mysterious island requires a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Navigation) check. On a failure, roll on the Travel Complications table (see the “Navigation and Travel” section in the New Mechanics part of the *Aetherial Expanse Setting Guide*). Once the characters resolve the complication, they locate the island.

## THE BLINKING ISLAND

Even within the Aetherial Expanse, the Blinking Island is an anomaly. Located just on the edge of the aether sea, the island is subject to strange effects as the ocean tides swell and recede.

The island blinks in and out of existence, much like a creature under the effects of the blink spell, except the island remains present and absent for long stretches of time.

The island remains on the Aetherial Expanse for 1 hour. During this time, the island’s astral emergent citizens go about their day as if nothing is amiss. However, as the hour progresses, reality begins to unravel around the edges of the island, affecting the landscape and the inhabitants’ minds. Just before the island disappears, a dense aether fog rolls over everything, from the airward side to the earthward side. When the fog reaches the earthward coastline, the island disappears with a strange green flash.

After 15 minutes, the green flash repeats, and the island returns.

## The Fogfall and Its Effects

When the island returns, everything on it resets to a previously established state. The island’s astral emergent inhabitants remember one another and anyone or anything that becomes part of the island or its community, but they forget any interactions with the characters. If reminded of their interactions, they distantly remember something, but it’s lost in a fog, as if in a half-forgotten dream. Thinking too hard about it distresses them, however, and they grow agitated if pressed to recall details.

Only after a character interacts with an astral emergent of the Blinking Island five times are they able to recall any significant details.

Any character that remains on the island when it’s consumed by the fogfall disappears along with the island. When they return to the expanse, they remember nothing about the 15 minutes they were elsewhere and gain 1 level of exhaustion. A character who gains a sixth level of exhaustion this way doesn’t die, but becomes part of the island’s community, forgetting anything about their previous life. Levels of exhaustion gained this way can’t be removed by magic such as greater restoration or by finishing a long rest on the Blinking Island.

## The World’s Edge

Contrary to common belief, falling off the edge of the Aetherial Expanse is very difficult. If the characters sail to the island’s air-by-flame side, the currents push their ship slowly back. If they’re insistent and sail past the air-by-flame coastline, either through magical means or sheer stubbornness, read the following:

*Past the island, in the distance—but still far too close for comfort—a thick fogbank extends from the surface of the sea into the sky as far as you can see: an endless, roiling wall that eddies and pulses as if alive. The fog surges toward you briefly before pulling back, like the great breath of a gargantuan beast.*

Characters who make a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check hear a muffled roar, like a tidal wave or a waterfall. Attempting to sail any farther is impossible, and such attempts end with the characters mysteriously returned to the Blinking Island’s flameward or waterward coast.

## Approaching the Island

Any ship approaching the Blinking Island finds that the earth-by-flame side is calmest. The island is shaped like a crescent moon with the two tips curving out earth by flame; each tip boasts a five-story lighthouse tower painted with navy and neon pink horizontal stripes. A narrow causeway connects the two tips with a well-traveled path.

Verdant hills full of bioluminescent trees shimmer high over the water while a few stone buildings dot the center of the island. The black sand beaches sparkle.





## COUNTDOWN CLOCK

To help track time on the Blinking Island, as soon as the party steps foot on land, a countdown clock begins. The clock starts at 10 points, and counts down as the characters explore and interact with their surroundings according to the bullet points below. When the clock reaches 0, the fogfall sweeps over the island, and it blinks out of existence.

- Visiting and investigating a location costs 1 point.
- Speaking to people costs 1 point per person.
- Travel between the lighthouse and the village costs 1 point.

### Environmental Effects

- At 7 points, the sky gets dark.
- At 5 points, the water and air seem to vibrate.
- At 3 points, the island's air-by-flame edges are enveloped in the roiling fog, visible from anywhere on the island.
- At 1 point, the entire island is enveloped in the thick fog. It muffles noise and anything 20 feet away is considered heavily obscured.
- If a character is on the island when the clock hits zero, they disappear with the rest of the island (see "The Fogfall and Its Effects" earlier in this chapter).

### Citizen Effects

- 6–10 points: The citizens interact with the characters as normal.
- 4–5 points: Only Erinaronda will speak to the characters. The citizens seem distracted and keep staring toward the island's air-by-flame side, heads cocked as if they can hear something.
- 1–3 points: None of the citizens will speak, but they all hum in strange, dissonant tones.

## BLINKING ISLAND LOCATIONS

Once on the island, the characters have several locations to travel to, though lingering too long is ill-advised.

### The Lighthouses

Accessible from the sea by a small boat or dingy, the sparkling black sand beach is bare aside from a few rocks, some wooden lounge chairs, and the lighthouse.

The lighthouse is in pristine condition. Its gray door is unlocked and a spiral staircase climbs up the inside of the lighthouse. On the first floor is a desk, a chair, and a navigational logbook—inside, a few names are written in Common: Kinsey Silt, Myalla Ogbaa, Saeli the Rough, and Aloysius Dumas.

The second, third, and fourth floors are living quarters. The second floor features comfortable chairs and side tables. The third floor is a kitchen with a hot stone, a cold box and a well-stocked pantry. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check or a successful DC 12 Wisdom check using cook's utensils reveals that the food is fresh and isn't magically preserved. The fourth floor is a well-kept bedroom with two beds and two bookshelves full of romance and mystery novels. A successful DC 18 Intelligence (History) check reveals all the books were printed over a hundred years ago. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check reveals there's no layer of dust in any of the rooms; the rooms are clean and in use.

At the top of the lighthouse is a 40-foot-diameter lantern room, with glass windows along the entire perimeter. Slowly rotating on a dais is a bioluminescent lamp set inside a six-sided stepped lens.

**Vantage Point.** Looking out from the top floor of a lighthouse affords a character an excellent view of the surrounding area. Earth-by-flame, the character can see the fogbank at the edge of the expanse (see "The World's Edge" earlier in this chapter). Toward the main body of the island, a cluster of low, gray stone buildings is visible, connected to the lighthouses by pathways through the foliage. With a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character sees someone running along the causeway toward the other lighthouse.

**Fleeing Astral Emergent.** Kinsey Silt, a young astral emergent, spotted the characters while crossing the causeway from the lighthouse on the opposite side. He had been visiting the lighthouse keeper, Jem Aediobra, and was hurrying back before he was found absent. If left alone, Kinsey retrieves Jem from the second lighthouse, and the two hurry back to the village to inform Erinaronda of the characters' arrival.

**Visiting Both Lighthouses.** If the characters take time to explore both lighthouses, they discover they have the same layout and general furnishings, though their contents differ slightly. The logbook in the second lighthouse lists four different names: Jem Aediobra, Alia Sands, Olyran Bogsbagin, and Oona Lyresmyth.



## Causeway

The 15-foot-wide causeway is made of the same black sand as the beaches, dotted with scrubby grasses with tiny, vibrant-blue flowers. A black gravel pathway runs down the center, making for easier travel.

A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals a bipedal creature recently ran down the causeway, from one lighthouse to the other. If the check succeeds by 2 or more, the tracks suggest the creature was walking down the causeway from one lighthouse, then pivoted on their heels and ran back the way they came.

## WHAT THE CITIZENS REMEMBER

The Citizens of the Eye are aware of the strange cycle their island goes through, but have accepted it as part of their life. From their perspective, they move through their days as anyone else would, and the reset is only detrimental to outsiders who remain when they shouldn't. They recall speaking with outsiders who have visited often, including Aloysius.

As the GM, feel free to insert interesting NPCs you think may have visited this island in this past, potentially ones from the characters' backstories, though keep in mind that few discover this strange location.

## The Village

A small rocky path leads away from either lighthouse and into the village in the island's center. The village has five main buildings and twelve smaller homes around it.

**Citizens of the Eye.** Twenty-four astral emergents live on this island, sixteen adults (**commoners**) and seven children (noncombatants) ranging in age from 6 to 16. Once the characters meet Erinaronda and earn her approval, they're friendly toward the characters; before that, when they spot the characters, they quickly hurry away to find Erinaronda.

**The Keepers of Consciousness.** This group of eight astral emergents rule over the small island community. The most respected and deferred-to Keeper is Erinaronda. The Keepers safeguard the artifacts given to them by other visitors. They don't know why their island acts the way it does, only that it has done so for countless ages and will likely to continue to do. If the characters try to impress on the emergents how much time passes between cycles, they seem unphased, accepting it as truth without concern.

The Keepers are:

**Avoidance.** (NG, female tiefling astral emergent **spy**).

She's quick to level a blade at those who would threaten her people.





**Caution.** (NG, male tiefling astral emergent **priest**).

Enjoys walking the island and picking flowers and herbs for tonics and tinctures.

**Erinaronda.** Erinaronda (LN, female human astral emergent **veteran**), the de facto leader of the Citizens of the Eye, is a wise and muscular woman. While the countdown is above 5, she's calm and self-assured, confident everything will come in its own time. Unless the characters are overtly hostile, she's warm and welcoming, though she keeps an eye open for potential betrayal: the characters aren't the first visitors to come in search of power and potential.

**Jonah Dorrington.** (LN, male human astral emergent **berserker**). He's the most physically imposing Keeper, save for Erinaronda, but flexes his size and strength more often.

**Leuca Albion.** (LN, female human astral emergent **guard**). Often waxes poetic about the visitors they've received over the years—those who have interacted with them often enough to be remembered, and those that stayed to become part of the island—including Aloysius Dumas.

**Olyran Bogsbagin.** (LN, male halfling astral emergent **noble**). He holds the same placid attitude as Erinaronda, though he isn't as good as maintaining it.

**Oona Lyresmyth.** (CG, female half-elf astral emergent **acolyte**). She wishes the Keepers were more proactive in dealing with the artifacts and the island's condition.

**Triana Worthing.** (NG, female drow astral emergent; use the **elf, drow** stat block). She prefers the island the way it is, as it keeps away unwanted visitors.

## Village Square

If the characters enter the village, a group of eight astral emergents, led by Erinaronda, approach the characters, their faces stoic and unreadable. Depending on how many points are left, the astral emergents act differently toward the characters.

**6–10 Points.** Erinaronda introduces herself and the rest of the crowd. Read:

*Dressed in a simple linen jumper and sandals, with the thickest forearms you've seen in days, an astral emergent with two long purple braids makes a gesture of welcome to you. "I am Erinaronda, and we are the Keepers of Consciousness. Welcome to the Blinking Island."*

*The others murmur almost musically. Erinaronda breaks into a smile. "Now quick, what powerful and mysterious object are you looking for?"*

Erinaronda refuses to explain further until the characters have answered her question. If they refuse to answer, or if they lie about which item they seek, she sighs, shakes her head and says "Good luck to you, then, and don't get

caught on the island after fogfall." She refuses to elaborate and walks away, leaving the characters alone. The other astral emergents avoid contact with the characters.

If the characters pretend they aren't searching for any item, but simply wish to spend time among the island's denizens, she allows them to do so. The other astral emergent citizens speak freely with the characters.

If the characters answer her truthfully, she smiles. Read:

*The Keepers smile at each other knowing this is their favorite part, too. Erinaronda laughs. "You don't think Aloysius was the only person to find this tiny spit of land and ask us protect something from willful pirates, do you?"*

*She pauses, a flash of something else darting across her face that manifests as a shooting star under her skin. "This is your first time to the island, isn't it?"*

With a successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Erinaronda explains what she means by her "first time" comment. Otherwise, she leads the characters up the stone pathway to a low dais.

Continue to "Erinaronda's Riddle," below.

**4–5 Points.** Erinaronda introduces herself and the rest of the crowd. Read:

*Dressed in a simple linen jumper and sandals, with the thickest forearms you've seen in days, an astral emergent with two long purple braids makes a gesture of welcome to you. "I am Erinaronda, and we are the Keepers of Consciousness. Welcome to the Blinking Island, but come quickly, there isn't much time."*

*The others look around with fear tinging their eyes and they tug at your sleeves, urging you to follow them up the path to the stone dais.*

Continue to "Erinaronda's Riddle," below.

