



TALES FROM THE BLACKWATER CANTINA

*Explore four tales of high seas adventure among the living...and the dead...in **Iron Kingdoms: Requiem***



TALES FROM THE BLACKWATER CANTINA



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“Welcome t’ the Lamprey’s Kiss, finest drinkin’ hole in all of t’ Nightmare Empire. Pull up a seat at the bar, if ye like, or claim one of the tables. The ones in back should be fine. Don’t mind ol’ Jasper. He’s dead, but we’ve got someone comin’ to claim the body—says that he’ll either make a fine thrall or a few crowns in the Meat Market. Aye, Lamprey’s Kiss has what ye need. Lookin’ for a pint of somethin’ to rot your guts? A bowl of somethin’ not too likely to kill ye? Is it a job ye’re after, perhaps? Or a game of chance? Well, no matter what brings ye in out of the cold an’ blight, ye’re sure to find it here.”

*Kofi Hatrod,
proprietor of the Lamprey’s Kiss*

INTRODUCTION

TALES FROM THE BLACK WATER CANTINA IS AN ANTHOLOGY of adventures set in the Nightmare Empire of the Iron Kingdoms. Each adventure begins in one of the iconic locations of Cryx and the Scharde Islands.

Starting from humble beginnings at the *Lamprey’s Kiss* in the pirate haven of Blackwater, the adventures in the book will take players on high seas adventures where they will rub shoulders with both the living and the undead.

USING THESE ADVENTURES

The *Tales from the Blackwater Cantina* table gives an overview for each of the adventures in this book. Each adventure is designed for a different tier of play, intended for four to six player characters of an appropriate level. You can adjust the adventures for larger or smaller groups or for character groups of a different level by changing the number of foes, using substitutions for particular monsters, or modifying the DC to better suit the capabilities of the characters.

The adventures work best for characters who are from the Nightmare Empire or the Scharde Islands, but some guidance is provided for including other character types available for *Iron Kingdoms: Requiem*. In general, characters will have the easiest time if the following remains true: characters are either willing—or desperate enough—to work with the unscrupulous inhabitants of the Nightmare Empire.

A Word of Caution. The Nightmare Empire is a land of necromancy, betrayal, and violence. As the Game Master, be sure that your players are comfortable with playing stories

TALES FROM THE BLACKWATER CANTINA ADVENTURES

Adventure	Suggested Level
<i>Dead Men Tell No Tales</i>	1st–4th
<i>Chasing Shadows</i>	5th–10th
<i>Shipwretch’d</i>	11th–16th
<i>Pretensions of a Lich</i>	17th–20th

surrounded by the darker side of the Iron Kingdoms. You can tone down some of these themes or omit them entirely if you don’t believe your players would be comfortable playing with them.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURES

To run these adventures, you’ll need the core rules of 5th Edition as well as *Iron Kingdoms: Requiem* and *Nightmare Empire*.

If you plan to GM an adventure, it is advised that you read through it to familiarize yourself with its contents. If you intend to play through the adventure, you should stop reading it now.

“Read-aloud text” that appears like this is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased to the players, typically at the start of an encounter or when the characters arrive at a location for the first time.

If a creature’s name is in **bold**, it is a visual reminder that the creature has statistics you can use. Many familiar creatures come from OGL sources, but those that live only in the Iron Kingdoms can be found in *Iron Kingdoms: Requiem*, *Iron Kingdoms: Monsternomicon*, *Nightmare Empire*, *The Scoundrel’s Guide to the Scharde Islands*, or the appendix of each adventure in this book.

MONSTER & NPC SOURCES

The following statistics are not in this book and can be found in the following sources:

Monster or NPC	Source
Bane Knight	Scoundrel’s Guide
Bile Thrall	Monsternomicon
Brute Thrall	Monsternomicon
Commoner	SRD
Dragon Knight	Scoundrel’s Guide
Gunslinger	Nightmare Empire
Ironmonger	Nightmare Empire
Mechanithrall	Monsternomicon
Necromancer	Nightmare Empire
Risen Thralls	Monsternomicon
Satyxis Blood Witch	Nightmare Empire
Satyxis Raider	Nightmare Empire
Satyxis Sea Witch	Nightmare Empire
Scharde Pirate	Nightmare Empire
Shadow	SRD
Skarlock Commander	Scoundrel’s Guide
Skarlock	Scoundrel’s Guide
Slayer	Nightmare Empire
Stalker	Nightmare Empire
Thrall Warrior	Monsternomicon

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DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES



DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES™ IS A STARTER adventure for **four 1st-level characters**. In this Iron Kingdoms adventure, set in the Scharde Islands, players are pulled into adventure in search of the lost treasure of Lord Craethen Morvaen. Along the way, they confront rival Cryxian gangs, infiltrate a pirate ship, cross dangerous waters, delve into catacombs crawling with undead creatures, and have a final showdown for the pirate king's trove of wealth. The adventure starts in the pirate town of Blackwater on the island of Cryx, providing a starting location with everything new players need to shop, find information, and hire a ship.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The story of Morvaen's treasure stretches back decades to when the pirate lord first took control of the port city of Blackwater. A self-styled pirate-king, Morvaen staged a series of bloody assassinations in 597 AR to eliminate all his rivals and claim total control of the city. With the aid of the witch Gaddis Naill and the Gore Talons, a company of blighted trollkin commanded by the notorious Jussika Bloodtongue, Lord Morvaen kept a firm grip on Blackwater, using taxes to milk its population and amass a hoard of wealth.

The treasure of Lord Morvaen is something of a local legend. Never the trusting sort, the pirate king hid his trove in a secret location known only to him. Rumors of the hoard spread far and wide across Blackwater, especially among the hungry thieves and mercenaries who sought to claim it for themselves.

There's just one complication: Craethen Morvaen is dead. Over five years ago, the warcaster Aiakos killed Morvaen and most of his inner circle, then took control of Blackwater as its new leader. But in the Nightmare Empire, death is seldom the obstacle it is elsewhere in western Immoren. To ensure that his rival would not return in undeath as an angry specter or bane out for revenge, Aiakos captured Morvaen's spirit in a soul cage. Now the tormented soul of the former leader of Blackwater—and the only person who knows the treasure's resting place—hangs in a black iron ornament aboard Aiakos' own ship, the *Nocturnus*.

LORD MORVAEN'S TREASURE

During his time as Blackwater's top pirate, Craethen Morvaen amassed more than plundered golden crowns and bits of jewelry. Aside from the blackships of Cryx's Black Fleet, every vessel that moored in Blackwater was taxed a portion of its cargo. All kinds of trade goods found their way into Morvaen's hoard: silk and spices taken from Mercarian trade ships returning from Zu, armaments from captured warships, and even relics dug out of the ruins of Castle Moorcraig.

The pirate hid his ill-gotten gains deep in the Catacombs, a network of tunnels and caverns carved into the cliffside of the fjord opposite Blackwater. Even though many necrotechs and other demented beings called the place their home, Morvaen wagered that these inhabitants would act as an extra layer

of security for his hoard. To guarantee the treasure's safety, Morvaen had the sea witch Gaddis Naill weave powerful blood rituals that warded the location against prying eyes and divinatory magic. This magic was so strong that not even the Catacombs' inhabitants were likely to stumble upon the treasure—and those who did would almost certainly be laid low by the gauntlet of traps and hazards Morvaen left behind.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

"Dead Men Tell No Tales" begins with the characters encountering a strange witch in the Lamprey's Kiss, a tavern just off the docks of Blackwater, where they learn their first clue about Morvaen's treasure.

This adventure is divided into four chapters.

Chapter 1: Scum and Villainy. The characters encounter an unusual witch who describes a vast, hidden treasure just waiting to be claimed.

Chapter 2: Aboard the Nocturnus. Having learned of Morvaen's treasure, the characters must infiltrate the pirate vessel of the Cryxian warcaster Aiakos to recover the captured soul of the former ruler of Blackwater.

Chapter 3: Across Black Waters. The characters must board a sailing vessel and cross Belken Bay with an enemy ship hot on their tail.

Chapter 4: Into the Catacombs. In the adventure's finale, the characters must delve into the labyrinthine tunnels of Blackwater to find the resting place of the pirate king Morvaen's hidden treasure, confront the perils within, and face off in a final confrontation with an unexpected betrayer.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Because this adventure is designed with starting characters in mind, it can serve as a starting point for further adventures in the Scharde Islands and the Nightmare Empire. If your players are not playing Scharde characters or require an extra push to get involved, the following adventure hooks can help draw them into the pirate town and the adventure ahead.

MAROONED

The characters arrive in Blackwater on a ship looking to offload some illegitimately acquired goods. While they're ashore stretching their legs, their ship's captain gets on the wrong side of some dock gangs who are demanding protection money. When the characters return to the dock, they see their former captain pinned through the throat to the dock piling and their ship burned down to the waterline. Left without a ship, they need to find a way to earn passage out of the Nightmare Empire before they become the newest offering at the infamous Meat Market.

ABDUCTED

The adventuring company was taken captive by the crew of a Cryxian pirate vessel and brought back to Blackwater to be sold at the Meat Market. Upon arriving in port, their captors were set upon by members of the Dragon Fish, a rival gang. During the ensuing brawl, the characters slipped away while their abductors and the Dragon Fish hacked each other to bits. Now lost in an unfamiliar port populated by both

the living and the undead, they need to find a way off the accursed island.

UP-AND-COMERS

The adventuring company either just formed in Blackwater or just arrived in port. In either case, the company's members are looking for a way to make a name for themselves in the cutthroat world of the Nightmare Empire. If they want to survive in this vicious pirate haven, they'll need to be more than just good fighters: they'll need to prove that they have the cunning and skills required to be a match for the dark alleys and fighting arenas of the port of scum and villainy.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

You'll need a copy of the fifth edition core rules to run this adventure. When the name of a ship or monster appears in **bold** type, it's a hint pointing to the stats for that ship or creature. Before running this adventure, take a few minutes to acquaint yourself with the creatures and the rules for sea battles in *The Scoundrel's Guide to the Scharde Islands*.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

Characters start at 1st level and receive experience points (XP) for slaying enemies, utilizing skills, and roleplaying. The Suggested Character Level table can be used as a reference if you decide to forego tracking XP in favor of milestone leveling.

SUGGESTED CHARACTER LEVEL

Section	Suggested Character Level
Scum and Villainy	1st
Aboard the <i>Nocturnus</i>	2nd
Across Black Waters	2nd
Into the Catacombs	3rd

If the players are using higher-level characters, adjust the DCs for all skill challenges and increase the challenge rating for each encounter.

BLACKWATER

1. Scalesflow River
2. Old Town
3. Beach
4. Temple of the Dragonfather
5. The Meat Market
6. The Smolders
7. Catacombs
8. Broken Skulls Cover



PART 1: SCUM & VILLAINY

The adventure begins in Blackwater at the Lamprey's Kiss. This infamous watering hole sits just off the town's salt-stained docks and is the initial stop for many first-time visitors to the port. The Lamprey's Kiss can serve as a recurring spot for the characters to visit while they are in Blackwater. It's a good place to find information, follow up on potential leads for new jobs, and make contacts in town.

When the characters first arrive at the Lamprey's Kiss, read the following text aloud:

There's no place quite like Blackwater's notorious Lamprey's Kiss. Bashed together out of the bones of sunken ships and decorated with barnacle-crusting loot dredged out of Belken Bay, the ramshackle tavern creaks ominously whenever the wind stirs above a whisper. Despite its unsound structure and unsavory reputation, this one-of-a-kind establishment is the perfect place to find work. The pints are cheap, the stew is filled with as many fish heads as one can stomach, and the tavern's proximity to Blackwater's docks makes it ideal for any captains or gang bosses who are looking for new recruits.

The sounds of muttered conversations fill the main hall, occasionally punctuated by a skeletal thrall sitting in a corner and screeching out a few sour notes on a cracked violin.

KOFI HATROD

The Lamprey's Kiss is owned and operated by Kofi Hatrod, the former captain of the *Windperil*. The tavern is built out of the broken hulls of ships that were scrapped for their timbers—the *Windperil* among them. Kofi slings cold stew and warm drinks in unwashed glasses and does nothing to discourage the frequent brawling and murders that take place in his establishment; in fact, he encourages them by providing a free drink and meal to anyone with a proven kill.

Kofi is a shrewd man who doesn't play favorites with the competing gangs of Blackwater. His neutrality is something everyone respects, and even though Kofi won't stop someone from getting stabbed, he won't twist the knife, either.

Kofi can be a source of information about the town of Blackwater, its major players, and its history—for a price,

THE QUAY SLAYERS

The Quay Slayers are a Blackwater gang of back-alley brawlers, urchins, and cutthroats. Even though Aiakos abandoned the gang to become a pirate aboard the *Scythe* before ultimately becoming the captain of the *Nocturnus*, the Quay Slayers have sworn their loyalty to the new lord of Blackwater. Those who prove their mettle join the warcaster aboard his ship; the rest remain in port as a rabble of fighters who enforce his orders.

Quay Slayer thugs are tougher, more experienced members of the gang. They use brutality and intimidation to keep other gang members in line.

TAVERN DENIZENS

d10 Denizen

- 1 A bogrin from the Smolders who is covered in alchemical burn scars and sells alchemical ingredients
- 2 A member of the Dragon Fish gang who offers to buy "fresh meat" from the characters for 5 gp per intact limb or 25 gp for a live specimen
- 3 A pistol wraith who sits at the bar and challenges newcomers to a shooting competition behind the Lamprey's Kiss, with the loser having to buy a round for all the patrons in the tavern
- 4 A rowdy black ogrun playing a dice game called "Ship, Captain, Crew"
- 5 A Satyxis haruspex who will cast the *augury* spell for anyone who brings her a live animal
- 6 A skarlock thrall who is here on an iron lich's orders to ask Kofi about any new arrivals in port
- 7 A blighted trollkin who is messily devouring a bowl of fish stew with a human hand sticking out of it and who offers to buy a limb off the meatiest-looking visitor for 10 gp
- 8 A street urchin in shabby clothing who tails any wealthy-looking patrons in the hopes of pickpocketing them
- 9 An apprentice necrosurgeon who offers to sew up any injuries (free of charge!) so long as the necrosurgeon can sign the work with a small brand, "just to get my name out there"
- 10 Dougal Kildare, the captain of a smuggling fleet and an eager gossip, who pays 5 sp to anyone who can bring him recent news from outside Blackwater and who is willing to buy gear and items for half their sale price

of course. He's been watching the turning tide in port for decades, and he expects that the tavern's next owner will have a necromancer bring him back once he finally passes on. In his own words, "They'll have to make a thrall out of me to learn the secret ingredient of my stew."

Personality Trait: Greed. "If I don't make a few crowns doing it, I'm not going to bother."

Ideal: Neutrality. "I haven't made it in Blackwater this long by choosing sides."

Bond: The *Windperil*. "The *Windperil* is my home, my business, and my sanctuary. She isn't a ship anymore, but she makes a damned fine tavern."

Flaw: Cowardice. "I live in a town populated by the walking dead, necromancers, blood mages, and ghosts. If you

think I'm going to get on their bad side, you have another thing coming."

OTHER DENIZENS

The Lamprey's Kiss is frequented by a variety of regular patrons, some of whom offer their services to the tavern's patrons. The table below highlights some of the more colorful individuals who occasionally visit the Lamprey's Kiss. If you're looking to spice up the characters' time there, choose a denizen for an encounter, or roll on the Tavern Denizens table.

BAR BRAWL

Whether the characters have entered the Lamprey's Kiss to chow down some food, throw back a few drinks, or perhaps even find work (or a way out of Blackwater), they soon find themselves in the middle of a confrontation between the Quay Slayers, the foremost gang in Blackwater and the enforcers of Captain Aiakos' will in port, and "the Admiralty," the now-diminished gang of the former pirate king Craethen Morvaen. Once the characters have finally settled in at the Lamprey's Kiss, read the following boxed text aloud:

Everything goes quiet as several hungry-eyed and heavily tattooed pirates stride through the tavern's only door. The room goes silent in anticipation of trouble as a reed-thin woman scans the room with her one good eye, before her gaze lands on a table close to you.

"You Quay Slayer rats are at my table," she hisses. Across the room, patrons begin to pay attention. It looks like the night's entertainment is about to begin in earnest.

A chair scrapes across the floor with a nasty groan as one of the Quay Slayers rises from his table. Blighted patches across the Scharde man's scalp give him the appearance of wearing a crown of small horns.

"Cragtooth Annie," he draws. "You should have sailed out of Blackwater when Aiakos gave you the chance, not come here while I'm enjoyin' my supper." He punctuates his statement by drawing a tarnished boarding axe and placing it on the table. "Or what, Croely? You'll stab me in the back like your captain did to Craethen? Toruk's scales, I can't wait to cut that smirk off your face." The woman turns to her fellow pirates. "Admiralty, let's get rid of this trash."

The tavern's owner, Kofi Hatrod, does nothing to dissuade the two groups of Blackwater gangsters from fighting. A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check can tell that there is some real menace to the woman's words and that her grievances go far beyond a simple case of seating arrangements.

Within moments, the two groups begin assaulting each other in a brutal melee. The opposing parties consist of five **Quay Slayers** led by a **Quay Slayer thug** and five **Scharde pirates** from the rival Admiralty gang.

This is no simple bout of drunken fisticuffs. The two gangs

are bitter rivals and do not hesitate to kill their opponents when given the chance. The Admiralty fight with particular brutality, taking the time to finish off downed opponents.

GETTING INVOLVED

The patrons of the Lamprey's Kiss cheer on the brawling gangsters, occasionally pitching in by throwing a mug at one of the combatants or by holding one fighter so that another can get a few good hits in.

If the characters choose to join the fighting, have everyone roll initiative. Whichever group the characters side with determines which gang they'll confront later in the adventure, so take note of their allegiances in this first fight.

The brawl gives the characters an opportunity to show off their talents in combat. It also catches the attention of Gaddis Naill, a sea witch who is in truth Morvaen's former confidant.

HANGING BACK

If the characters choose not to intervene, the brawl is a quick and bloody affair. Roll a d6. On an odd roll, the Admiralty is victorious, and the number rolled is the number of Admiralty fighters who remain upright. On an even roll, the Quay Slayers are the victors, and the number rolled is the number of Quay Slayer thugs who survived the fight.

The surviving members of the prevailing gang drag their opponent's bodies out of the Lamprey's Kiss, commenting loudly about how much they will get at the Meat Market for their slain foes.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters participate in the fight, divide 500 XP among them if they fought against the Admiralty and 225 XP among them if they fought against the Quay Slayers.

TREASURE

The pirates are carrying little in the way of treasure. If the characters are the first to loot the dead—which might be a difficult task, depending on how avaricious their fellow tavern-goers are feeling—the scattered coins, earrings, and other baubles they manage to collect from the corpses are worth a total of only 2d6 gp. You can add some unusual items to the loot by rolling once for each character on the Trinkets table in chapter 4 of *Iron Kingdoms: Nightmare Empire*.

All the gang members wear a distinctive symbol that marks their allegiance. Each Quay Slayer wears a red sash or bandanna marked with a trident, modeled after the one carried by Captain Aiakos, while the mark of the Admiralty

ROLEPLAYING THE SEA WITCH

Gaddis Naill is a shrewd woman who has lived in Blackwater all her life. As the right hand of the port's former pirate king, she is used to dealing with all manner of pirates, villains, and worse. She wishes to recover Morvaen's hidden treasure not only because of the wealth it represents, but also because she wants to finance a force to overthrow the usurper Aiakos.

Gaddis will stop at nothing to accomplish this goal. A cunning negotiator and skilled liar, she tells the characters what they want to hear in order to get them on her side.

is a white anchor and crown on a field of black. A character who wears one of these markers has advantage on any skill checks made to pass as a member of the appropriate gang.

DEVELOPMENT

If the characters choose a side in the brawl, they will make friends—and enemies, too.

Quay Slayers. Getting on the wrong side of the dominant gang in town has consequences. Any surviving gang members or tavern bystanders will carry word of the characters' actions to the rest of the gang, who will thereafter be on the lookout for them. In chapter 3, the rival vessel pursuing the characters will be crewed by Quay Slayers.

The Admiralty. Although greatly diminished from its former might, the Admiralty is still a significant presence in Blackwater. As with the Quay Slayers, survivors or bystanders will clue the rest of the gang in on the characters' actions during the brawl. In chapter 3, the Admiralty crews the vessel pursuing the characters.

AN OFFER

Once the fighting subsides and the dockside tavern returns to a semblance of normalcy, a hunched-over Scharde woman approaches the characters and introduces herself as **Gaddis Nail**. She is dressed in rags of old sailcloth and wears a fishing net with glass floats and small bone charms woven through it like a cloak. No matter what the characters did during the fight, the witch praises their actions: if they fought on behalf of either gang, she comments on their skill in battle



AN OFFER YOU CAN REFUSE

Depending on their present circumstances, Gaddis' offer of splitting a massive treasure should entice the characters, but they might be suspicious of her and decline her offer. If they do, the sea witch tells them they can always find her at her home above the mapmaker on Shingleskin Lane on the edge of the Smolders.