**2–3 Points.** Erinaronda and the other astral emergents come to greet the characters.

*Dressed in a simple linen jumper, sandals, and with the thickest forearms the characters have seen in days, the astral emergent in charge gestures to the island and the darkness slowly growing over the island. Her voice is a song rising in pitch and timbre but unrecognizable to the characters.*

*The other astral emergents are clumped in groups along the path, gesturing to come with them. They repeat the leader's song together, beautiful but terrifying in its volume. They break out into a run as soon as the characters begin to follow.*

Continue to "Erinaronda's Riddle," below.

**1 Point.** The astral emergents work to force the characters off the island.

*A group of astral emergents approach you, frantically waving their arms and pointing toward the shore where your boat waits. Their expressions are ones of panic and fear.*

Characters who make a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check realize the astral emergents don't wish them harm; they're afraid for the characters and are trying to warn them back to their boat.

If the characters head back toward the sea, read the following:

*It's as if every astral emergent on the island is spread along the path to the beach where the you landed. They point to the encroaching darkness and grab your dinghy, beginning to push it back out into the water for you. Their lips move, but their mouths are blurry and produce no sound.*

*A muscular astral emergent with long purple braids watches it all with her hands on her hips.*

If the characters attempt to stay on the island, the astral emergents purposefully throw rocks at their feet as a warning. A trio of astral emergents cast sleep on any character who won't then board the boat. If the characters cast calm emotions or a similar spell on the astral emergents, they become less fearful but no less urgent in their actions.

The fogfall that has been enveloping the island finally overtakes the muscular Erinaronda, then washes across the shore before lapping at the waves of the Aetherial Expanse.

## Erinaronda's Riddle

Erinaronda and the other Keepers lead the characters into the center of village. The buildings here are made of stacked stone, simple in design but well-made and adorned with designs painted in bright, colorful pigments. The five buildings that surround the village square are common spaces for shared use between the island's citizens and, at 50 feet on a side, are much larger than the other buildings.

On a low dais in the center of the square, an elaborate compass rose has been laid out in a mosaic of colored stones. The body and arms of the starlike compass are formed from stones in golden and yellow hues, the ordinal arms from white, and the background from shades of blue and gray with the occasional green or purple shimmer. The letters of each direction—*A*, *F*, *E*, and *W*—are drawn with black beach sand.

Erinaronda stops at the edge of the compass rose and turns to the characters. If the countdown timer is still

above 3 points, she asks the characters a single question: "In which direction do you wish to go?" If the countdown timer is at 3 or less, she simply gestures to the compass rose with desperation in her eyes.

The answer to Erinaronda's question is the decoded message from Aloysius's journal pages: "The wind knows the way" (see appendix C), referencing the airward point of the compass rose.

## Compass Rose

The compass rose hides several artifacts, one beneath each cardinal point. The Blinking Wheel is buried beneath the *A*, under the airward point.

If the characters answer Erinaronda correctly, she simply smiles and raises her arms. The stones of the compass rose begin to shudder and shake, then the ground beneath the *A* shifts and separates, revealing the Blinking Wheel—a little dirty, but no worse for wear.

If Erinaronda isn't speaking, the characters must deduce the meaning and dig beneath the correct letter for themselves. Several shovels lean against a nearby wall for this purpose.

**Picking the Wrong Artifact.** Beneath the other arms of the compass rose wait other artifacts hidden over the ages. Beneath the *F*, a small box contains an oval bat amulet with curved wings that is cold to the touch and radiates an air of sorrow (an amulet of regrets; functions as a *ring of three wishes*). The *E* hides a sea star-shaped silver flask with five chambers, each filled with a different liquid (*flask of eternal options*; see appendix B). Beneath the *W*, an unassuming carving of a horse is buried—a *figurine of wondrous power* (obsidian steed).

**Mix and Match.** The characters can take any of these artifacts, though the astral emergents only allow them to take one. If the characters return after the island resets, the astral emergents know that the characters already claimed one artifact, and they explain that the island won't allow them to take another without returning the first.

**Getting Greedy.** If the characters try to take more than one artifact, the astral emergents attempt to stop them, and explain that the island won't allow them to take more than one.

If the characters still leave with more than one artifact, all but one of the artifacts disappears from their possession when the fogfall next engulfs Blinking Island. As the GM, you may choose or randomly determine which artifact remains in the characters' possession.



## AN INVITATION

If any of the characters is an astral emergent, or if Terrol or Acorn come ashore, Erinaronda offers to let the astral emergent characters join them on the island. She doesn't extend this invitation to other characters. If the character has any questions, she says she can't answer them until the character has made their choice, but she says the island is safe and a good home for those like them.

Astral emergents who choose to stay become part of the island and its eternal cycle.

## SPENDING TIME ISLANDSIDE

If the characters don't immediately take an artifact and leave, or if Erinaronda's riddle has the players stumped, Erinaronda suggests the characters spend time on the island getting to know her and the other astral emergent citizens. She can't consider them a friend until she can remember them, and even then, she must know they're truthful and honest in their ways.

Once the characters spend three days' worth of cycles on the island with the astral emergents, Erinaronda calls them forth to deliver her judgment. If the characters have been kind, truthful, caring, and helpful, she considers them friends. If at any time they took advantage of an astral emergent, lied, stole, or otherwise displayed deplorable behavior, she asks them politely but firmly to leave and not return.

If the characters spend time on the island, feel free to craft side quests for them to do for the astral emergents. Some of these quests may include gathering herbs for Caution, sparring with Jonah Dorrington, and minding the island's children while their parents do chores.

## KILLING THE ASTRAL EMERGENTS

If the characters kill any of the astral emergents on the island, the astral emergent returns, alive and well, the next time the island appears, but they have an intense dislike for the character that they can't explain. If they spend six or more cycles conversing with the character who killed them, their death at the hands of that character is the first memory that returns to them.

If the characters kill all the astral emergents on the island, including the children, none of them return when the island returns. Instead, the island is empty, with no bodies and no signs of violence, with only empty structures and the compass rose as a reminder of the people that were here.

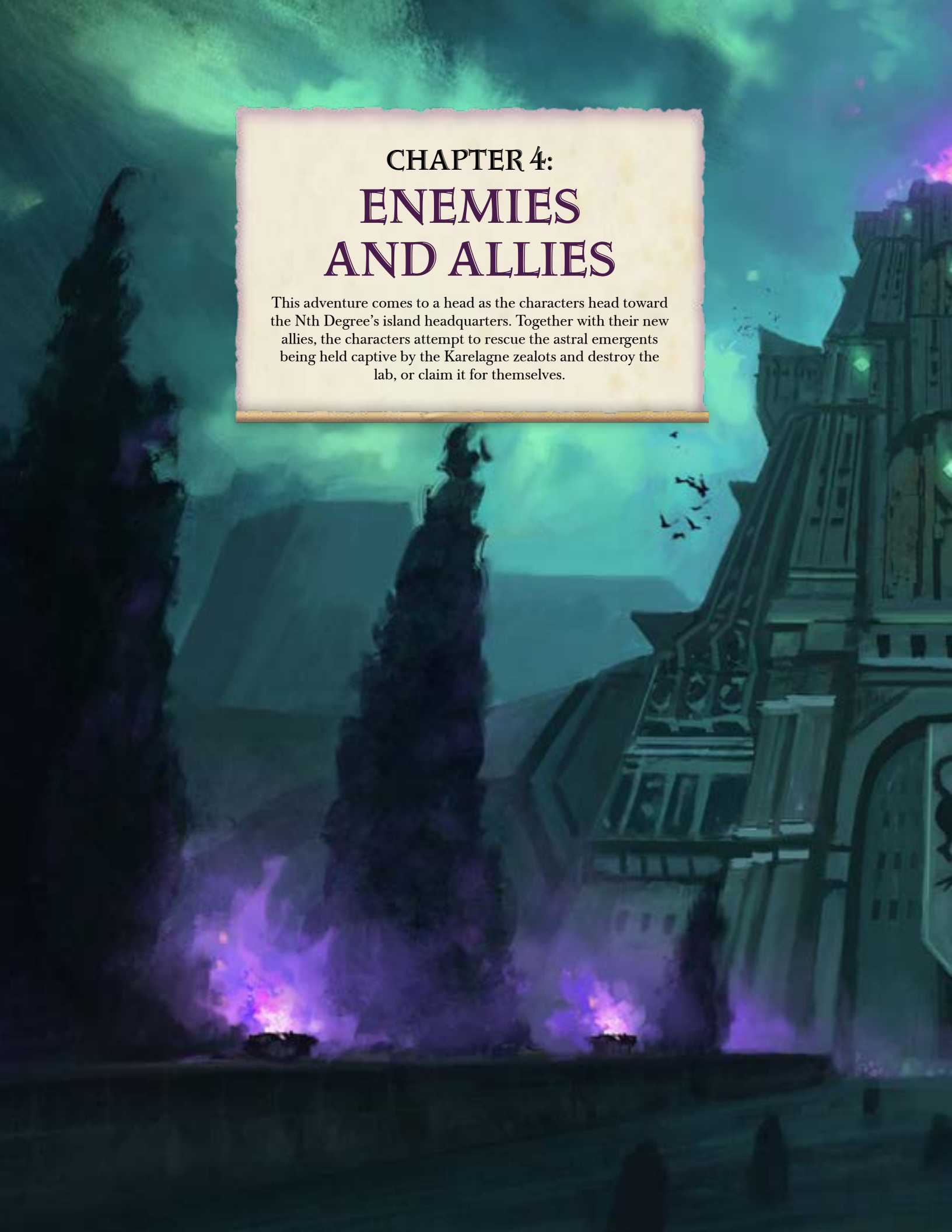
## REPUTATION ADVANCEMENT

This section explains the impacts on the characters' reputation following their actions during this chapter.

### Killing the Astral Emergents

If the players kill the astral emergents on the Blinking Island, they gain 3 evil reputation.



The background of the page is a dark, atmospheric illustration. On the right, a tall, gothic-style building with many windows is visible, some of which are glowing with a green light. On the left and in the center, a massive, dark plume of smoke or fire rises into the sky. At the base of this plume, there are bright, glowing orange and yellow flames. The sky is a deep blue with some lighter, hazy clouds. The overall mood is one of conflict and destruction.

## CHAPTER 4: ENEMIES AND ALLIES

This adventure comes to a head as the characters head toward the Nth Degree's island headquarters. Together with their new allies, the characters attempt to rescue the astral emergents being held captive by the Karelagne zealots and destroy the lab, or claim it for themselves.





## THE BEST-LAID PLANS

The characters have time to plan their assault on the Nth Degree headquarters based on the intelligence they've uncovered and the allies they've gathered. They may want to attempt a full-on assault, to use some of the ships as a distraction and sneak in, or to use a completely different tactic. Allow them time to think things through from all the angles, and use the NPCs to point out forgotten information or details the characters might have missed. Some items or intel that could prove helpful include:

**The Passage Medallion.** This artifact allows one or more ships to pass through the island's wards unharmed (see "Retrieving the *Passage Medallion*" in chapter 3).

**The Blinking Wheel.** Hidden on the Blinking Island by explorer Aloysius Dumas, the Blinking Wheel allows the characters' ship to maneuver around the battlefield—or through the island's ward—with startling efficiency (see "The Blinking Island" in chapter 3).

**Allies from Madame Isabeau's.** A number of allies (and a traitor in disguise) could be found at Madame Isabeau's at Port Kaylo in chapter 3.

**Maps and Star Charts.** Maps and star charts guiding the way to the Nth Degree's Island can be obtained from Sailor Fortune in chapter 3, or from Beliene's cabin on the *Fanged Stallion* in chapter 1.

**Intel from Beliene.** If the characters captured and interrogated Beliene, she may have given them information about the island's layout and security measures.

## FOLLOWING THE STARS

With a full crew of sailors, associates, and the like, the characters and any additional ships begin to sail to where they believe the zealots are hiding out.

To find the Nth Degree's island, the navigator must make **three** successful DC 18 Intelligence (Navigation) checks. Access to Sailor Fortune's maps or the presence of Mr. Wheel may modify these checks (see "Sailor Fortune" and "Mr. Wheel," below).