If the characters do not agree to help Gaddis, she departs the Lamprey's Kiss and immediately contracts a minor Blackwater gang such as the Dragon Fish to attack and harass the characters in an effort to drain their resources, make them desperate, and push them back to her. The hired thugs are given instructions not to kill the characters; instead, they are told to rough the characters up, rob them, and otherwise do whatever it takes to make them come crawling to Gaddis for help. If the characters have also made enemies of the Quay Slayers or the Admiralty, having *multiple* gangs out for their blood might be enough to encourage them to reconsider the witch's offer.

and their fearlessness in the face of such foes, but if they decided not to get involved, she comments on their shrewd decision not to gain the ire of either group.

Once Gaddis and the characters have exchanged pleasantries, the witch requests their help in finding an elusive Quay Slayer. She leads them to a secluded table in the Lamprey's Kiss to make her case.

Personality Trait: Flattery. "A talent like yours would be such a horrible thing to waste. Let me tell about how you could make good use of it . . ."

Ideal: Might. "By becoming stronger, I can ensure no one ever takes anything from me again."

Bond: Morvaen and His Treasure. "Morvaen was my partner in life. I'll do what I can to rescue his soul—and his treasure."

Flaw: Ambition. "Despite a few setbacks, there is nothing that will stop me from ruling all of Blackwater, with the head of Captain Aiakos as a trophy in my halls."

THE STORY OF CRAETHEN MORVAEN

To get the characters intrigued, Gaddis tells them a short version of the story behind Morvaen's treasure. Read the following text aloud:

The woman leans forward and speaks to you in a conspiratorial hush, "Craethen Morvaen is not a name spoken much anymore—not since the warcaster Aiakos betrayed and killed him. But he once ruled the whole of this city from his estate in Old Town as its pirate king. For fifteen years he was uncontested in his authority, except for the lich lords and the Dragonfather himself. "It took many years, but Morvaen built a vast hoard of wealth taken from every ship to pass through Blackwater—a tax for the dragon, of course, but he always kept a bit for himself. But Morvaen never trusted anyone, and he hid his wealth away in a place known only to him.

"But I know of a way to discover its location, if you're keen. Help me claim it, and you can share in the wealth. Gold, ivory, weapons, armor . . . enough wealth to buy a ship of your own and sail wherever the Meredius carries you. What do you say?"

A character who wants to determine the truth of Gaddis' story must make a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check. On a success, the character determines that Gaddis is telling the truth about Morvaen having amassed the treasure but catches a far-off look in her eyes, as if she is recounting the story from her personal history (which she is). If a character presses her on it, she says that she has lived in Blackwater longer than most others and knows many of the port's darker secrets.

Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (History) check recalls having heard of the events of Morvaen's betrayal and death: years ago, the pirate warcaster Aiakos appeared before Morvaen with a tribute of treasure and a unique helljack. The warcaster incited the helljack to slaughter Morvaen and his inner circle of the Admiralty in a brutal ambush, then took command of Blackwater in the aftermath.

Gaddis concludes her tale by telling the characters that Lord Morvaen's soul is the key to discovering the treasure's location. Unfortunately, it's being held prisoner in a soul cage aboard the *Nocturnus*.

CROOKED FLETCHER

Gaddis believes she can commune with the spirit of Craethen Morvaen, but his soul is currently out of her reach aboard the *Nocturnus*.

Captain Aiakos' vessel is well guarded at all times, but through conniving, bribery, and other underhanded tactics, Gaddis has learned the identity of one of its guards: a Quay Slayer named Crooked Fletcher, who might be able to get intruders aboard. Fletcher has the reputation of being an easily manipulated man of few loyalties, and the witch is convinced she can get him to help sneak the characters aboard Aiakos' ship.

"They don't call him 'Crooked Fletcher' just because of his bent back. The man's as slippery as a Belken eel, willing to take coin from any hand that offers it. He poisoned his oldest mate because someone offered him a tankard of uiske. He's the man to get us aboard the Nocturnus. We just need to find him. I followed his crew for days across every piss-stinking pub and gambling den in the docks, but he must have known something was amiss, because he somehow ducked me and vanished into the town—laughing at my expense the whole way, I have no doubt."

Gaddis describes Fletcher as a tattooed Scharde male in his forties with a spine curled like a fishhook and a mind that's twice as twisted. When she lost track of him, the Quay Slayer was visiting his old haunts in the Docks district while spending his way through a month's wages with his crew.

WALK A CROOKED MILE

Gaddis last spotted Crooked Fletcher with a group of four other Quay Slayers as they traveled from one den of vice to the next. Although the witch lost sight of her quarry, she has taken great pains to study him and has learned of several locations he likes to frequent in Blackwater when on leave from his duties.

Gaddis describes three likely spots to the characters: the Broken Sailor, the Mongrel Dog, and Kar Halfhand's stall in the Meat Market. If asked why she doesn't seek Fletcher herself, the witch says she suspects that the Quay Slayer might have spotted her during her earlier pursuit. Seeing her again might raise his suspicion, but the characters likely won't elicit the same response.

FLETCHER'S SCHEDULE

Crooked Fletcher is on leave for a total of ten days, after which he must return to the *Nocturnus* to resume his duties. His days generally look like this:

8 AM. Wake up at the Mongrel Dog, then eat a small meal before heading out for the day.

9 AM–Noon. Travel to the Broken Sailor to gamble the previous night's wealth on the fights. By 11 AM, he is usually out of coins.

Noon–1 PM. Purchase a small meal in the Meat Market.

1 PM–5 PM. Stalk the dockside looking for easy marks. Any victims are sold at Halfhand's stall.

5 PM–11 PM. Get drunk at the Mongrel Dog.

11 PM–8 AM. Sleep in his room at the Mongrel Dog.

Add additional parts to Fletcher's routine if you want to extend the search for him. Doing so can provide a great opportunity to show off other regions of the seedy pirate port.

GATHERING INFORMATION

Rather than visit Crooked Fletcher's likely haunts, the characters might hit the streets and talk to Blackwater's citizens to chase down some leads on their quarry. Fletcher is a well-known Quay Slayer with a notable reputation, and chances are good that the characters can find someone who knows a thing or two about him.

A character can spend 1d6 hours talking with people in the Docks district and gathering rumors about Fletcher. At the end of this time, the character can make a DC 12 Charisma (Deception), Charisma (Intimidation), or Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a success, the character learns one of the following bits of information:

Fletcher likes to bet on fights when he starts his shore leave, but he's notoriously bad at picking winners and usually burns through his purse after one or two bouts.

In the evening, Fletcher prefers to rest at the Mongrel Dog, a boarding house near the edge of Old Town.

When Fletcher is low on funds, he likes to hang out near the docks to roll newcomers for their coins or assault someone and then sell the body at the Meat Market.

Fletcher has a good relationship with Kar Halfhand, a trollkin butcher who plies his trade in the Meat Market.

THE BROKEN SAILOR

The Broken Sailor is a bloody arena run by Sharkjaw Wavegutter (NE blighted trollkin **commoner**). Warriors from across Blackwater meet there in an effort to gain the attention of gang leaders and potential captains. An open pit with a floor of black sand ringed with barbed-iron fencing dominates the center of the Broken Sailor, and wooden



benches surround the fighting arena. When the characters arrive, read the following text to set the scene:

In a muddy pit surrounded by iron spikes and benches of roaring onlookers, several lightly armed gladiators fight to the death for the entertainment of those watching. Every meaty crunch and spray of blood is met with a bellow of approval and the clinking of coins trading hands. A trollkin with jagged, oversized teeth yells over the crowd, "Bets for the next bout close in five rounds. Get your bets in, or get out!"

Approximately a dozen onlookers are watching three gladiators duke it out in the pit below. A few patrons roar in approval each time one of the three lands a blow.

SHARKJAW WAVEGUTTER

Sharkjaw is willing to tell the characters about Crooked Fletcher if they help him deal with a gladiator first.

Knowledge Fight. One of the fighters in the pit, an ogrun gladiator named **Jihn Gorhall**, has voiced a desire to fight for a competitor's arena. Sharkjaw wants the characters to challenge Jihn to a fight and cut him down, thereby robbing the competitor of a skilled fighter.

What Sharkjaw Knows. If the characters defeat Jihn, Sharkjaw tells them about Fletcher's most recent visit, emphasizing that the Quay Slayer couldn't spot a good fighter

if his life depended on it. He mentions that he overheard Fletcher grumbling about needing to sell a few more bodies to Kar Halfhand after losing his shirt in the morning fight.

THE MONGREL DOG

A run-down boarding house near the border of Old Town, the Mongrel Dog is known for the many chinks in its walls that let in the muggy Blackwater air, the aggressiveness of its rats, and the affordability of its numerous small rooms. The proprietor, an elderly man named Gnash Barlow (NE Scharde human **commoner**), spends most of his day in the entry room, smoking a foul pipe and playing solitary games of dice. When the characters enter the Mongrel Dog, read the following text aloud:

A haze of wood and pike smoke hangs in the air inside this run-down, creaking flophouse on the edge of Old Town. A scattering of patrons, either sleeping or dead, are sprawled out across the long tables of the common room. A grizzled man with a long bone pipe sits by the smoking fireplace, idly tossing dice across the table. As you enter, he looks up from his dice and says, "Rolled a fifteen. Are you here for a room?"

GNASH BARLOW

Gnash Barlow is willing to share information with the characters about Fletcher, but he won't do anything for free. The old man will agree to tell the characters what he knows in exchange for one of two simple arrangements: the characters can pay him, or they can help him kick a troublesome visitor out of the boarding house.

Eviction. A Scharde ogrun sailor named Gresh Kurlok (neutral evil ogrun **ironmonger**) has failed to pay for his room, but Gnash is physically incapable of throwing the loafer out. If the characters agree to help Gnash evict his unwelcome guest, he gives them a skeleton key to the rooms and directs them to room 5. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Gnash is afraid of the occupant of room 5, though he does his best not to make it obvious.

His fear is somewhat justified. Gresh has a bad temper and has been looking for a fight for some time. If the characters try to convince the ogrun to leave, he's happy to come out swinging an oversized wrench.

What Gnash Knows. Gnash doesn't want to give up a good customer too easily, but if the characters help him evict the ogrun, he answers whatever questions he can about Crooked Fletcher. He begins by telling them that a Quay Slayer by that name often stays at the Mongrel Dog. Any character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check becomes certain that Barlow is withholding information and can make a DC 14 Charisma (Intimidation) or Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a success, Barlow reveals that Fletcher is still staying at the Mongrel Dog and that he expects the sailor to come back after sundown. Any character can get the same information from Barlow with a bribe worth at least 10 gp.

THE MEAT MARKET

Kar Halfhand's stall in the Meat Market looks similar to the other stalls lining the marketplace. A tarp of suspicious leathers is draped over the crude wooden structure, inside which the trollkin has set out a display of various organs and meat of a mix of humanoids.

The drone of buzzing black flies competes with hawkers praising their wares in the crowded streets of the Meat Market. A heavysset trollkin moves through one of the corpse vendors' stalls, artfully arranging open barrels of severed limbs and updating the slate that declares his prices.

KAR HALFHAND

Kar Halfhand (neutral evil trollkin **commoner**) is an older, potbellied "chef" who wears a stained butcher's apron. His left hand is split down the middle, and the outer finger is withered and useless.

Nice Ink. Any character with a passive Perception of 13 or higher, or a character who examines the bins of severed body parts in the stall and succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, notices a severed arm with a conspicuous tattoo: the symbol of the Quay Slayers. If asked, Kar explains that the body was brought in earlier by another Slayer—one he does frequent business with.

Today's Specials

ORGANS: 2 cp/lb.

LIMBS (PUTRID): 1 cp/lb.

LIMBS (FRESH): 5 cp/lb.

"Specialty cuts"

Available

Upon Request!

NEW ITEM:
Gobber Livers!

What Kar Knows. Because Fletcher provides Kar with a steady stream of raw goods, the trollkin is reluctant to admit knowing the Quay Slayer, but he is no fighter and is easily intimidated. A successful DC 10 Charisma (Intimidation) check reveals that Fletcher comes by Kar's stall almost every day with a fresh corpse to sell. Kar explains that Fletcher usually arrives in the early afternoon or evening, his breath stinking of cheap booze and his boots caked in mud from the dockside.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

Divide 100 XP among the characters if they convince Kar to talk.

CONFRONTING CROOKED FLETCHER

After hitting the streets, the characters have a chance to learn about the elusive Quay Slayer's semiregular schedule and can confront him at any of his various haunts. Fletcher, a **Quay Slayer thug**, is usually accompanied by four **Quay Slayers**.

When the characters confront Fletcher, read the following text aloud:

As the witch promised, Crooked Fletcher is difficult to miss in a crowd. His whole body leans sharply to one side, and blight-born spurs of bone emerge from his twisted spine. A group of grubby, glassy-eyed Quay Slayers surround him, trading bawdy jokes and cackling with laughter.

Assuming the characters managed to track him down at one of his haunts, Fletcher is wary but not hostile. If the characters mention that a woman would like to speak with him or suggest there's money to be made, he's happy to leave his fellow Quay Slayers behind and explore the opportunity, but he remains guarded and won't follow the characters into anything he suspects is an ambush. Before leaving, Fletcher tells his fellow Quay Slayers to memorize the characters' faces and to come after him if he doesn't return to the Mongrel Dog by nightfall.

If the Characters Failed to Find Him First. If the characters were unwilling or unable to wring information about Fletcher from their investigation, the Quay Slayer eventually catches word about a group of people who have been poking around and asking questions about him. In this case, Fletcher is hostile to the characters, since he's not keen on the idea of being followed. Have Fletcher and his fellow gang members attack the characters when you feel the time is right.

Although Fletcher and his pirates are hostile, they aren't suicidal. (This applies double to Fletcher.) If more than half of them are incapacitated, or if Fletcher himself drops to half of his hit points, Fletcher surrenders and pleads for mercy, and any surviving pirates immediately follow his lead.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters convince Fletcher to come with them, or if they defeat him and the accompanying Quay Slayers, divide 200 XP among them.

RETURN TO THE WITCH

Once the characters return to Gaddis—ideally having Fletcher in tow, as a willing guest or as a captive—they find her who waiting for them in her home on Shingleskin Lane. When the characters approach the witch's hut, read the following boxed text aloud:

The witch's tall, narrow home looks to be made of random scraps of flotsam, tar paper, and scrap tin. Chimes made of scrimshawed human bone hang next to the door, though you can't tell whether they're wards against spirits or simply a grisly door knocker. The yellow light of an oil lamp shines through a greasy downstairs window, outlining the silhouette of a figure inside.

Gaddis is stirring a bubbling pot over a fire in the downstairs room of her small home. When the characters announce themselves, she invites them into her home—hopefully with Crooked Fletcher in tow.

If the Characters Have Crooked Fletcher. If the characters have brought the elusive pirate with them, read the following text aloud:

"Crooked Fletcher! So happy to see you again." Gaddis grins at Fletcher, not without mirth. "You've met my new friends, I see. You owe me a debt, Fletcher, and tonight is the night you make good on that debt."

The witch eagerly outlines her plan and explains the following to the characters:

The *Nocturnus*—the ship captained by the Cryxian warcaster Aiakos, the current leader of Blackwater—is moored at the town's docks.

Captain Aiakos spends most of his time in Blackwater's fighting pits, accompanied by his best sailors. Any sailors left aboard the ship will be newer recruits who haven't earned leave yet.

A soul cage containing the spirit of Blackwater's former pirate king, Craethen Morvaen, is stowed in the captain's cabin of the *Nocturnus*.

Fletcher is to lead the characters aboard the ship and escort them to the captain's cabin. The characters need to locate the soul cage and meet Gaddis at the west side of the docks, where she will be waiting with a ship.

Once Gaddis finishes explaining the plan, the characters can ask questions of her and Crooked Fletcher. Fletcher knows the layout of the *Nocturnus* and can guess—fairly accurately—how many crew members remain aboard, but he hasn't been in the captain's cabin and doesn't know where the soul cage might be hidden.

Gaddis answers any questions about Craethen Morvaen's history but is careful not to reveal too much about her connection to the former pirate king. Any character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check realizes that the witch knows more than she is saying and that she is bitterly angry about Morvaen's death, but pressing the matter causes her to become tight-lipped and brusque with the character.

Emptyhanded. If the characters couldn't find Fletcher, or if the pirate died during a confrontation, the witch is disappointed but not ready to give up her dreams of wealth. She outlines her plan as explained above, though she is less confident about the characters' chances. She explains that they'll have to go in blind—and might have to fight any crew members they encounter—if they're to have any chance of recovering the soul cage.

Next Steps. Whether or not the characters returned with Crooked Fletcher, Gaddis eventually sends them on their way with information about the next part of the plan. When the characters are ready to move on, read the following text aloud:

Gaddis rises from her seat. "I will wait for you at Broken-Nail Point, on the east end of the docks. I've chartered the Jagged Maw to carry us to our next destination." She raises a finger for emphasis. "But without Morvaen's soul, all is for nothing. Meet me at the ship, but be sure to bring the soul cage with you."

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

The characters complete an important milestone at this point. In addition to experience earned from defeating opponents, divide 25 XP among the characters for each clue they uncovered. If the characters managed to bring Crooked Fletcher back to Gaddis, divide an additional 100 XP among them.

PART 2: ABOARD THE NOCTURNUS

The *Nocturnus* is a massive pirate ship—a galleon with steam-powered side wheels and a trio of masts. She sails the Meredius with hundreds of hands, multiple helljacks, and a complement of mechanithralls but is currently attended by only a skeleton crew of sailors while she sits tied to Blackwater's docks.

The *Nocturnus* is relatively easy to locate: it's the largest vessel currently docked, and its flag bears the distinctive trident symbol of Captain Aiakos.

GENERAL FEATURES

The *Nocturnus* has the following important features:

Lighting. Very little light makes its way into the ship's lower levels during the day, and the decks are cast in constant shadow. The ship's interior is dimly lit by scattered lamps both day and night. During the day, gray light passes through the grimy windows of the captain's cabin.

Sounds and Smells. The ship is poorly maintained. Litter is scattered across most of it, and the air in and around the ship reeks of old blood, sweat, urine, and blasting powder. The steady splash of Belken Bay against the hull is a constant background noise, as is the creaking of the ship's timbers.

Doors. All the doors and hatches inside the *Nocturnus* are made of sturdy wood and banded in iron. They are not locked unless specified. Each door is a Medium object with AC 12, 10 hit points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. A character using thieves' tools can unlock a locked door with a successful DC 12 Dexterity check. Alternatively, a character can break open a locked door with a successful DC 20 Strength check, although doing so produces a great deal of noise that might draw unwanted attention from patrolling sailors.

SNEAKING ABOARD

Sneaking aboard the ship can be challenging. Although most of the crew is on leave in Blackwater, a number of sailors remain aboard and keep watch for intruders. If the characters try to move unnoticed aboard the ship, have them make a group DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) check. If the check succeeds, the characters go unseen for the next minute. If it fails, they are spotted by any patrol or individual pirate they stumble across during the next minute.

If Crooked Fletcher accompanies the characters, he can attempt to cover for them if they're spotted aboard the ship. If this happens, have Fletcher make a Charisma (Deception) check contested by a Wisdom (Insight) check by one of the pirates. If Fletcher wins the contest, he convinces the pirates that the characters are new recruits and then ushers them along before anyone can ask additional questions.

UPPER DECK

The upper deck consists of the main deck, forecastle, aftercastle, captain's cabin, and storeroom.



1. MAIN DECK

Unless the characters choose some unorthodox method of getting aboard, such as crawling through one of the portholes of the gun deck, the main deck is the first part of the *Nocturnus* they'll encounter. A light breeze of salty air blows off the bay, causing the rigging to creak and whip overhead. When the characters finally board the *Nocturnus*, read the following text aloud:

The main deck of the ship stretches over a hundred feet long and is as wide as a broad Blackwater street. A forecastle at the bow and an aftercastle at the stern provide a clear view across the wooden deck. Tarp-covered stacks of crates and water barrels provide numerous hiding places, as do three enormous masts.