If the navigator rolls three failures before finding the island, a random ally (and their resources) becomes lost or discouraged and detaches from the fleet.

## UTILIZING GATHERED RESOURCES

Each set of NPCs and the ships they brought with them affect the operation in different ways. There are two ways to handle this:

**Play It Out.** Pirate battle, round by round. The easiest way to handle this approach is to give players control over the available ships and allow them to dictate their actions, with the exception of Sailor Fortune's. Once on land, any combat or infiltration help is controlled by the GM.

**Just the Highlights.** If your players aren't interested in a potentially drawn-out ship battle before they even get ashore, you can use their allies to eliminate one threat from the battlefield, as listed in the respective sections below. Some NPCs may have several options for which threat they can eliminate on their own.

### Dr. Nani Driftright

Doctor Driftright has no ship to lend, but if she travels with the characters, she can use subterfuge to get herself and the party past any zealots by demanding to be taken to Doctor Parnetty. When Dr. Driftright is with them, the characters have advantage on Charisma checks made to interact with the zealots.





## Mr. Wheel

If Mr. Wheel is on the characters' ship, or on his own ship, he can grant advantage to Intelligence (Navigation) checks to find the island. If the characters have Mr. Wheel's aid and Sailor Fortune's maps, no check is needed to find the island.

Once at the island, if Mr. Wheel is with his old crew on the *Skull Tithe*, they can handle one Nth Degree ship or two towers.

## Ridley Ono

Ridley Ono brings one ship to bear. The ship isn't robust on firepower, it can't take out any Nth Degree ships or tower turrets, but it can hold its own through the scrum so Ridley and her crewmates can get ashore.

Once on land, Ridley's scouts can move ahead of the party and eliminate any ground threats between them and the compound, or they can head to the towers and take out the zealots working the turrets.

## Sailor Fortune

If Sailor Fortune gave the map and star charts to the characters, they have advantage on Intelligence (Navigation) checks to find the island. If the characters have these maps and Mr. Wheel's assistance, no check is needed.

If Sailor Fortune and the *Ebon Wake* are with the party, the island is on high alert when the characters arrive. The tower turrets are manned and Nth Degree ships patrol the waters around the island. Sailor Fortune promised to bring firepower to the efforts against the Nth Degree, but a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that his ship is being suspiciously unhelpful during any naval combat.

## Skitter LaMarc

Skitter's ships of artillery specialists can cause a lot of distractions and commotion. He can handle one Nth Degree ship or one tower. If the characters talked him into obtaining extra artillery, he can handle all three Nth Degree ships on his own, or take out the four tower turrets. He can also upgrade the character's ship with three coilguns and a wrath cannon (complete with appropriate ammunition).

## NTH DEGREE ISLAND

The Nth Degree's island headquarters sits earth by flame of Windcrown and the Constellation Isles and almost directly earthward of the Blinking Island. It's a tiny tropical island covered in palm trees, with rocky outcroppings and a sharp rise from the beach to the center of the island.

The Nth Degree compound sits atop the rise, facing waterward. It's a stark, Brutalist-style building, all sharp edges and gray concrete. Karelagne banners hang from the walls, leaving no question as to the loyalty of those within.

## NTH DEGREE PORT

The Nth Degree anchors its ships on the island's V-shaped airward harbor. The slope there is softer and easier to ascend, and has numerous paths the zealots often climb to the compound.

When the characters arrive, three ships are in the harbor: two brigantines, the *Mermaid's Folly* and the *Tide's Call*, and a frigate, the *Last Bastion*. If the characters didn't ally with Sailor Fortune in chapter 3, the *Ebon Wake*, Rider Uton's galleon, is also in port. When it's clear the island is under attack, the ships maneuver out into the water but won't pass the ward line unless necessary, attempting to goad the characters' ships into triggering the ward.

On the opposite side on the island, the *Minnow*, a sloop, is tucked safely away behind some rocky outcroppings. This is an emergency getaway ship, and its location is only known to Rider Uton, Doctor Parnetty, and Doctor Ugkin. It's impossible to see the sloop from the sea, but it can be spotted from the land above or adjacent with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check.

## ACCESSING THE ISLAND

The Nth Degree has several defenses in place to stop unwelcome guests from making landfall. These include a ward, aetherwolf-infested islands, and manned turret towers for driving off ships.

## Island Ward

The island is protected by a ward set in place by the Nth Degree. The ward rings the island close enough to the shore to discourage large ships from sailing through it, and is shaped like an uneven dome, encapsulating the entire island from the sea floor to the sky.

The ward is triggered by anything made of wood or metal that's as large or larger than a standard rowboat. Living creatures can pass harmlessly through the ward, but it devastates sailing vessels.

When a vessel passes through the ward, its hull takes 14 (4d6) force damage as the magical ward rends its timbers. The ward visibly shimmers and sparks with magical energy when this occurs, and a creature who makes a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check can discern the dome-like shape of the ward surrounding the entire island. The ward is then disabled for 2 rounds. If more than one vessel hits the ward at the same moment, divide the damage evenly between vessels.

**Passage Medallion.** The wards around the island deactivate if approached by a ship with a passage medallion (see appendix C). When disabled in this way, the ward remains inactive for 3 rounds.

## Aetherwolf-Infested Waters

The Nth Degree chose their home base well, and the waters around the island are filled with **aetherwolves** (see appendix A). The characters may attempt to outswim the aetherwolves or turn and fight, but they quickly find there's an endless number of the Aetherbeasts.

When a character lands in the water, 1d4 aetherwolves (or one **giant aetherwolf** on a result of 4) attack them after 1d4 rounds.

The more people in the water, the more the commotion draws the aetherwolves; every round someone new enters the water, roll for a new set of aetherwolves. There can never be more than six aetherwolves in combat with the characters at once.

If the characters defeat all the aetherwolves, they have 1 minute before another 1d4 aetherwolves reach them.



Tower Turrets

## Tower Turrets

The Nth Degree's island has four towers armed with long-range weapons for deterring ships from approaching. The stone turrets are open on top, with a conical roof for shelter. Each tower has four floors and the open roof level where the weapons are kept.

For the purposes of naval warfare, the turrets are Tiny structures with 8 hit points. Each turret is equipped with two coilguns and a wrath cannon.

There are enough zealots to man all four towers at the same time without removing any from the compound—the zealots work shifts at the towers, like a lighthouse keeper, and sleep and eat there until their shift is done.

## ACCESSING THE COMPOUND

Once on land, the characters must reach the compound. The Nth Degree compound sits atop a steep incline on the island's waterward side, facing the shore. There are multiple ways to get there, but each brings its own challenges.

## Crossing the Island

Climbing any side but the island's airward side requires a successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check for every 30 feet of movement. On a failure, the character slides back down 30 feet and takes 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

Approaching the compound from the airward side doesn't require a skill check.

The island's upper side is heavily forested, thick with palm trees and jungle vines. The jungle is difficult terrain, and travel through it is slow and arduous unless the characters locate the pathway cut by the zealots with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check.

## Lift

In the compound clearing, on the island's upper air-by-waterward side, is a lift. The zealots use the lift to get the heavier supplies to and from the compound above, eliminating the need to carry large shipments up a steep incline. The lift is composed of a 15-foot-square metal platform, raised and lowered along metal supporting rails by a chain and winch.

When the characters arrive, the platform is at the top of the lift. It's easy to activate with a pull of a lever, but it's slow; moving down the 80-foot sheer face with a movement speed of 10 feet, and it's loud and easily heard by anyone near the compound. If the characters activate the lift, two zealots (**sailors** with light crossbows; see appendix A) arrive at the top when the lift reaches the ground. If Ridley Ono's scouts are with the group, remove these zealots.

The zealots attack the characters with their light crossbows from their vantage point above, and take potshots at them if they attempt to ride the lift up.





## Secret Tunnel

Halfway up the steep incline on the island's earth-by-flame side, is a well-hidden secret tunnel. The tunnel is rough-hewn and is 10 feet wide. After the first 30 feet, bioluminescent moss covers much of the tunnel's walls, floor, and ceiling, giving off a faint blue glow that provides dim light. The tunnel travels up and under the compound, and connects to a hidden door in the lab (see area L14).

Traveling through the tunnel is tricky, though not as difficult as climbing the slopes outside. A successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check is needed to make reach the lab without incident; on a failure, a character slips on the moss and takes 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

Locating the moss-overgrown mechanism to open the secret door from this side requires a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Using the mechanism doesn't require a check.

## NTH DEGREE COMPOUND

The compound is a three-story building made of drab gray concrete. From a bird's-eye view, the building is shaped like two intersecting squares. The waterward square holds the kitchen, the mess hall, and the living quarters for the Nth Degree zealots and their leaders. The middle of the flameward square holds an open-air courtyard with a multifloor column running down the center. The column can only be entered from the top floor, and the elevator descends to the lab underground.



## COMPOUND FEATURES

The compound has the following general features:

**Ceilings and Walls.** Unless otherwise stated, ceilings are 10 feet tall. Walls are 2 feet thick and made of concrete supported by metal rods.

**Windows.** The second and third floors have windows approximately every 25 feet. These windows are short, wide, and set high up. Only Small or smaller creatures can squeeze through them. The windows are latched shut from the inside, and open outward and up.

**Doors.** Doors are made of heavy-duty metal and have AC 19, 27 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Locked doors require a key to open or can be unlocked with a successful DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, or forced open with a successful DC 18 Strength check.

**Lighting.** Rooms in the compound are brightly lit by magical lights that fit snug against the ceilings. A creature can turn a room's lights off or on by speaking the command phrases "lights on" or "lights off."

**Suspicious Zealots.** The DC of Charisma checks made to interact with Nth Degree zealots is DC 17. The zealots are a close-knit bunch, but it isn't unusual for Beliene or others to bring in new recruits. If, however, any character is an astral emergent, increase the DC of the Charisma check to 22. Characters defeated by the zealots are rendered unconscious and put in cell in area L12 to await interrogation.

## COMPOUND LOCATIONS

The following areas are keyed to the Nth Degree Compound maps.

### L1: Atrium

Entering through the front doors brings the characters into the atrium. A surprisingly airy and wide-open space, the atrium's ceiling is two stories above. A fountain stands in the center, with liquid aether flowing in a steady, sparkling curtain down three tiers. The room is filled with the echo of rushing aether: Intelligence (Investigation) and Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing are made with disadvantage.

A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals runes carved into the stone fountain; a subsequent successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that they're meant to trap aether in a non-gas form and prevent it returning to the sea.

The airward door leads to the mess hall (area L2), and the flameward door leads to the kitchen (area L3). The building continues earthward, where a pair of doors and expansive windows lead to a courtyard (area L4).

A ramp on the earthward side of the atrium leads up to the next floor.

### L2: Mess Hall

A long table with sixteen chairs fills the center of this room, where the zealots take their meals.

The waterward door leads out into the atrium (area S1), the swinging door flameward leads to the kitchen (area S3).







### L3: Kitchen

The kitchen sports two large stoves on the flameward wall. Through the flameward door, a basin filled with water waits for dishes or laundry; the earthward door leads to a pantry filled with sacks of grain, barrels of grog, and other foodstuffs.

**Chef.** When the characters enter this room, Dameria Jules (NE, female dwarf **gladiator**) the cook is chopping vegetables. Sneaking past Dameria requires a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) group check. She rounds on the characters as soon as she spots them and demands to know why they're in her kitchen. If the characters came in through the flameward door, she's immediately suspicious of them, and the DC of Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) checks to convince her not to raise the alarm increases by 2.

**Combat.** If Dameria is not convinced that the characters are on the level, she runs to the earth-by-waterward door and yells "We've got guests! Oi, get your asses down here!" Then she stands in front of the door, blocking the characters' exit. If the characters flee, she follows them long enough to see which way they go. After 2 rounds, three **sailors** (see appendix A) from the barracks (area L5) arrive and join the fight.

### L4: Courtyard and Hallways

The back of the compound is dominated by a large courtyard, visible through the floor-to-ceiling windows in the back hallways. A set of double doors lead into the courtyard, where scrubby island grasses grow around three round tables. Three **sailors** (see appendix A) are playing liar's dice at the table in the earth-by-flameward corner. If the characters enter through the double doors,

they remain unnoticed unless they come around the central column and into view. Once the sailors see the characters, however, they attack.