Nine **Quay Slayers** patrol the main deck in three groups of three. When the characters arrive, the patrols are located at

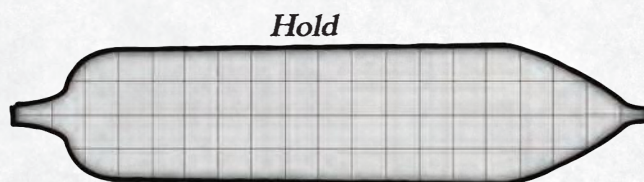
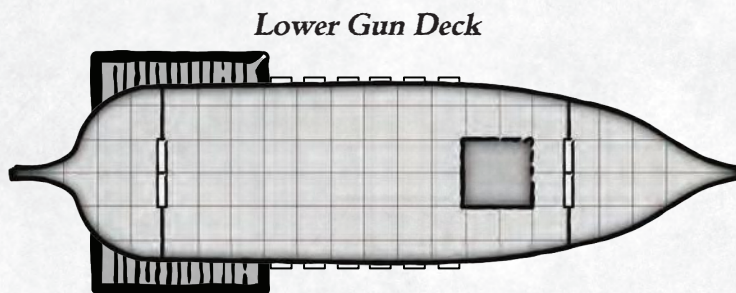
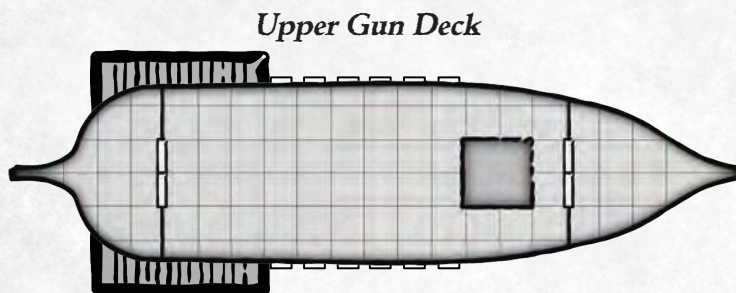
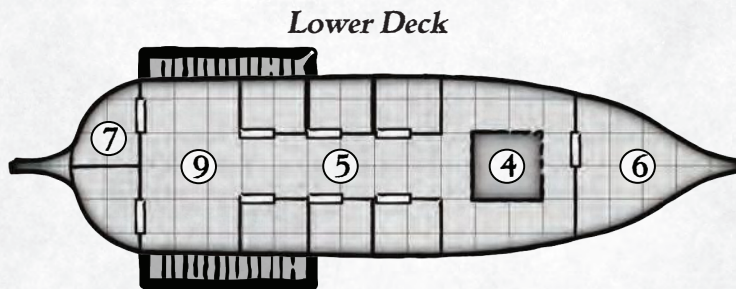
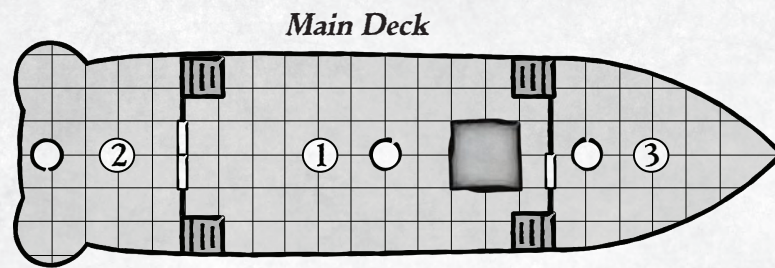
WHAT THE CREW MEMBERS KNOW

If the characters interrogate the *Nocturnus*' crew or otherwise gather information from them, they can learn the following information:

Aiakos will be in the fighting pits for several days, possibly even a week. Once he's had his fill of the arena, the ship will set out to raid along the Broken Coast.

Before departing the ship, Aiakos cautioned the remaining crew to keep an eye out for "Admiralty scum." It's no secret that there's bad blood between the captain and the former rulers of Blackwater.

Aiakos' personal helljack, Kharybdis, is below decks in the ship's hold. The crew were given explicit instructions to keep Kharybdis fueled; in the captain's eyes, the 'jack is the only protector of the *Nocturnus* he can really trust.



The Nocturnus



each of the three areas marked #1 on the map. They circle the main deck clockwise as they conduct their patrols.

Deck Hatch. A hatch set in the deck between the mainmast and foremast leads to area 4. The hatch is heavy and normally opened by multiple crew members. A single character can open the hatch with a successful DC 25 Strength (Athletics) check, or two or more characters can open it by succeeding on a group DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

Forecastle and Aftercastle. Any patrols standing on the ship's forecastle and aftercastle have a good view of the main deck. A character on either castle has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Ship's Bell. A corroded iron bell hangs in the aftercastle, near the ship's wheel. Any character proficient with vehicles (water) knows that this bell is used to signal changes in the watch or to raise the alarm.

If one of the patrols rings the ship's bell, all patrols aboard the ship are alerted to danger and begin actively searching for the characters. A character can disable the bell by dealing any amount of slashing damage to the cord that holds the clapper within it, thereby cutting the clapper free.

Patrols. Although the patrols are supposed to be keeping a close watch over the ship, they're paying little attention—after all, they're poorly compensated pirates who have been left behind while their crewmates enjoy shore leave. If the characters are reckless, make a great deal of noise, or take no effort to conceal themselves, however, the patrols will have no trouble noticing them.

Any patrol that notices the characters is likely to respond violently unless Crooked Fletcher or another character manages to fast-talk through the situation, or if the patrol is offered a suitable bribe worth at least 25 gp per person in the patrol.

2. CAPTAIN'S CABIN

A pair of locked doors beneath the ship's aftercastle leads into the captain's cabin. When the characters enter, read the following text aloud:

This cabin is in utter disarray. Plates with half-eaten meals are stacked in small towers across multiple surfaces, unwashed clothing litters the floor, and even the bed and captain's table are covered with debris. The only objects in the chamber that suggest any semblance of care are an impressive weapons rack mounted to one wall and a dark wooden footlocker set at the foot of the bed.

Footlocker. The footlocker at the foot of the bed is a simple sea chest that appears to have been in use for an extended period. The footlocker is locked, but a character using thieves' tools can pick the lock with a successful DC 12 Dexterity check. A key to the chest lies under some loose pages on the captain's table. Any character who examines the table and succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the key.

In addition to locking the chest, Aiakos has trapped it with a blight-poisoned needle. Spotting the trap requires a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check, after

which a character using thieves' tools can disarm the trap with a successful DC 12 Dexterity check. The trap triggers if someone opens the chest without first disarming the trap.

When triggered, the trap fires a small poisoned dart from the lock. Any creature standing in front of the lock is automatically struck by the needle and takes 1 piercing damage, 5 (1d6 + 2) poison damage, and 2 (1d4) necrotic damage.

The footlocker contains two *potions of healing*, a bag of ten rubies worth 50 gp each, and a cylindrical leather case large enough to contain a soul cage. A character who opens the case discovers that it is empty except for a rolled-up piece of parchment.

O Morvaen, Where Art Thou? Suspecting his first mate of wanting to rob him and not wanting his prized possession to go missing, Aiakos recently moved the soul cage to the safest place he could think of: hanging around the neck of his warjack, Kharybdis. In its place, he has left a note directed to his first mate. When the characters read the note, read the following text aloud:

You thought I was stupid, Morgan, didn't you? Or maybe you thought you were so damn clever. Neither one is a good quality in a first mate.

Either way, I'm on to you. I saw you staring at my prize. You couldn't hide how hungry you were for it. Supposing the legends of his treasure are true, I can't blame you.

You've got one chance, Morgan. I've put the old pirate king with the rest of the loot. The only person I trust is keeping a close watch on it. If you're so damned interested in the soul cage, it's waiting for you in the hold.

Treasure. The interior of the cabin is a disorganized mess. Scraps of loot—small coins, bits of jewelry, unset gemstones, and so forth—worth 75 gp are scattered around on the various surfaces of the room and can be collected by any character who spends 5 minutes searching the cabin.

The navigational charts of the *Nocturnus*' most recent raids are spread across the captain's table. Three places are marked as targets for the ship's next outing: Giant's Head Island, the coastal Cygnaran village of Lauderfall, and Oxtree, a town on the coast of Ord's Bay of Stone. The map also identifies safe passages that avoid the most treacherous areas between Blackwater and the Broken Coast. A character proficient with cartographer's tools can spend 5 minutes duplicating the routes, which can fetch 25 gp from any captain looking to avoid such perils.

3. FORE STOREROOM

A locked wooden door next to the stairs leading to the forecastle provides access to the fore storeroom of the main deck. When the characters enter this room, read the following text aloud:

SEA CHEST CONTENTS

d6 Contents

1	4d6 sp
2	2d4 gems worth 10 gp each
3	1d4 art objects worth 25 gp each
5	6d6 gp
6	A leather-bound book of off-color limericks and crude drawings written in a childish hand on the pages of an alchemist's journal that contains the formula for rust agent

This dark room under the forecastle appears to be used to stow various supplies for maintaining the ship. Rope, sailcloth, and timber are all stacked in tall piles throughout the room, and several barrels—likely extra food and water—line the far wall. The buzzing, snorting snores of an unconscious pirate reach your ears from somewhere within the maze of supplies.

The chamber contains several weeks' worth of supplies: dried meat and cheese, hardtack, barrels of water, and casks of rum. There are also five bolts of sailcloth (20 square yards each), ten 100-foot coils of hempen rope, cords of timber for repairing damage to the hull, and enough tools to create three complete sets of carpenter's tools.

What Shall We Do with a Drunken Sailor? Bosun's mate "Scabby" Bruford (CE human **Quay Slayer thug**) is using a pile of rope and sailcloth as a cot as he shirks his duties and sleeps off a nasty hangover in the storeroom. His loud snores are evident the moment any character enters the chamber.

Attached to Scabby's belt is a ring of keys that open any of the doors on the lower deck. A character who wants to take the keys without waking Scabby must make a DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check. If the check succeeds, the character takes the keys without waking the pirate. If the check fails, the character manages to take the keys but wakes Scabby in the process, causing the pirate to jolt awake with bleary eyes and slurred speech. Due to his hangover, Scabby has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks, just as if he were poisoned.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

Divide 100 XP among the characters if they overpower Scabby or manage to steal his keys without his noticing.

LOWER DECK

Stairs near the aftercastle and the cargo hatch in the center of the main deck lead to the lower deck of the *Nocturnus*. There is little light below decks other than a scattering of lamps, each burning with a low flame, and the lower deck is dimly lit.

There are eight pirates (CE human **Quay Slayers**) on the lower decks: a ship's cook working in the galley, two locked in the brig, and five resting in the crew quarters.

4. CREW'S QUARTERS

The large, dimly lit expanse of the crew's quarters takes up the majority of the lower deck. When the characters enter this area, read the following text aloud:

The stink of unwashed bodies permeates this large chamber. Rows of hammocks hang in the space like dirty laundry on the line, piles of blankets litter the floor, and rats scamper from place to place in search of food. A pair of wooden tables and benches are fixed to the floor near the stern of the common space, stacked with filthy plates of half-eaten food. Rats on each table hungrily devour the scraps left behind, dim lamplight gleaming off their eyes.

The crew's quarters are a messy sprawl of hanging hammocks, filth, nests of blankets, and rats. A **swarm of rats** is on each table in the rear of the chamber. The rats are occupied with eating what they can and are not hostile, but they will defend themselves if attacked or if the characters try to get them away from their meals.

Five pirates (CE human **Quay Slayers**) are sleeping here in hammocks. The pirates will not wake if they are not disturbed, but anyone who engages in combat with the rats immediately awakens them—confused and a bit bleary-eyed but ready to defend the ship if needed. Awakened Quay Slayers investigate any disturbances they hear in the lower decks.

Canvas satchels near each set of hammocks contain the crew's spare clothing. These greasy, threadbare items are worthless, but there are enough of them for each character to don a set of pirate clothes in an effort to pass as a member of the crew.

5. OFFICER'S QUARTERS

Each of the six small rooms at the aft of the lower deck belongs to one of the ship's officers. The door to each room is locked. Each room includes a bunk affixed to a wall, a small sea chest, a writing desk, and a lamp.