In the center of the courtyard is a stone-and-metal column that houses the elevator to the lab (area L12). The elevator is inaccessible from this floor.

In the earth-by-flameward corner of the hallway, double doors lead out to the island. These doors are locked at all times, and only opened when a new prisoner or a delivery is being taken to the lab below.

### L5: Barracks

This L-shaped room has ten bunk beds (twenty bunks total). Between each bunk bed is a chest of drawers.

If Dameria Jules (area L3) hasn't called out for help, three **sailors** (see appendix A) are resting here. When the characters enter, they attack.

**Treasure.** The chests of drawers mostly hold the clothes and the zealots' sundry possessions. If a character makes a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check while searching a chest, they find one of the following items in addition to ten sets of common clothes.

### ZEALOT TRINKET AND TREASURES

D10	FOUND ITEM
1	A red-and-orange rag doll with "CM" embroidered over its heart.
2	A burlap pouch containing four sapphires worth 25 gp each.
3	Three gold coins with a skull on one side and a feather on the other.
4	A half-carved pirate ship made of balsa wood.
5	Three handmade friendship bracelets, one pink, one purple, and one blue, with tiny shimmering shells woven into them.
6	A palm-size disk of thin beaten copper, carved with sigils worth 15 gp. A successful DC 5 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals the sigils are nonsense.
7	A blue velvet pouch containing five seashells and three pretty, but ultimately worthless rocks.
8	A heavy gold hoop earring worth 10 gp.
9	A pocket-size journal filled with florid love poetry dedicated to its subject, Orreni. Some poems are incomplete, and others are scribbled out. Most of them rhyme.
10	A sea star carved from motherpearl worth 40 gp.



### L6: Private Chambers

These chambers, kept for high-ranking members of the Nth Degree, each hold a bed and a chest of drawers. The waterward room belongs to Beliene when she's on land.

If Beliene escaped in chapter 3, she can be found here, lounging on her bed and reading. She attacks the characters on sight, and yells, raising the alarm. Any sailors still in the barracks or in the halls (areas L5 and L7) arrive 2 rounds later and join the fight.

### L7: Hallways

These wide hallways have floor-to-ceiling windows that overlook the courtyard below. Two **sailors** (see appendix A) lazily patrol these hallways. When they spot the characters, they attack.

### L8: Third-Floor Loft

This upper loft overlooks the ramp from the floor below. It holds several cushioned chairs, and a long dining table made of dark, polished wood with ten chairs. It's set with decorative candelabras and a thick brocade runner in the Karelagne colors. This is where Rider Uton, the Nth Degree's leader, takes his meals, along with Doctor Parnetty and Ugkin, whenever they aren't in the lab.

### L9: Officers' Quarters

These four chambers are the largest sleeping quarters in the compound. Each room holds a large bed, a chest of drawers, and a desk. The air-by-waterward room belongs to Rider Uton (the Nth Degree's leader), the air-by-flameward room to Doctor Ugkin, and the earth-by-flameward room to Doctor Parnetty. The final room stands unclaimed, though Rider Uton is considering promoting Beliene and granting her quarters.

The desk in Rider Uton's quarters hides a secret compartment similar to the one on the *Fanged Stallion*. It can be discovered and opened with a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check.





**Fortune's Favor.** If the characters didn't ally with Sailor Fortune (Rider Uton) in chapter 3, he's in this room at his desk. When the characters enter, it requires a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check to pierce his calm facade and recognize his surprise. He converses with the characters cordially, probing for their intentions and any information about who else is with them. He attacks only if attacked first, or if the characters attempt to head deeper into the compound (especially to the lab). If Rider Uton is reduced to 19 hit points or less, he uses his *ring of dimension door* (functions as a *cape of the mountebank*) to teleport to the lab (area L12) and warn the doctors. Two rounds later, an alarm sounds throughout the compound (see area L13).

**Treasure.** Inside the secret compartment in Uton's desk is a sizable piece of artificial crystal aetherium, the first one ever produced in the lab. The crystal weighs 1 lb.

### L10: Storage

This room was, until recently, filled with crates of artificial aetherium crystal. Just two days ago, the crates were taken to Port Majeure and given to the Karelagne Empire—all in all, over 100 lb. of aetherium crystal was shipped out on the last run. A few barrels and crates remain, and this room is obviously used for storage.

**Treasure.** Two crates part-filled with aetherium crystals grown in the lab below have been left open. Three pounds of aetherium crystal can be recovered from the crates. A character who makes a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check can tell the crystals are artificial; they're too perfectly formed to be natural.



## L11: Elevator

A narrow enclosed walkway leads from the third-floor hallways to a set of double doors. When someone approaches the doors, the elevator is automatically summoned, and the doors slide open with the faintest hiss of hydraulics oiled with magic.

The 20-foot-diameter elevator can carry eight Medium creatures (about 1,000 lb.) without issue. If the load ever exceeds 1,500 lb., roll a d4; on a result of 1, the elevator slips its moorings and drops 30 feet to the lab below, dealing 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage to anyone within, and is unusable until it's repaired.

The elevator can be activated by button within.

## L12: Laboratory

The elevator opens into a subterranean lab, where the Nth Degree scientists work their gruesome experiments.

When the characters enter this room, read the following.

*The first thing you notice is the smell. The room smells of chemicals and sweat, a strange, pungent mix of sour and stringent. The hum of machinery fills the air, layered with the sound of boiling liquid.*

*A narrow, barred cell sits against the waterward wall, and earthward, several doors stand shut. A long workbench covered in flasks and vials stands against the airward wall. Two large metal vats and strange cylindrical glass tanks fill the center of the room, connected to the ceiling by twisting tubes and pipes. The bright sparkle of aether inside the tanks is unmistakable, casting its shimmering light across the gurneys lining two of the walls, where shapes lie motionless beneath thin blankets.*

The two larger vats are filled with aether kept under constant agitation by a large rotating paddle. The airward workbench holds the tools of the process, most notably a large metal crucible inscribed with sigils. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals the runes are transmutation and abjuration runes. If the check succeeds by 4 or more, the character realizes the vats are for combining two components that would normally resist one another.

**Second Time's the Charm.** If the characters faced off with Rider Uton in his chambers (area L9) and he escaped, he's waiting here with Ugkin and Parnetty at the ready, and whatever zealots remain in the compound arrive via the elevator in 1d4 rounds.





**Blood Money.** Doctors Parnetty and Ugkin have been working in this lab for months now, experimenting and perfecting their process for using astral emergents as crucibles for creating artificial aetherium. The process is long and painful, and involves harvesting the astral emergent's blood, then mixing it with pure aether in a crucible inscribed with transmutation runes. The resulting mixture is then transfused back into the astral emergent's bloodstream, where it erupts through their capillaries and boils to the surface of their skin in large blisters. After three days, the blisters burst, revealing chunks of aetherium embedded in the emergent's arms, legs, and torso. The aetherium can then be harvested, and the process repeated. The process takes fifteen days from start to finish, and each astral emergent produces between 1 and 2 lb. of aetherium crystal per infusion cycle.

Astral emergents who undergo this process will bear heavy scars, both physical and mental, for the rest of their lives.

**Astral Emergents.** Eight astral emergents are strapped to the gurneys and sedated. They all have bandages covering ninety percent of their body, where the aetherium crystals have erupted.

Within six of the tanks, the characters can see a Humanoid shape floating in the aether, seemingly unconscious, with a breathing apparatus over their mouth and nose. The subjects are in various stages of the process, some with clear skin that has yet to blister, some covered in inflamed boils and blisters, and others with near-complete aetherium crystals encrusting their arms, legs, torso, and face. The other six tanks are empty and waiting.

Speaking to the astral emergents is difficult, as they're heavily sedated and most are in great pain. Applying the lesser restoration spell or a similar tactic removes the sedative's effects, but only the unblemished emergents can communicate anything past gasps and cries.

The astral emergents can tell the character the following:

- They were kidnapped and brought to this lab by Karelagne sailors, and thrown in the waterward cells to wait their turn.
- Doctors Parnetty and Ugkin are the scientists in charge. Parnetty isn't shy about talking with his subjects, and Ugkin has a strangely calming bedside manner—one that would serve her well if she wasn't torturing her patients.
- The scientists are creating artificial aetherium to fund the Karelagne Navy and the ever-expanding Karelagne Empire.
- The process is excruciatingly painful, and the astral emergents are awake and aware the whole time. They can describe the gruesome process in detail.

**Kita.** If the characters take the time to look in the tanks, they find a tiefling astral emergent, with tightly curled pink hair and a right horn missing its tip. This is Kita, Cora Styx's friend (the server at Madame Isabeau's). She's alive, but is in her second cycle of the process, with boils and blisters on her skin.

**Ugkin and Parnetty.** Doctor Ugkin (LE, female half-orc **mage**) and Doctor Parnetty (NE, male gnome **mage**) are in their respective offices (area L13). They don't immediately respond to the sound of the elevator, as it isn't unusual for other zealots to come and go with supplies or new astral emergents for experimentation. After a few minutes, Doctor Ugkin emerges from her office. If the characters are unusually loud or cause any commotion in the lab prior to this, both Ugkin and Parnetty emerge to see what the ruckus is about.

Ugkin and Parnetty are reluctant to fight in the lab, for fear of damaging the equipment or their subjects. They both attempt to talk the characters back onto the elevator and out the lab via suggestion, so they can engage them without fear of collateral damage, or they escape to the elevator themselves (using *greater invisibility* if necessary) in the hopes of drawing the characters out. Once out the lab, Ugkin and Parnetty have no qualms about unleashing everything in their arsenal to take down the characters.

**Sailor Fortune (Rider Uton).** If the characters allied with Sailor Fortune in chapter 2, he arrives in the lab via the secret door in area L14. If the characters end up in combat with Ugkin and Parnetty, roll initiative for Rider Uton. If Ugkin or Parnetty is reduced to 20 hit points or less, Uton launches an ambush at the start of the next round.

When Uton arrives, a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals both doctors are relieved to see him. Uton upholds his friendly ruse long enough to close in on one of the characters, then launches a surprise attack. Ugkin and Parnetty refer to Sailor Fortune by his real name, Rider Uton.

## L13: Ugkin and Parnetty's Offices

These two offices belong to Ugkin and Parnetty. They're functionally the same, each holding a desk and a bookshelf filled with Karelagne literature and treatises on the untapped potential of the Aetherial Expanse, the necessity for the Karelagne Empire to bring its glory to the peoples of the expanse, and aetherium and its worth in various states and research into its uses.

When the characters enter the lab, Ugkin and Parnetty are both working in their offices. If the characters enter one of these offices, the doctor attempts to stealthily press the alarm button on the underside of their desk—which a characters notices with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check—before addressing the characters. If they press the button, they engage the characters in polite conversation and remain compliant until reinforcements arrive.