Sea Chests. Each chest is locked, but a character using thieves' tools can pick the lock with a successful DC 12 Dexterity check. Each chest contains a suit of traveling clothes in finer condition than those found in the crew quarters, along with several personal items. To determine a chest's additional contents, roll twice on the Trinkets table in chapter 4 of *Iron Kingdoms: Nightmare Empire* and once on the Sea Chest Contents table below.

6. OFFICERS' MESS

A fine dark oak table fills the center of this narrow room. Six chairs, each of different make and exquisite manufacture, stand at each of the six place settings. The utensils, cups, and plates on the table appear to be made of fine silver.

The officers of the *Nocturnus* take their meals in this room. It is cleaner than the crew's tables and the captain's cabin, but that isn't saying much. Greasy stains cover the long wooden table, which has been nicked and gouged hundreds of times over the years.

Treasure. The table in the galley has six place settings. Unlike the cheap tin plates and cups elsewhere in the ship, each of these items is made of pure silver. The utensils, cups, and plates are of various styles, having been looted from numerous ships. The silver settings are worth 10 gp each.

7. GALLEY AND PANTRY

This chamber serves double duty as the ship's galley and pantry. A coal-fired iron stove heats the room to a sweltering temperature, and the rancid smell of bad meat, spoiling fruits and vegetables, and unwashed dishes fills the air.

The ship's cook, Edek Gutbellow (NE blighted trollkin **Quay Slayer thug**), is preparing a meal of boiled groats and fish parts for the crew left aboard the *Nocturnus*. Any character with a passive Perception of 12 or higher automatically smells the stomach-churning scent of the meal from the hall. Otherwise, a character must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the scent and hear the clattering of pots in the galley.

Edek leaves the galley to investigate any disturbances he hears in the lower decks. The cook is particularly protective of his galley.

8. BRIG

The brig is a small space near the stern of the ship. (Because the crews of the Scharde Islands favor more immediate methods of punishment, most pirate brigs are quite small.) When the characters enter this area, read the following text aloud:

The cramped, dank interior of the brig contains a single holding cell. A pair of bedraggled prisoners—a man and a woman—are held captive inside, shackled to the far wall. The prisoners' attention is consumed by a pair of roaches scurrying across the floor.

"Come on, Grackle, you greasy little bastard!" the man shouts. "Don't listen to him, Charlie! You've got this!" the woman cries in return.

Cell Door. Breaking open the cell door requires a successful DC 25 Strength (Athletics) check, but doing so creates a great deal of noise, which draws the attention of Edek Gutbellow in area 7 and the Quay Slayers in area 4.

A key to the cells hangs from Edek's belt. He was given the key so that he could feed the prisoners. "Scabby" Bruford's key ring also includes a key for the cells.

Prisoners. Two pirates (NE human **Quay Slayers**) are locked in the brig. Alger the Blacktooth and Cara Shivers were thrown into the brig after a failed attempt to rob the bosun's cabin. They were to be sold at the Meat Market when the *Nocturnus* returned to Blackwater, but their former crewmates forgot about the prisoners in their haste to get some shore leave.

When the characters enter the brig, the imprisoned pirates are distracting themselves by watching a pair of roaches scurry across the room and taking bets on which insect will

TOO MUCH TO HANDLE

Kharybdis is a significant danger to the characters. The helljack is likely well above their experience level and could prove a deadly encounter for most groups, but its instructions are to protect the treasure hoard, not to pursue or destroy any intruders. It has no interest in killing the characters and breaks off its attack if it does not consider them a threat to the objects it's protecting.

If it looks like the characters are in danger of being destroyed by the helljack, feel free to tell them the machine appears to be interested only in the treasure, like a protective beast keeping watch over a clutch of eggs. Most of all, reward any clever ploys or improvisation the players come up with when confronting the helljack. Although Kharybdis is intended to be a terrifying opponent, it's a simple-minded one that follows the instructions it was given and has little ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

Should Kharybdis simply prove too much for the characters to overcome, you can avoid killing them by having any returning Quay Slayers find their unconscious forms in the hold and pitch them into the brig, as described in the "Apprehended" sidebar.

reach a crumb of hardtack on the floor first—essentially "racing" the pests. Use the following information to guide any interactions with the prisoners:

Both want to escape the brig, since they're doomed otherwise.

Alger is willing to cause a distraction for the characters if they free him. If he does so, he can draw off two of the patrolling Quay Slayers from either the lower or upper deck.

Cara is afraid of Edek, the ship's cook. The trollkin has made not-so-subtle comments about turning her into a stew and feeding her to her old shipmates. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check discovers that Cara's fear of Edek is genuine. If the trollkin is not defeated, she will seek him out and inform him of the characters' presence in an effort to save herself. A character who succeeded on the initial DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check can convince Cara not to reveal the characters by succeeding on a DC 12 Charisma (Intimidation) or Charisma (Persuasion) check. If the characters have already defeated Edek, this check is automatically successful.

9. ENGINE, BOILER, AND COAL ROOM

The engine room contains the massive steam engine that powers the *Nocturnus'* sidewheels. A connected chamber stores the tons of coal needed to fuel it. When the characters enter this area, read the following text aloud:

The main chamber contains an enormous steam engine. Open doorways to port and starboard lead into smaller areas: one containing a massive reserve of coal, and another with a huge brass boiler.

This area consists of three rooms: an engine room, a boiler room, and a coal room.

Engine Room. Two **mechanithralls** altered for labor sit idle in the engine room. They attack any intruders not dressed as Quay Slayers.

Boiler Room. The ship's main boiler is a 10-foot-wide, 15-foot-tall cylinder of brass. Gauges on its face indicate its current temperature and pressure. A character proficient with tinker's tools or a mechanic's toolkit can identify the array of controls and valves that regulate the boiler. A character who identifies the controls can release excess steam from the boiler, filling the entire room with a haze of steam that lightly obscures the area.

Coal Room. A mountain of several tons of coal fills this small room. Soot-covered shovels hang inside the door.

GUN DECK

The gun deck is split into upper and lower levels connected by ladders. Batteries of cannons line both sides of each level, with round shot, blasting powder, and fuse ready at each station. Each hatch along the deck is a 2-foot-wide square.

THE HOLD

The main cargo hold of the *Nocturnus* is where its most recent hoard of treasure is stored. This would represent a significant windfall to the characters if they managed to secure even a portion of it, but there is one problem: Aiakos' ferocious and doggedly loyal helljack, Kharybdis. When the characters enter the hold, read the following text aloud:

This vast, cavernous space holds the ill-gotten goods of the Nocturnus. Piles of crates and barrels under oilcloth line the sides of the chamber in piles five and ten feet tall. The true riches of piracy are piled in a scattered heap in the center of the space: coins, gems, goblets, and other riches. Crouched over the pile is a glistening helljack of black iron and tarnished brass, its long steel tentacles curled covetously around the treasure. A soul cage on an iron chain hangs from the machine's neck like a medallion.

APPREHENDED

If the characters are captured, they are thrown in the brig of the *Nocturnus*. From there, they have a few options to free themselves.

Persuasion. Being pirates, the captors are easily swayed by bribery. A character can convince one of the crew to free them in exchange for a share of the treasure by succeeding on a Charisma (Deception) or Charisma (Persuasion) check contested by the pirate's Wisdom (Insight) check.

Help from Allies. If the characters previously rescued the pirates imprisoned in the brig, it's possible one of the pirates will return the favor. If Alger or Cara returns to free the characters, the former prisoner declares that this makes the two parties even and that the characters shouldn't expect such assistance in the future.

The Sea Witch's Rescue. Although Gaddis is reluctant to come to the characters' aid because doing so would put her in danger of being recognized by the Quay Slayers, if the characters fail to escape on their own, she casts *dominate person* on a member of the ship's crew and has the pirate liberate the characters from the brig.

THE DWELLER IN DARKNESS

Kharybdis, Aiakos' bonded helljack, is a one-of-a-kind piece of necromechanika. Constructed for the former lich lord Daemortus, it was thought lost to the Meredius for decades until Aiakos dredged it up from the sea. After restoring the machine, the pirate warcaster used it to hunt down and slay Craethen Morvaen, then took his place as ruler of Blackwater.

Kharybdis sits motionless atop the treasure hoard in the center of the cargo hold, but it is not inert. Any character who enters the hold and succeeds on a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the dull glow of burning necrotite in the helljack's firebox and a whisper of smoke coming from its stacks and is not surprised when it attacks—which happens the moment a character comes within its reach.

The helljack fights to protect the treasure hoard and wears the soul cage of Craethen Morvaen like a necklace around its neck. A character can break the chain holding the soul cage and take the object from Kharybdis' neck by hitting the helljack with an unarmed strike and then succeeding on a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check.

Although Kharybdis will focus its attacks against any character who ends up in possession of the soul cage, it is not suicidal. If the helljack drops to less than a quarter of its total hit points, it attempts to flee the combat, firing black ink to blind the closest target before releasing an acid cloud and scuttling for the cargo hatch.

TREASURE

The treasure hoard in the hold contains 400 sp, 90 gp, five art objects worth 25 gp each, and a symbol of Ascendant Corbhen (treat as a periapt of health). In addition to the hoard protected by Kharybdis, the ship's hold contains the following cargo:

Fifty bolts of sailcloth worth 25 sp each

Thirty cases of rare spices worth 20 gp each

Fifteen casks of Ordric rum worth 7 gp each

DEVELOPMENT

If the characters successfully claim the soul cage from Kharybdis, any surviving crew members aboard the *Nocturnus* are on alert, if they weren't already. The characters will need to rely on either combat prowess or stealth to make their way off the ship and back to the docks.

If the characters fail to escape or fall in combat, the crew of the *Nocturnus* haul their unconscious bodies to the brig, and you should consult the "Apprehended" sidebar for guidance on how to proceed. Otherwise, the characters can make their way to the eastern docks of Blackwater, where the disguised witch Gaddis Niall awaits their arrival.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

The characters complete an important milestone at this point. In addition to awarding XP earned from defeating opponents, divide 1,100 XP among the characters if they drove off Kharybdis. For each Quay Slayer the characters successfully deceived or snuck past, award XP as if they had defeated those NPCs.



PART 3: ACROSS BLACK WATERS

In this section, the characters must cross the water of Belken Bay to reach the Catacombs, an area set high on the cliff walls surrounding Blackwater. Gaddis has secured a small caravel, the *Jagged Maw*, which can carry them to the entrances to the Catacombs. (See appendix N for the ship's stats.) Not long after leaving the dock, however, the *Jagged Maw* comes under attack from a hostile ship.

Although this section of the adventure doesn't account for as much time as some of the others, it is no less perilous. Shortly after the characters leave aboard their hired vessel, their foes set upon them. The adventure assumes that the pursuers are members of the Admiralty, but depending on the characters' actions through the story so far, you can easily substitute Quay Slayers for their counterparts among the Admiralty.