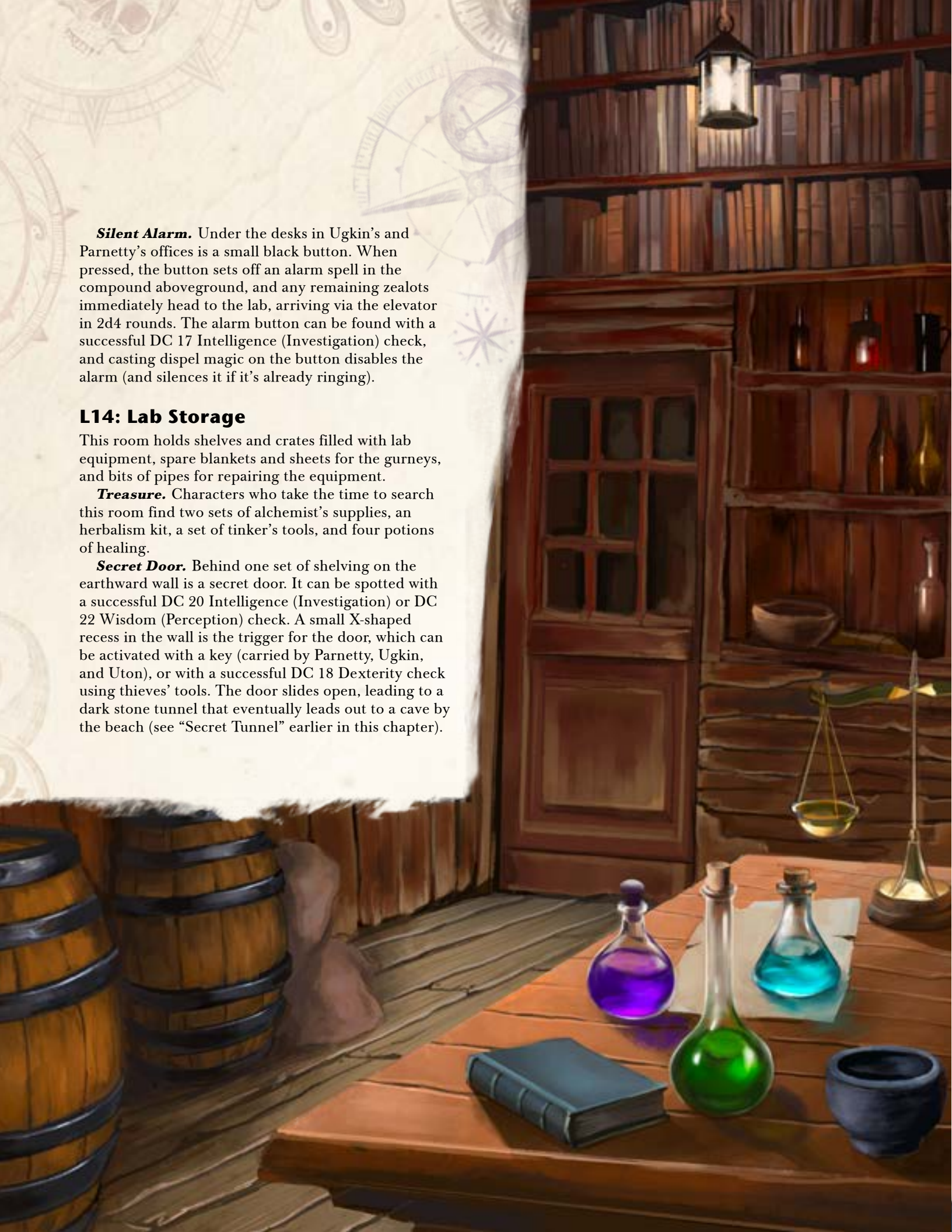
**Silent Alarm.** Under the desks in Ugkin's and Parnetty's offices is a small black button. When pressed, the button sets off an alarm spell in the compound aboveground, and any remaining zealots immediately head to the lab, arriving via the elevator in 2d4 rounds. The alarm button can be found with a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check, and casting dispel magic on the button disables the alarm (and silences it if it's already ringing).

## L14: Lab Storage

This room holds shelves and crates filled with lab equipment, spare blankets and sheets for the gurneys, and bits of pipes for repairing the equipment.

**Treasure.** Characters who take the time to search this room find two sets of alchemist's supplies, an herbalism kit, a set of tinker's tools, and four potions of healing.

**Secret Door.** Behind one set of shelving on the earthward wall is a secret door. It can be spotted with a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) or DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check. A small X-shaped recess in the wall is the trigger for the door, which can be activated with a key (carried by Parnetty, Ugkin, and Uton), or with a successful DC 18 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. The door slides open, leading to a dark stone tunnel that eventually leads out to a cave by the beach (see "Secret Tunnel" earlier in this chapter).





## AFTER THE BATTLE

Once the battle for the Nth Degree's base is complete, and its forces eliminated, the characters face some choices.

### THE FATE OF THE ASTRAL EMERGENTS

The character must decide what to do with the astral emergents in the lab. Acorn, Terrol, and Nadia all want to rescue them, and Nadia even suggests taking them to the Sistren of the Isles for shelter and potentially to testify against Beliene and the Nth Degree.

### THE FATE OF THE ARTIFICIAL AETHERIUM

The amount of artificial aetherium at the headquarters is staggering. Any pirate or Karelagne ships want to claim it and use it to fund their own purchases. Ayrissian ships want nothing to do with it. Acorn wants to destroy it, as it was made from the blood of his siblings and will forever be tainted.

### THE FATE OF THE RESEARCH

The characters must decide if they keep the research notes from Ugkin and Parnetty, or if they destroy them to make sure nothing like this ever happens again.

### THE FATE OF THE COMPOUND

The characters can destroy the compound with explosives (especially if Skitter LaMarc is present) or they can keep it for themselves.

### REPUTATION ADVANCEMENT

This section explains the impacts on the characters' reputation following their actions during this chapter.

#### Frontal Assault on the Nth Degree's Island

If the characters opted for a frontal assault on the Nth Degree's island compound, they gain 3 chaotic reputation. Unless Skitter LaMarc was recruited, not everyone survives the attempt, and although everyone knew what they had signed up for, resentment lingers, especially if the mission wasn't a complete success.

#### Minimize Deaths When Assaulting the Nth Degree's Island

If the characters opted for a tactical or stealthy approach to besieging the island, they gain 3 good reputation.

#### Abandoning or Killing the Astral Emergents

If the characters kill or leave behind the astral emergents within the Nth Degree's lab, they gain 3 evil reputation. The fate of the abandoned astral emergents is up to the GM.

#### Rescuing the Astral Emergents

If the characters rescue the astral emergents, they gain 3 good reputation. The astral emergents may be convinced to join the ship's crew, once they've recovered.

#### Failing or Fleeing the Nth Degree's Island

If the characters fail to take down the Nth Degree's operations, they lose 5 reputation. The Nth Degree continues to flourish, more astral emergents fall prey to their twisted schemes, and the Karelagne Empire quietly reaps the benefits.

#### Claiming the Nth Degree's Compound

If the characters claim the Nth Degree's island and compound for themselves, they gain 5 reputation. Pirate captains petition for the privilege of anchoring in their harbors.

#### Continuing the Nth Degree's Enterprise

If the characters continue creating artificial aetherium, or allow another group to, they gain 10 evil reputation. No astral emergent within the Aetherial Expanse will trust them or serve on their crew, and many organizations treat the characters with disdain, if not outright hostility.

#### Destroying the Nth Degree's Enterprise

If the characters destroy or otherwise permanently dismantle the Nth Degree's enterprise, they gain 10 reputation. They gain the respect of many pirate and privateer captains, and the Karelagne Empire quietly thanks them for eliminating the zealots.

# APPENDIX A: NEW MONSTERS

This appendix details the new creatures that appear in this episode of *Pirates of the Aetherial Expanse*.



## AETHERDACTYL

The aetherdactyl possesses an uncommon ability among Aetherbeasts—the ability to fly. Ships that trawl the Aetherial Expanse keep a careful eye out for aetherdactyls when sailing outside the typical trade lanes, for these soaring predators tend to roost atop rock spires far from inhabited islands.

**Pack Hunters.** Aetherdactyls are cunning hunters that often seek prey in packs of three. One of the creatures harries its prey, intimidating it with its massive 25-foot wingspan while its wingmates swoop down and maul the distracted prey.

**Aether-Infused.** All Aetherbeasts are magical, and many of their magical abilities are similar to spells. The aetherdactyl, however, possesses the unusual ability to transform its body into aether vapor and tear like a knife-sharp psychic wind through its prey. These creatures typically reserve this uncanny magic for hunting other Aetherbeasts.



## AETHERDACTYL

*Large Beast (Aetherbeast), Unaligned*

**Armor Class** 16 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 90 (12d10 + 24)

**Speed** 5 ft., fly 90 ft., swim 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	4 (–3)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

**Saving Throws** Str +7, Wis +5

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages** understands Aetherian but can't speak

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus** +3

**Flyby.** The aetherdactyl doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

**Magic Weapons.** The aetherdactyl's weapon attacks are magical.

**Pack Tactics.** The aetherdactyl has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the aetherdactyl's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The aetherdactyl makes two Bite attacks.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

*Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 19 (3d12) poison damage.

**Aether Rush (Recharge 4–6).** The aetherdactyl becomes incorporeal aether vapor until the end of its turn and flies up to its flying speed. While incorporeal, the aetherdactyl can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. Each creature it moves through must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take 26 (4d12) psychic damage and be poisoned until the end of its next turn; no creature can take this damage more than once per turn. The aetherdactyl takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object and is shunted into the nearest unoccupied space.



# AETHERWOLVES

Due to the adaptations their bodies have undergone to survive near the surface of the aether, aetherwolves bear little resemblance to terrestrial wolves. They swim in deadly packs through shallow aether, preying upon small ships and other Aetherbeasts.

**Giant Aetherwolves.** Aetherwolves which consume sapient creatures touched by the aether, such as astral merfolk, astral merrow, or astral emergents, undergo a transformation. They gain increased intelligence and cunning, and double in size, making them ferocious and bloodthirsty predators, and feared leaders of aetherwolf packs.

## VARIANT: AETHERCASTING

As Aetherbeasts draw their power directly from the aether, they have the ability to cast unexpected spells. You can replace the spell listed in this creature's stat block with another spell that would be suitable for its challenge rating. (See the "Aetherbeasts" section of the *Aetherial Expanse Setting Guide*.)

## AETHERWOLF

*Medium Beast (Aetherbeast), Unaligned*

**Armor Class** 13 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 11 (2d8 + 2)

**Speed** 10 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

**Skills** Perception +3, Stealth +4

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** understands Aetherian but can't speak

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus** +2

**Aetheric Adaptation.** The aetherwolf can breathe aether, and is immune to the effects of aether poisoning.

**Keen Hearing and Smell.** The aetherwolf has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

**Pack Tactics.** The aetherwolf has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the aetherwolf's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

## ACTIONS

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.  
*Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage.

**Aethercasting (1/Day).** The aetherwolf casts *magic missile*.







## GIANT AETHERWOLF

*Large Beast (Aetherbeast), Unaligned*

**Armor Class** 12

**Hit Points** 32 (5d10 + 5)

**Speed** 10 ft., swim 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	6 (–2)	10 (+0)	3 (–4)

**Skills** Perception +2, Stealth +4

**Damage Immunities** cold

**Senses** blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages** Aetherian

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus** +2

**Aetheric Adaptation.** The aetherwolf can breathe aether, and is immune to the effects of aether poisoning.

**Keen Hearing and Smell.** The aetherwolf has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

**Pack Tactics.** The aetherwolf has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the aetherwolf's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

### ACTIONS

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target.

*Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be grappled (escape DC 14).

**Aethercasting (1/Day).** The aetherwolf casts *magic missile* (at 3rd level).

**Prismatic Breath (Recharge 5–6).** The aetherwolf exhales a blast of dazzling radiation in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) radiant damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

## ASTRAL MERROW

Leadership among the merrow of the Aetherial Expanse is hard-won through animalistic dominance and is shared between mates in a monogamous or polygamous relationship.

A shiver is a group of merrow, and a shiver's social structure changes year to year as individuals move up and down in the hierarchy. A merrow lower down in the ladder may challenge an alpha merrow for leadership. If the alpha merrow loses, they leave the shiver to find another mate and start a new shiver. Merrow very low in the pecking order (that are constantly harassed by the other members) may also leave the shiver. These merrow become forsaken until they either form their own shiver or, on rare occasions, join an existing shiver.



### ASTRAL MERROW

*Medium Monstrosity, Typically Chaotic Evil*

**Armor Class** 15 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 26 (4d8 + 8)

**Speed** 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

**Saving Throws** Str +5, Con +4

**Skills** Intimidation +3, Perception +2, Stealth +3

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

**Languages** Aetherian, Common

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus** +2

**Blood Frenzy.** The merrow has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all its hit points.

**Limited Amphibiousness.** The merrow can breathe aether and water, but it needs to be submerged at least once every 4 hours to avoid suffocating.

**Pack Tactics.** The merrow has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the merrow's allies is within 5 ft. of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The merrow makes one Bite attack and one Bone Mace attack.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.  
*Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

**Bone Mace.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

**Venomous Spines.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned. While poisoned in this way, the target is also paralyzed. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.



## FEATHER STARS

Once powerful guardians and servants of a sea god, feather stars are Celestials that are as powerful as they are rare. The few that have been encountered are either young or dormant, unable to summon the power they once possessed without the aid of magic.

### YOUNG FEATHER STAR

*Gargantuan Celestial, Typically Neutral*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 108 (7d20 + 35)

**Speed** 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)

**Saving Throws** Str +9, Con +9, Wis +7

**Skills** Athletics +9, Insight +7, Perception +7

**Damage Immunities** poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

**Condition Immunities** exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, prone

**Senses** blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

**Languages** all, telepathy 120 ft.

**Challenge** 10 (5,900 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus** +4

**Aetheric Adaptation.** The star can breathe aether, and is immune to the effects of aether poisoning.

**Magic Resistance.** The star has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

**Magic Weapons.** The star's weapon attacks are magical.

**Siege Monster.** The star deals double damage to objects and structures.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The star makes three Radiant Feather attacks.

**Radiant Feather.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) radiant damage.

**Spellcasting.** The star casts one of the following spells, using Wisdom as the spellcasting ability and requiring no material components:

At will: *dancing lights*, *darkness*, *greater restoration*  
3/day: *freedom of movement*

## NADIA FEEM

Nadia is a wayfinder for the Sistren of the Isles. More than just a navigator, Nadia has a special ability that allows her to use someone's personal effects to track them with startling precision.

Nadia wears a star-shaped amulet made of motherpearl, the sign of her membership in the Sistren of the Isles.



### NADIA FEEM

*Medium Humanoid (Half-Astral Merfolk), Chaotic Good*

**Armor Class** 15 (leather armor)

**Hit Points** 75 (10d8 + 20)

**Speed** 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

**Saving Throws** Dex +6, Intelligence +5

**Skills** Athletics +2, Perception +3, Stealth +6

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common, Aetheric

**Challenge** 3 (700 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus** +2

**Aetheric Adaptation.** Nadia can breathe aether, and is immune to the effects of aether poisoning.

**Experienced Deckhand.** Nadia has advantage on Strength (Athletics) checks made to climb the rigging, and on Dexterity checks related to sails, ropes, and other rigging.

**Sea Legs.** Nadia has advantage on ability checks and saving throws to resist being knocked prone.

**Sistren Wayfinder.** Nadia has advantage on Intelligence (Navigation) checks made when she has a personal object of a creature at the destination.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Nadia makes two Rapier attacks.

**Rapier.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.  
*Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

### BONUS ACTIONS

**Cunning Action.** Nadia takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.



## SHIP CAT

Every Sistren ship (or ship a Sistren sails on) has at least one ship cat, used as an extra set of eyes for the crew. It can be sent, surreptitiously or otherwise, onto other ships to gather information. Ship cats can communicate what they see in a series of psychic images to whoever sent them on their mission.

Ship cats can't die or be seriously hurt, though they temporarily disincorporate if they sustain enough damage. No ship has more than five ship cats at a time: jaunty tales tell of ship cats overpowering the crew and taking the ship for themselves, but the limit may have more to do with the incessant yowling and territorial spitting that comes with too many ship cats in close quarters.

**Espionage.** The life of a feline spy is a tricky one. If a character sends out a ship cat to gather information, they must roll on the Ship Cat Complications table.

### SHIP CAT COMPLICATIONS

d12	COMPLICATION
1	Another ship cat convinced your cat to stay on its ship and it has left your service.
2	Your cat convinced another ship cat to move aboard your ship.
3	Your ship cat doesn't send images of what it saw or it sends useless images.
4	Your ship cat saw something distressing and refuses to go out again for 3 days.
5-12	No complication.



## SHIP CAT

*Tiny Monstrosity, Unaligned*

**Armor Class** 12

**Hit Points** 10 (4d4)

**Speed** 40 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	7 (-2)

**Saving Throws** Dex +4

**Skills** Perception +3, Stealth +4

**Damage Resistances** acid, fire, lightning

**Damage Immunities** cold, poison, radiant

**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

**Languages** understands Common but can't speak

**Challenge** 0 (10 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus** +2

**Disincorporate.** If the cat is reduced to 0 hit points, it remains conscious and becomes incorporeal until it finishes a long rest. While incorporeal, the cat can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain.

**Investigate.** When sent to investigate another vessel, the cat can transmit six images via limited telepathy to the creature that sent it on the mission.

**Keen Smell.** The cat has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

**Locate.** If asked to locate something aboard a ship, the cat will find it and either bring it back or sit next to it and meow incessantly.

### ACTIONS

**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +0 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

*Hit:* 1 slashing damage.



## SAILOR

An experienced sailor is familiar with all facets of working on a functioning ship, and has the knowledge and physical strength to competently work across the vessel from serving as lookout in the crow's nest to swabbing the poop deck to firing the artillery.

A ship can't run without sailors; they secure payloads, clean the ship, and follow the quartermaster's and the first mate's orders.

### SAILOR

*Medium or Small Humanoid, Any Alignment*

**Armor Class** 13 (heavy leather coat)

**Hit Points** 11 (2d8 + 2)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)

**Skills** Acrobatics +3, Athletics +3

**Senses** passive Perception 10

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 1/8 (25 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus** +2

**Sea Legs.** The sailor has advantage on ability checks and saving throws to resist being knocked prone.

### ACTIONS

**Belaying Pin.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage.



# APPENDIX B: NEW ITEMS

This appendix details the new items that appear in this episode of *Pirates of the Aetherial Expanse*.

## MAGIC ITEMS

### Blinking Wheel

*Wondrous Item, Legendary*

This ship's wheel is made of light, polished wood and is engraved with whorls that evoke clouds or fog. When affixed to a ship, the *Blinking Wheel* grants the ability to teleport the entire ship over short distances.

If you're touching the wheel, you may use an action to teleport the ship, including all items and creatures aboard, to an unoccupied space you can see within 3 squares (roughly 300 feet). If the space is occupied, or there isn't enough room for the ship, or the space isn't in contact with a body of aether or water, the teleportation fails. Once this property has been used, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

### Flask of Eternal Options

*Wondrous Item, Legendary*

This silver flask is shaped like a sea star. Each arm is a separate stoppered flask and holds a different liquid. Once a day, you may consume the liquid in one of the arms and gain the effects of one of the potions below. The consumed liquid replenishes itself at the next dawn.

- *Potion of diminution*
- *Potion of flying*
- *Potion of giant strength (storm)*
- *Potion of speed*
- *Potion of vitality*

### Passage Medallion

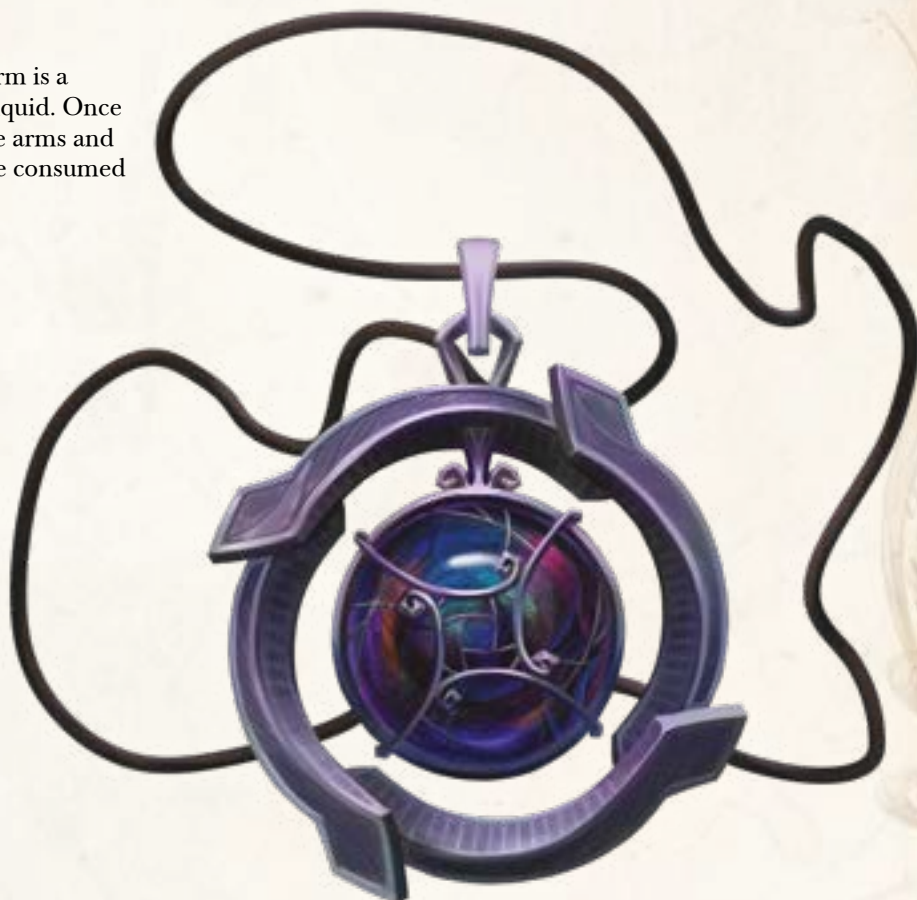
*Wondrous Item, Rare*

This heavy, wooden medallion is inlaid with whorls and sigils made of precious metals and it has a circumference as wide as an adult human skull. When the passage medallion passes through the ward around the Nth Degree's island, it harmlessly deactivates the ward for 3 rounds.

### Ring of Sending

*Ring, Rare*

This ring has 7 charges and regains expended charges daily at dawn. While wearing this ring, you can use an action to expend 1 of its charges to cast the sending spell.



## MINES

Mines are explosive munitions that can be placed beneath the aether's surface, and typically detonate on impact with a ship. Multiple types of mines exist, and are used for many different purposes.

### MINES

TYPE	DESCRIPTION
<b>Constellation</b>	A series of mines linked by a magical cord in different shape configurations. Triggering one mine triggers the rest in the series in a cascade. Each ship within a 60-foot radius of the mines takes 2d10 bludgeoning damage and is knocked off course. (A ship in the area of more than one explosion is affected only once.)
<b>Emotional</b>	The red pulse of this mine is like that of a dispersed ego rejoining the aether. Creatures within 60 feet of the blast must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute.
<b>Gazer</b>	This tiny mine resembles a rock with crystals radiating from it. When triggered, the crystals explode out and mark ship hulls, creatures' skin, and other items with a glowing mark perceptible only to wayfinders. Wayfinders have advantage on Intelligence (Navigation) checks made to find the marked ship. The effect remains until the mark is removed using an action to touch the affected area..
<b>Imposter</b>	A dummy mine with no explosive properties, these are interspersed with other mines along a perimeter of protection or used in training exercises.
<b>Lamplighter</b>	Hovering 10 feet above the aether, this mine resembles the light of a small dinghy. Any ship that gets within 75 feet triggers the mine and takes 3d8 bludgeoning damage, and any creatures on deck take 2d8 radiant damage.
<b>Standard</b>	A floating mine in the shape of an upside-down teardrop stamped with the mark of the Karelagne Empire. This mine detonates when a ship passes within 30 feet of it, dealing 2d6 bludgeoning damage to any ship in a 30-foot radius.
<b>Supernova</b>	This navy-blue mine bobs right at the surface of the aetherial sea. If a ship with a Stardrive moves within 30 feet of the mine, it explodes in a blast of aether fire, dealing 3d10 fire damage to each ship in a 60-foot radius
<b>Trebushatter</b>	This pair of mines is connected by a 60-foot-long weighted cord. When one mine detonates, the other whips from the aether in the direction of the ship. The ship takes 5d10 bludgeoning damage and the projectile creates a 5-foot-diameter hole in the hull.





# APPENDIX C: HANDOUTS

This appendix contains handouts that the GM can give the players at certain points in the adventure.

## Nadia's Letter (Chapter 1)

Sorry that this letter brings you sad news, I hope you have a cup of tea to help process this. Eventually, I'll tell you everything, but Beliene is dead, not by friend, of course, but by foe. While sailing the sea airward of Monstera we met some arrogant and unruly pirates. They surprised us by launching an attack despite their flying the whites. If you're able to come gather what remains, I venture we shall be here for a bit longer. But I encourage you to make haste, the winds are picking up.

Sincerely,  
A Friend

## Yo Ho Home (Chapter 1)

### YO HO HOME: A GUIDE TO MAKING YOUR BUNK MORE THAN A BED

BY DOMINIC DULAP,  
SPONSORED BY CRESTLINE

Warmer tones will light up the room as do optics. Wrap or paint the outside glass or partition of lanterns with warm colors like red, yellow, or especially orange. The extra bit of color can trick the brain into believing it's near a fire and heat up the body by several degrees.

~

Stick-on constellation stars aren't just popular for kids! With Crestline's Moving Stars, you can enjoy the serenity of the night sky from your bunk while also knowing exactly where you are. The stars move in time with the stars in the sky.

~

When a beloved shirt or set of breeches is beyond repair, even by the *mending* spell, don't throw them away! You can craft new items from it such as a pennant flag streamer, patches for other clothes, a book jacket, small carrying pouches, or a fabric birthday card for a crewmate. Imagine having a bit of your best friend's favorite shirt reminding you of all the good times you had together pillaging villages or dredging up a sunken ship.

~

Adding a sprig of honeysuckle above your bunk will stop phase spiders shifting into your stretch of the Aetherial Expanse. It has worked so far for this author. You can jam the sprig into a crack in the wood or use a bit of Crestline's Everstick—the strip of tape to hold up anything.

## Aloysius Dumas's Journal Pages (Chapter 2)

### Page 1

so close to the edge of the Aetherial Expanse. Some strange magics must be set over the entire island, to make it flicker and blink so. I asked Erinaronda about it once, and she simply shrugged, saying it had always been the way of things here. Nevertheless, I always make sure to be back on the water before fogfall, and I only sleep on the **Albatross** . . . While traveling back and forth from the village to the shore eats up a good portion of my time, I refuse to be caught up in that strange fog ever again. When it washed over me, and then away again, it felt as if I'd lost a part of myself. It was as if no time had passed, yet it also felt like an eternity floating in a lack of existence. I had no edges, and my mind was no longer my own. Needless to say, it was unpleasant.

In a pleasant development, however, it seems Erinaronda and a few of the other villagers have begun to remember me, and recall bits of our previous conversations. I don't understand why their memories of me are returning now, but I'll accept the blessing for what it is.

Once she recalled our first conversation, I asked Erinaronda if she'd like to leave the island with me the next time I went. She smiled, though it seemed a bit sad to my eyes, and simply said no. When pressed, she said her place, and her people's place, was on the island. As a community of astral emergents, I suppose they don't find the fogfall as distressing as I do, though I can't imagine they find it pleasant. I'll have to ask Erinaronda about it when I'm next ashore. We

### Page 2

debated with myself for some time, and have finally decided to leave the **Blinking Wheel** behind when I go. I do so with no great **zeal**, however. Though it has **unquestioningly been** quite a boon to me in my **travels**, if it were to fall in the wrong hands, it could empower a tyrant of the seas—and Unammon knows few pirates or **zealots** on these waters need the incentive.

I shall **travel** home **without** the use of the artifact. May the waters be calm, may Unammon **keep** me in **her** intentions, and may **Qoz** continue to slumber.

Erinaronda has **agreed** to protect it for me, and to only relinquish it to one who has the proper passphrase, contained herein, to the value of three. **Blessings** to her and all the astral emergents of the Blinking Island.



# APPENDIX D: NEW GAMES

This appendix details the new games that appear in this episode of *Pirates of the Aetherial Expanse*.

## DIRTNAAPS AND BONESACKS

*A card game for 2-5 players.*

Dirtnaps and Bonesacks is a card game about graverobbers competing to strike it rich.

**Pieces.** You will need a standard pack of playing cards.

**Setup.** Follow these steps to set up the game:

- Fill the Graves by dealing out six stacks of three cards face-down in the middle of the table.
- Put the remaining cards in a stack to draw from called the Dirt Pile.
- Leave a space to discard cards to: the Refuse Pile.

**Rules.** Use the following rules to guide play:

**Death Rattle.** On their turn, a player may discard two aces (the Death Rattle) to the Refuse Pile to take a random card from another player's hand. This doesn't take an action.

**Hand Size.** A player can have a maximum of five cards in hand at any time and can't take an action that would give them more than five cards in hand (e.g. a player with four cards in hand couldn't empty a Grave containing two cards).

**No Recycling.** Only the top card of the Refuse Pile should be visible.

**Turn Order.** Choose or randomly select the starting player. After they've finished their turn, the next player on the left takes their turn, and so on.

**Actions.** On their turn, a player may take one of the following actions:

- Look at the top card of a Grave.
- Move the top card of a Grave to another Grave.
- Empty a Grave (put all the cards from a Grave into their hand).
- Draw one card from the Dirt Pile.
- Discard one card from their hand to the Refuse Pile.

**Ending the Game.** The player who empties the last Grave triggers the end of the game. At the end of their turn, the game ends. A player successfully robbed a grave if they gather one of the following combinations (in descending order of richness):

- The Mother and the Father (A queen and a king of the same suit)
- The Lovers (Two queens of the same color)
- The Triplets (Three jacks)
- The Bluestocking (A queen and an 8 of the same suit)
- Death's Servant (A king, an ace, and a 7)

If more than one player successfully robbed a grave, the character with the richest grave wins.



# FLOTILLA

*A dice game for 2-10 players*

All players roll 4d6 and keep the results hidden like a hand of cards. These dice represent ships. The object of the game is to collect ships until you have a “flotilla,” a winning hand, much like a hand of poker cards.

## STARTING THE GAME

Players randomly select a person to start, referred to as the “bait.” Play passes to the left.

At the very start of the game, and at the start of each round when play returns to the bait, the bait rolls a d6 and adds it to a pot in the middle, called the coffer.

## ON YOUR TURN

On a player’s turn, they choose one:

- Reroll one hidden die
- Attack another player
- Attempt to take the coffer

## ATTACKING

When attacking, a player must send a ship to attack, and the defender chooses a ship to defend. Each reveals the number on their chosen dice, and the higher number wins. The winner captures the opponent’s ship and adds it to their hand.

If the players bid with a ship of the same value (two 5s, for example) both players must reroll the dice in the open and resolve the battle with the new values.

## TAKING THE COFFER

When a player attempts to take the coffer, any other players at the table can choose to challenge them for it. If there are no other challengers, the player attempting to take the coffer collects all the dice.

When a player challenges for the coffer, they send a ship into battle just like when a player attacks another player. The only difference is that battles for the coffer may include more than two combatants. Again, the highest bid wins, and the winner takes the pot and captures the ships of all other challengers. Ties are resolved in the same way.

## HAND SIZE

Whenever a player has more than six dice, they must choose a die from their hand to place into the coffer until they have six dice remaining.

If a player has no dice at the start of their turn, they can take up to four dice out of the coffer, re-rolling them and keeping the new values secret. If there are no dice in the coffer, they pass.

## CHEATING

Players may cheat by keeping a hand of more than six dice, but if a player suspects another of cheating, they can accuse them publicly. When an accusation is made, both players reveal their hands to the table.

If the accusation was correct, the accuser takes all of the cheater’s dice.

If the accusation was incorrect, the accused takes all of the accusers’ dice.

## WINNING THE GAME

When a player has gathered a flotilla and it is their turn, they may unveil their fleet. All players reveal their dice, and the winner is the player with the highest scoring flotilla. This means it is possible for a player to announce victory and unveil their fleet, but lose the game to another player who has secretly gathered a better flotilla.

If a player has more than six dice when all hands are revealed, they’re “caught red-handed.” All their dice go into the coffer.

## FLOTILLAS

The following is a list of winning hands in order of score—higher scores are farther down the list:

- Three pairs
- “Half ‘n half” (two three-of-a-kinds)
- Four of a kind
- “Sitting ducks” (a straight of four consecutive dice)
- “Shipshape” (a six-die straight of 1 through 6)
- “Fathoms” (six of a kind, all sixes)

You can break ties by adding the values of the dice. A higher total in flotilla wins. If this does not resolve the tie, players hide their dice again, and play continues.



# LIAR'S DICE

*A dice game for 2 or more players*

The rules below describe a version of Liar's Dice popular with pirates across the Aetherial Expanse. Each player has five six-sided dice, usually made of wood or aetherbeast bone. High rollers are known to use aetherium dice. Players must also have a way to keep their rolls hidden, typically by using a dice cup, with wealthy gamblers often using elaborate metal and bone cups inlaid with aetherium crystal.

## STARTING THE GAME

Before starting the game, players add an agreed-upon wager to join the game. All players roll their dice, keeping their rolls hidden from the other players. If one or more dice land atop another, that player must re-roll their dice. Players are not required to look at their roll immediately.

## BIDDING

In the first round of the game, bidding starts with a randomly chosen player. Otherwise, bidding begins with the loser of the previous round.

A bid consists of declaring a face value (the number showing on a rolled die) and a number of dice. The number of dice bid represents the minimum number of dice showing the bid face value among all players' dice. Thus, "Four 3s" claims at least four dice showing "3" exist among all dice rolled.

Bidding continues clockwise, with the player either increasing the current bid or calling the player of the previous bid a "Liar."

## RAISING THE BID

To increase the bid, a player can increase the face value, increase the number of dice, or both, with the following caveats:

- The number of dice bid can never decrease
- The face value can decrease but only if the number of dice bid increases

For example, if the current bid was "Four 3s," then all of the following are valid raises:

- Five 3s (the number of dice increased)
- Four 4s (the face value increased)
- Six 2s (the number of dice increased)

Whereas "Three 4s" would not be valid because the number of dice bid decreased.

## CALLING "LIAR"

All rolled dice are revealed when a player's bid is challenged by calling the previous bidder a "Liar."

**The Last Bid was True.** If at least as many face value dice are revealed as the last bid, the challenger loses this round.

**The Last Bid was False.** If fewer face value dice are revealed than the last bid, the last bidder loses this round.

For example, if the last bid was "Four 3s" when "Liar" was called, and five 3s are revealed among all dice rolled, then the challenger would lose. However, if only "Three 3s" were revealed, then the last bidder was a Liar and would lose this round.

The loser must remove one of their dice for the rest of the game, and the current round ends. Players with no dice remaining are removed from the game.

The next round begins with players rolling their remaining dice and repeating the bidding process.



## WINNING THE GAME

The last player with dice remaining wins the game and takes the total amount wagered by players.

## VARIANT RULES

Several variants of Liar's Dice exist, including:

**Wild "1s".** One's are wild and count as the face of the current bid.

**Passing.** In addition to bidding or calling the previous bidder a "Liar," players may "Pass" once during the round. By "Passing," the player claims all of their dice have a different face value, which is unlikely until several dice have been lost. Although "Passing" does not raise the current bid, the next player can still call the Passing player a "Liar," forcing the end of the round.

**Special Final Round.** A final elimination round occurs if all remaining players have just one die. Each player rolls their die. The bidding round proceeds with players bidding on the "SUM" of face values in play –the sum of all dice rolled. Bidding proceeds as usual until one player is called a Liar.

**One Round Ultimate.** Rather than playing multiple rounds and removing dice each round, players can agree to play a single round to determine the winner.

**Ongoing Wagers.** In addition to an initial wager, players may agree to further wagering at the start of each round. Players unable to match another player's wager must leave the game. If only one player remains, they win the game.

**Buying Back Dice.** At the start of each round, a player may repurchase lost dice by again adding the initial wager amount into the pot for each die purchased.





# APPENDIX E: PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

This guide suggests pronunciations for many of the non-English names found in this Fable, along with a reference to the first episode it was referenced.

NAME	PRONUNCIATION	DESCRIPTION	REF
Abrexta Kathinel	ah-BRECKS-tuh KATH-in-el	Tiefling Karelagne admiral commanding the INS <i>Thunderchild</i>	E6
Adumbral End	AH-dum-brawl	Desdemona's spectral galleon	E5
Aesphodel	AS-foh-dell	Pirate crew based on Maladell Island	E2
Aether	EE-ther (or AY-ther)	The magical substance making up the seas of the Aetherial Expanse.	E1
Aetherium	ee-THEER-ee-um (or ay-THEER-ee-um)	The rare crystalline form of aether	E1
Ailing Grog	Ay-LING	Retired astral emergent pirate owning a tavern of the same name	E6
Akaste	ah-KAHS-tay	An ancient storm giant sea-witch who acts in secret	E5
Akora	ay-KOR-uh	A gynosphinx librarian in the Sunken Palace	E4
Alaric Concord	al-uh-RICK	Infamous half-orc Karelagne privateer captain	E6
Alfonce Arvide	AL-fahns ahr-VID	Starblade crewmember on the <i>Adumbral End</i>	E5
Algol	AL-gohl	An eldritch beast from the deep aether	E5
Amil Markhoff	ah-MEEL MARK-ov	Once a renowned merfolk captain, now transformed into a merrow haunting Shipgrave Reef	E1
Anka	ANK-uh	Dragonborn shipwright on Velstarrón Island	E2
Areyca	uh-RAY-kuh	Wood elf wizard leader of Fosfior Town	E2
Ariadne	AWR-ee-ad-nay	Astral merfolk scavenger	E4
Asteth, the Empress	AS-teth	Fiery goddess from the Aetherial Expanse	SG
Astrium	AS-tri-um	Mythical civilization of plane-faring giants	E1
Atakora	a-ta-KOR-uh	An island named after the sharp bladed grass that covers it	E4
Ayris	EY-riss	A powerful material plane kingdom vying for control of the Aetherial Expanse	E1
Bathyal Chariot	BATH-yawl	Akaste's grotto lair	E5
Beliene Delaney	bel-EEN del-a-NAY	True captain of the Fanged Stallion pretending to belong to the Sistren of the Isle	E3
Belnorae	bel-NOR-ay	Dragonborn child of Karelagne officer Zrafarn Sheccac	E5
Brighid	BRIG-id	Captain of the INS <i>Loyalty</i>	E6
Bulwark Island	BULL-wark	Jungle covered island in Shipgrave Reef	E1
Calderé Island	cawl-duh-RAY	A volcanic island in the Isle of Drakes	E2
Calladin Thorn	KAL-a-din	Half-elf captain of the <i>Knight's Corsair</i>	E5
Centaris	Sen-TAWR-is	An island with powerful aether geysers in the Constellation Isles	E4

(SG = Setting Guide)



NAME	PRONUNCIATION	DESCRIPTION	REF
Cindra	SIN-druh	Elf starspeaker crewmember on the <i>Adumbral End</i>	E5
Cozmara	coz-MAW-ruh	Drow Aesphodel pirate	E2
Cyrrill the Hierophant	SEER-ill	God of the Aetherial expanse and legendary creator of the aether.	SG
Dagodurne Gad	DAG-o-dern GAD	The dwarven Lord High Admiral commanding Karelagne's military defense of Port Majeure	SG
Dameria Jules	da-MAIR-ee-uh	Dwarf cook on Nth Degree Island	E3
Darissa	da-RIS-uh	Powerful Ayris merchant guildmaster secretly working with the Karelagne Empire. Mother of Ori.	E5
Desdemona	DES-duh-mow-nuh	The immortal storm giant captain of <i>Adumbral End</i> .	E5
Diego Madrix	dee-AY-go MAD-ricks	Inexperienced gnome Karelagne officer	E6
Diyan	dee-YAN	An island named after the tar-like moss growing there.	E4
Eldari	el-DAW-ri	Half-merfolk Sistren leader on Kesforth island	E4
Eolicos Island	ee-OH-lick-ohs	A desolate wind-swept island in the Isle of Drakes	SG
Equino Duo	eh-KWEE-no	A pair of islands in the Constellation Isles	E4
Erinaronda	AIR-rin-a-RON-duh	Astral emergent leader of the Keepers on the Blinking Island	E3
Estamuel Chemelthary	es-TAM-yoo-el KEM-el-there-ee	Ayrisian Governor of Windcrown	E6
Eydis Pearlsheen	AY-dis	Youngest member of the astral merfolk Trident leadership	E4
Fearghal	FEER-gull	Elf garrison commander of Fort Bantor	E6
Ferryn Jassan	FAIR-in ja-SAHN	Imprisoned Karelagne rogue on the <i>Adumbral End</i>	E5
Floe Island	FLOW	A small island in Shipgrave Reef	E1
Forge of Arganok	AR-gan-ok	A magical forge in Astrium	E6
Fosfior Island	FAHS-fee-or	A jungle-covered island in the Isle of Drakes	E2
Gemma	JEM-muh	The <i>Fanged Stallion's</i> gnome quartermaster pretending to be the first-mate	E3
Gruup Meistercut	GROOP	Dwarf astral emergent butcher at Bester's Ring in Windcrown	SG
Hamelyn Ferralon	HAM-el-in FER-ral-on	Gunnery Chief Hamelyn. Half-elf proprietor of Steel for a Steal weapon shop	SG
Hikaru Davies	hee-KAW-roo	Human mage smuggler in Windcrown.	SG
Imayn	IM-ayn	Human wife of Ayrisian officer Phryne Soulette	
Inzeh Ahime	in-ZEH aw-HEEM-eh	Dragonborn navigator of <i>Adumbral End</i>	E5
Ithas	EE-thas	Last king of Astrium	E6
Jarobe	JAW-row-bae	Human chef on the <i>Fanged Stallion</i>	E3
Jem Aediobra	JEM ee-di-OH-bra	Astral emergent lightkeeper on the Blinking Island	E3
Johilde Blackbone	joe-HILL-duh	Dwarf master gunner on the <i>Adumbral End</i>	E5

(SG = Setting Guide)

NAME	PRONUNCIATION	DESCRIPTION	REF
Karabell	KAIR-uh-bel	Half-elf owner of the Treehouse Inn	E2
Karel	kuh-REL	The capital city of the Karelagne Empire on its homeworld in the Material Plane.	E1
Karelagne Empire	KAIR-el-ayn	A powerful material plane empire vying for control of the Aetherial Expanse	E1
Kellis	KEL-lis	Half-orc gunsmith and owner of The Steel Barrel	E2
Kesforth	KES-forth	Island home of the Sistren of the Constellation Isles	E4
Kinsey Silt	KIN-see	An astral emergent citizen of the Blinking Isle	E3
Larmeath	LAR-meeth	An island in the Constellation Isles home to astral merfolk	E4
Leuca Albiones	LOO-kah AL-bee-onz	A human astral emergent citizen of the Blinking Isle	E3
Liloyassa	LEE-loh-yas-sa	Dragonborn child of Karelagne officer Zrafarn Sheccac	E5
Madam Sebria	SEB-ree-uh	Astral emergent mage owner of an upscale hostelry in Port Kaylo	E6
Madame Isabeau's	iz-uh-BOH	A bar and gambling establishment in Port Kaylo	E3
Makagul	MAK-uh-gawl	Half-orc quartermaster on the <i>Adumbral End</i>	E5
Maladell Island	MAL-uh-dell	An island in the Isle of Drakes home to the Aesphodel pirate crew.	E2
Maledonna Ackles	mal-eh-DON-na AK-les	Leader of the Children of Asteth and pirate captain of the <i>Avenging Angel</i>	E6
Manta "Seabear" Gunthorpe	MAN-ta	Karelagne governor overseeing Port Kaylo	E6
Master Archifelt Spitz	ARCH-ih-felt	Human apothecary owner of Spitz's Remedies in the Isle of Drakes	SG
Merhild van Dien	MUR-hild VAN DEY-en	Reckless human gunner on the <i>Knight's Corsair's</i>	E5
Monstera Cluster	Mon-STAIR-ah	Set of islands many Ayrissians call home	SG
Nethiri	neh-THEE-ri	Tiefling mage first-mate on <i>Adumbral End</i>	E5
Nyxaltil Eshwyn ("Nyx")	NIKS-al-thil ESH-win	Dragonborn prisoner in Bathyal Chariot	E5
Oceane the Bard	oh-SEEN	A human astral emergent and double agent selling information to Ayris and Karel	E6
Olyran Bogbagin	oh-LEE-ran BOG-bagin	A halfling astral emergent citizen of the Blinking Isle	E3
Oona Lyresmyth	OO-nuh	A half-elf astral emergent citizen of the Blinking Isle	E3
Orabella Hylde	or-uh-BELL-uh HILD	Half-elf quartermaster on the <i>Knight's Corsair's</i>	E5
Orglix	OR-gliks	Ancient kraken lurking in Astrium	E6
Orivari ("Ori")	OR-ee-VAHR-ee	Tiefling stowaway and daughter of guildmaster Darissa of Ayris	E5
Parnetty	PAR-net-ee	Doctor Parnetty, gnome mage experimenting on astral emergents.	E3
Phryne Soulette	FRIN SOO-let	Elf Ayrissian officer	E5
Port Kaylo	KAY-low	Ayrissian merchant port under Karelagne control.	E3
Port Majeure	mawj-OOR	Karelagne Empires main base in the Etherial Expanse	SG
Qoz, the Hermit	KOHZ	The destructive feather star god of the Aetherial Expanse said to sleep at the bottom of the aether	SG
Quoiya	KOI-uh	Dryad Aesphodel pirate	E2

(SG = Setting Guide)



NAME	PRONUNCIATION	DESCRIPTION	REF
Reiz	RAYs	Dragonborn foreman overseeing Fire Crystal Mining's operations	E2
Ronen	ROW-nin	Astral merrow leader on Scathiss.	E4
Sartreus, Master of Knowledge	sar-TREE-us	Ghostly astral titan within Astrium	E6
Scamallath	SKA-mal-lath	An island in the Constellation Isles home of the astral merrow	E4
Scathiss	SKA-this	An smaller islands south of Scamallath, home to an astral merrow splinter faction	E4
Shaenah	SHAY-naw	Dragonborn in charge of Fosfior Island docks	E2
Tektite Island	TEK-tight	Jungle covered island in Shipgrave Reef covered by black glass objects of the same name	E1
Terrol	TER-rol	Astral emergent tiefling, hired by Ayrissia to spy on Beliene.	E3
Teruko	TEH-roo-koh	Pirate captain Teruko the Drake, deceased founder of the Isle of Drakes	E1
Threx Starmine	th-WRECKs	Dwarven astral emergent leader of Starmine Key	E6
Tortugon	TOR-too-gon	A legendary slumbering cosmic turtle said to watch over pirates in the Isle of Drakes.	E6
Ugkin	UCK-in	Doctor Ugkin, a half-orc mage experimenting on astral emergent.	E3
Unammon, the Chariot	oo-NAM-awn	God of wind in the Aetherial Expanse	SG
Vea Plumeria	VAY-uh ploo-MAIR-ee-a	The material plane capital of the Kingdom of Ayris	SG
Velstarrón Island	vel-stuh-ROHN	The bustling central island of the Isle of Drakes.	E2
Viceroy Caturix	CAT-yoor-icks	Cruel half-elf commander of the Karelagne Navy from Port Majeure.	SG
Vicktir Hartlein	VICK-teer HART-line	Zilro Rikter's forgotten identity.	E5
Vitates, Vinan, and Vianti	vi-TAY-tes, vi-NAHN, vi-an-TI	An inhospitable line of islands in the Constellation Isles	E4
Xivaine "the Sorrow" Sax	zi-VAYN	Wood-elf captain of the <i>Dolor</i>	E5
Yaskara Dumik	yas-KAW-ruh DOO-mik	Half-orc first mate of the <i>Knight's Corsair's</i>	E5
Zheng Yang Shi	CHEN YAWNG SHIH	Retired human pirate captain owner of the Sparrow's Flight gambling den	E1
Zilro Rikter	ZIL-roh	Ship surgeon on <i>Adumbral End</i>	E5
Zrafarn Sheccac	zra-FARN she-KAK	Karelagne officer	E5

(SG = Setting Guide)

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