At the start of the pursuit, the *Jagged Maw* is 50 to 150 feet away from the pursuing vessel (short range). Depending on the complications the characters must overcome, this distance will fluctuate during the pursuit.

The pursuit ends if the *Jagged Maw* can increase the distance between the ships to at least 1,500 feet (long range), if the pursuing vessel is disabled or destroyed, or if the pursuing vessel initiates a boarding action.

ALL HANDS ON DECK

When the characters arrive at Broken-Nail Point, they find Gaddis preparing for departure. Read the following text aloud:

The witch paces back and forth across the warped and gray timbers of the easternmost pier of Blackwater's docks. She walks in the shadow of a small sailing ship. Faded, whitewashed letters on the ship's hull mark it as the Jagged Maw—an appropriate name, judging by the alchemically preserved hull grinder's jaw that serves as its figurehead.

When the sea witch spots the characters, she rushes to them, eagerly inquiring about the pirate king's soul cage. If the characters managed to recover the soul cage, Gaddis is elated and asks to see it for herself. Given the opportunity, she strokes her fingertips across the surface of the cage, smiling to herself and saying that the characters have given her a key to her grandest dreams. If Kharybdis fled before the characters could gain possession of the soul cage, however, the witch is much less gracious. She scowls with disappointment and informs the characters that the way ahead is going to be much, much more difficult. A successful

DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that the sea witch is silently seething and furious at them but is going out of her way to not appear as such.

HEADING OUT

Whether the characters succeeded or failed in their effort to reclaim the soul cage, Gaddis impresses upon them that time is of the essence. The Quay Slayers will not take kindly to the characters' actions, and if the other gangs in Blackwater catch wind of their plans, the whole port might come down on them. She hurries aboard the *Jagged Maw* and urges the characters to follow suit.

OTHER GANGS, OTHER FOES

This adventure assumes that the Admiralty gang is pursuing the characters, but it could just as easily be a gang of Quay Slayers who have learned of the assault on the *Nocturnus* and seek Morvaen's soul cage to gain favor with Captain Aiakos. In fact, any gang the characters have interacted with in Blackwater, be they the Dragon Fish, the gladiators from the fighting pits, or a gang of your own creation, could have heard about the characters' interaction with Gaddis and decided to chase them down in pursuit of vengeance or ill-gotten gains.

THE ADMIRALTY ATTACKS

As the *Jagged Maw* pulls away from Blackwater's docks and heads for the Catacombs across the bay, another ship moves into pursuit: the *Chase*. When you're ready to announce the pursuers' presence, read the following text aloud:

As the Jagged Maw slips from Blackwater's docks and into Belken Bay, a commotion rises from a nearby slip. Several pirates toss mooring lines from the piers and scramble aboard their own ship, a small but nimble vessel named the Chase. The ship lurches from the port as its sails unfurl, its crew howling with bloodthirsty excitement. Alarmingly, the ship appears to be on a course heading straight for you.

The pursuit takes place over several minutes. During each minute, the ships' crews have different challenges to contend with, as described in the "Pursuit Complications" section below. If the pursuers are not lost or defeated before the *Jagged Maw* reaches the Catacombs, Gaddis demands that the characters turn about and confront the enemy, as she does not want to lead a rival gang straight to Morvaen's treasure.

SHIP TACTICS

The *Chase* tries to stay behind and slightly to the left or right of the *Jagged Maw* and opens fire with its battery of long nines. When it is within close range of the *Jagged Maw*, its marines ready grapples and lines in preparation for a boarding action.

Unless the *Chase* is close enough at the start of its turn to conduct a boarding action, it does the following during each naval combat phase:

RUNNING THE CHASE

The Scoundrel's Guide to the Scharde Islands contains rules for naval engagements in the Iron Kingdoms. You can use those rules or any naval combat rules offered in another source. If you do not have access to such sources, you can run this encounter as a simple chase.



Phase 1 (Maneuver and Move): The *Chase* uses the Outrun/Pursue maneuver.

Phase 2 (Action): If the *Chase* is within grappling range of the *Jagged Maw*, it takes the Board action, as described in the “Boarding Action” section below. If not, it takes the Attack action if it has a clear line of sight to fire and the Dash action if it doesn’t.

Phase 3 (Bonus Action): The *Chase*’s crew takes the Repair Hull action.

BOARDING ACTION

Once the *Chase* is close enough to the *Jagged Maw*, its marines sling their grapples and attempt a boarding action. The boarding marines open with a volley of pistol fire from the gunwale before attempting to leap aboard the *Jagged Maw*.

Boarding Party. The boarding party consists of four **Scharde pirates**. Two pirates pair up to attack the most dangerous-looking characters on the *Jagged Maw* while the rest hold back and fire their pistols from the gunwale.

PURSUIT COMPLICATIONS

During the pursuit, you can throw some complications at the characters to make things more interesting. At the end of each turn of the chase, roll a d20 for both the *Jagged Maw* and the *Chase*, then consult the Complications table to determine what complications, if any, arise for each party.

RIGHT OF WAY

Belken Bay is a busy harbor. Ships both large and small move about the bay at all times, and the captains of these ships rely on the code of “right of way” to avoid collisions.

During the first minute of the pursuit, a challenge presents itself in the form of a Cryxian warship heading for the docks. Any character proficient in vehicles (water) recognizes that the larger vessel has the right of way and will not alter course to avoid a crash.

To avoid hitting the larger vehicle, the ship’s pilot must make a DC 14 maneuver check. If the check succeeds, the ship does not collide with the larger vessel, and the other vessel in the chase can’t fire at it for one round due to the obstruction. If the check fails, the ship takes 45 (10d8) bludgeoning damage. If the *Jagged Maw* fails this check, the *Chase* moves one range closer. If the *Chase* fails this check, the *Jagged Maw* moves one range further away.

JOYRIDERS

Many of the youngest members of Blackwater’s gangs enjoy harassing ships in the harbor. Seven **Scharde pirates**

COMPLICATIONS

d20	Complication
1–5	Right of Way
6	Joyriders
7–8	Flotsam
9	Warning Fire
10	The Beast of Belken Bay
11–20	No complication

on sailboards close in on the ship, looking to joyride from its hull.

Each gang member throws a grappling hook (+4 to hit) to snare the ship. For each gang member that successfully snares the ship, the ship's pilot takes a -1 penalty to maneuver checks due to the additional drag imposed by the sailboards. While the sailboards are attached to the ship, the gang members perform stunts in the vessel's wake, cheer, shout, and demand that the snared vessel go faster.

Dealing at least 1 slashing damage to a grappling line (AC 14) cuts the line.

FLOTSAM

The sailors who visit Blackwater are not cautious about the trash they fling from their ships. Debris from the Barrel Branch channel is brought in by the tides, creating a challenging passage for those who want to move quickly.

A patch of debris floats in the ship's path. The ship's pilot must make a DC 12 maneuver check. If the check fails, the ship plows through the patch and gets fouled on bits of trailing line, snarls of debris, and so forth, and the pilot's next maneuver check is made with disadvantage. If the check succeeds, the ship avoids running afoul of the debris.

WARNING FIRE

Erratic activity in the harbor makes other captains and the coastal defenders of Blackwater nervous. In order to dissuade such actions and knock some sense into wayward pilots, ships and coastal batteries have been known to fire warning shots at ships operating in an out-of-the-ordinary way.

One of the larger ships in the harbor or one of the coastal batteries on the cliffs above Belken Bay fires a volley of warning shots at the offending ship. Any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 12 or higher hears the distinct whine of cannon shots raining down a moment before an enormous geyser erupts near the ship.

The volley's impact turns the water treacherous. The ship's pilot must make a DC 12 maneuver check. If the check succeeds, the pilot maintains control of the ship without incident. If the check fails, each creature aboard the vessel must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone and take 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage from being knocked around as the ship passes over the suddenly turbulent water.

The first shot is a warning, but the next one isn't. If this complication is rolled more than once for a single ship, then the warning shots from the gunnery crew or the coastal battery become deliberate attacks. Use the stats for a 24-pound cannon battery (+4 to hit, 6d12 bludgeoning damage).

THE BEAST OF BELKEN BAY

The commotion of the chase attracts the attention of a **hull grinder**. Characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 13 or higher notice a shape sweeping under the water to one side of the ship. If they then succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, they spot a monstrous sea creature rising from the depths, headed directly toward the ship.

Any character who fails to notice the hull grinder is surprised when it batters the ship and must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone from the impact.

The hull grinder uses its Spinal Scourge trait against the ship for three rounds before it loses interest in its potential prey. It breaks off its attack sooner if it takes 50 damage or more, takes any damage from critical hit, or takes any fire damage.

ARRIVING AT THE CATACOMBS

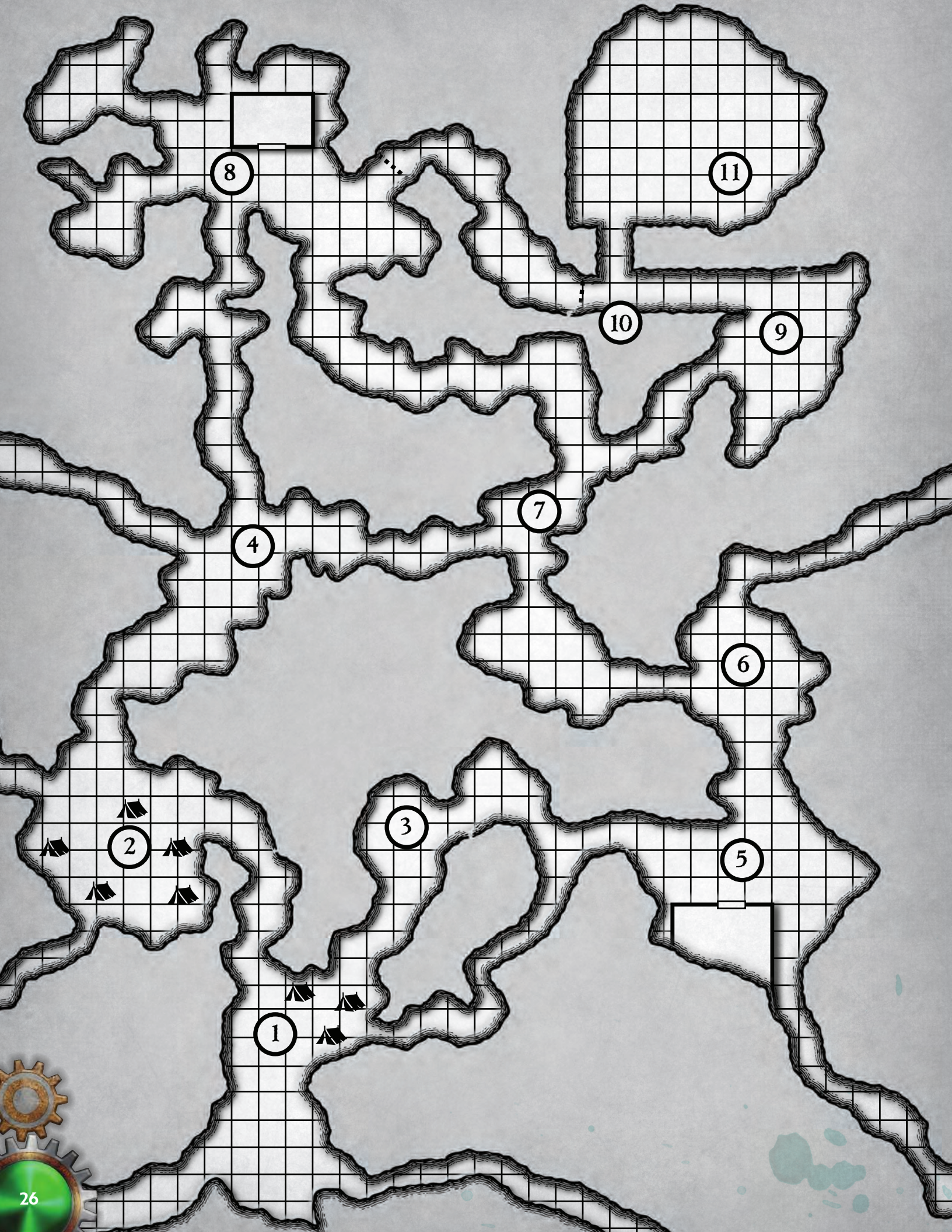
Once the characters evade their pursuers or defeat them in combat, nothing else stands between them and the caves bored into the cliffs of Belken Bay: the Catacombs. When they arrive at their destination, read the following text aloud:

The surf of the bay splashes violently against the sheer cliffs that shelter the harbor. Across the algae-slick face of the nearest cliff, dozens of small caverns bore deep into the rock. Some have the faint glow of lanterns illuminating them, while others are lightless pits.

Gaddis points to a small sandbar near the cliff's base, which sits just below a large, dark tunnel in the cliff face. "There! Lower the anchor and ready a rowboat. That is where we will enter the Catacombs!"

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

The characters complete an important milestone at this point. Divide 2,400 XP among them once they arrive at the Catacombs, in addition to any XP earned from defeating opponents.



PART 4: INTO THE CATACOMBS

The Catacombs are a vast network of tunnels and caverns carved into the western cliff faces of Blackwater. This labyrinth extends for hundreds of miles, many of them lightless, unmapped paths. It is a common hiding place for bandit gangs and rogue necromancers, along with the utter dregs of Blackwater society—outcasts so shunned they have been deemed unfit to dwell even in the ramshackle shanties in the port.

The Catacombs are also the resting place of Morvaen's trove of stolen wealth, carefully hidden from those who would claim it.

SPEAK OF THE DEAD

If the characters managed to recover Morvaen's soul cage, Gaddis begins preparing a final ritual shortly after making landfall on the sandbar at the cliff base. She quickly explains that the ritual will allow the characters to commune with the soul of Craethen Morvaen. Requesting the soul cage, she scribes a circle of runes in the sand and kneels in its center. Any character who studies the runes can make a DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check to learn more about them. If the check succeeds, the character recognizes elements of a necromantic ritual meant to bind an errant soul to Caen for a short time.

Once her preparation is complete, Gaddis opens the soul cage and inhales some of the glowing, ephemeral spiritual essence of the dead pirate king. Read the following text aloud:

The sea witch's body goes stiff, and her back arches as the essence of the dead pirate enters her body. Her eyes glow a brilliant green, and her posture gradually changes to that of another person. Looking around at your faces, the witch speaks in a strange way—one that combines her now-familiar voice with the deeper echo of a masculine speaker.
"How long have I been dead?"

The characters can speak with Morvaen through Gaddis. The pirate king is eager to hear about what has transpired in Blackwater since his death and is particularly curious about the state of the Admiralty. Use the following information to guide the conversation with Morvaen's spirit:

Morvaen has had limited knowledge of his surroundings since his death. He is aware that the warcaster Aiakos killed him but knows little else that has happened since then.

The treasure hoard was meant to be an emergency fund if Morvaen ever felt he needed to flee Blackwater. He regrets never having had a chance to use it.

Other than himself, few others knew the location of his treasure. One was "Grand Admiral" Dehra Vennig, his second in command among the Admiralty gang.

Morvaen's vault lies deep in an isolated part of the Catacombs. It was previously occupied by a few insane necrotechs, a handful of squatters, and other dross from Blackwater, but he doubts any of them would have been able to overcome the wards placed on the treasure or bypass the

traps leading to it.

If asked about the traps, Morvaen doesn't remember too many specifics—being dead for years will do that—but he recalls a hallway lined with security measures to poison, burn, and cut those who entered.

The ritual expires after 5 minutes. When it does, Gaddis collapses from the effort of channeling Morvaen's spirit. She urges the characters to move on without her and says that she will follow them once she's recovered.

CHARACTER LEVEL

This chapter is designed for characters of at least 3rd level and assumes that each character has earned at least 900 XP. If the characters are not yet 3rd level, the encounters in the Catacombs might be too challenging for them.

GENERAL FEATURES

The Catacombs are dark, damp, and surprisingly noisy. The pounding waves that strike the sea caves beneath Belken Bay's waters echo constantly, drowning out other sounds in the area. A character who attempts to hear noises in nearby tunnels and chambers must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check.

Ceilings. Unless otherwise noted, all tunnels and caverns have sloping ceilings that range between 20 and 30 feet high. Stalactites dot the ceilings of larger caverns.

Doors. Certain chambers have doors made of pitted iron. Unless otherwise noted, doors are unlocked. A character using thieves' tools can unlock a locked door with a successful DC 12 Dexterity check. Alternatively, a character can break open a locked door with a successful DC 20 Strength check.

Light. The Catacombs are unlit unless otherwise indicated. Most of the area's denizens have other means of seeing in the dark. All descriptions in boxed text assume that the characters have light sources or darkvision.

Side Passages. Numerous narrow fissures, most too small for even a goblin to squeeze through, lead off in different directions, including into other areas of the Catacombs. The area the characters will explore in this chapter represents a tiny fraction of the greater labyrinth of passages that make up the Catacombs. Characters near these fissures can hear distant noises of combat, chatters of mad laughter, and the noises of subterranean creatures echoing through the wider expanse of this underground network of caves and tunnels.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE CATACOMBS

Threats of all kinds travel through all areas of the Catacombs. Blighted creatures native to the island, isolated necromancers, rogue alchemists, and bandit gangs all call the Catacombs home, lairing in natural or manufactured chambers under the cliffside. As the characters move through the Catacombs, they should believe that dangers lurk around every bend of the tunnels and hide in every shadow.

If the characters get lost in the Catacombs or spend an extended period in a given area, you can check for wandering monsters by rolling a d20. On a roll of 16–20, an encounter

CATACOMBS ENCOUNTERS

d10 Encounter

1-3	3 (1d4+1) mechanithralls
4-6	7 (2d6) risen thralls
7	1 swarm of devil rats
8	1 buzzard beetle swarm
9	1 bandit captain and 2 (1d4) bandits
10	1 thrullg

takes place. Conversely, if the players seem restless, you can decide that an encounter occurs. Roll on the Catacombs Encounters table to determine what the characters encounter, or choose an encounter from the table.

Not all creatures the characters encounter need to be hostile. Some might simply be inhabitants of the Catacombs, lost in them, or hiding out.

1. ENTRANCE TUNNEL

The tunnel leading into the Catacombs is 30 feet wide and slopes gently downward into the Catacombs. Waves and fluctuating tides occasionally swamp the tunnel with water from Belken Bay, and small tide pools spread throughout the tunnel are home to sea urchins, crabs, and other small wildlife. When the characters enter the tunnel, read the following text aloud:

The tunnel slopes gently downward as it leads into the Catacombs. Signs of high tide mark almost every surface near the opening: barnacles grow on the rocks, and small pools full of sea life dot the cave floor. A small encampment is perched on a stone shelf near the back of the tunnel, where shelters made of broken timber and tattered scraps of sailcloth form small and rudimentary tents.

A loose family of Blackwater urchins—primarily humans, bogrin, and gobbers—have set up a small camp near the back of the tunnel, sustaining themselves on whatever they can catch in the tidepools.

The leader of the urchins is a young woman named Pip the Needle (chaotic neutral human **commoner**). Pip's family is her primary concern, and she tries to avoid antagonizing the characters. If she gets the sense that the characters have money, she offers her assistance as a local guide to the Catacombs (see the "Navigation" sidebar) for 2 gp per day. Due to her familiarity with the Catacombs, Pip has advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks made to navigate the area.

Pip does not participate in any combat and will take the Hide action whenever possible during combat. She warns the characters about the bandits in area 2, who use the entrance tunnel whenever they please—and who have threatened Pip if she attempts to stop them from doing so.

2. BANDIT HIDEOUT

As the characters move into this cavern, they discover a gang of bandits lying low after kidnapping a few drunks from Blackwater. Read the following text aloud:

You spot a small camp of patchwork tents in the cavern ahead. Several leather-clad figures sit around a low fire, roasting an ugly fish on a spit. A woman with scars covering her blight-pocked face sharpens a hooked axe with a piece of stone. Three figures with sacks covering their heads are trussed up next to her.

If the characters do not announce their presence, they have a chance to surprise the outlaws, a down-on-their-luck gang of four **bandits** (CN humans) led by Maggie Hatch (CE human **bandit captain**). The characters can attempt to move deeper into the cavern by making a group Dexterity (Stealth) check contested by the bandits' passive Wisdom (Perception) score. If the bandits notice the characters, they assume that their captives' friends have come to attempt a rescue and move to attack.



The Captives. The three captives are members of the Dragon Fish gang. Maggie hoped to ransom the trio back to their leader for 25 gp a head—enough coin to hire passage out of Blackwater and to Five Fingers.

If the characters free the captives, they introduce themselves as Thoughtless Jayne, Blond Jack, and Gibber Bones (CN human **Scharde pirates**). The three had spent a night drinking copious amounts of brandy and rum in Blackwater and woke up in the cavern with sacks over their heads. The Dragon Fish just want to get out of the Catacombs and back to their gang, but a character can convince them to join the expedition by succeeding on a DC 16 Charisma (Intimidation) or Charisma (Persuasion) check. The Dragon Fish have no weapons of their own but can use any weapons taken from the fallen bandits.

If the characters choose to let the Dragon Fish go, the trio promise that they'll let their fellow gang members know that the characters are to be left alone while in Blackwater and are not to be sold to the Meat Market. For the rest of the time they spend in Blackwater, the Dragon Fish gang will not cause any trouble for the characters—unless, of course, the characters give them a new reason to do so.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

In addition to awarding XP earned from defeating opponents, divide 1,000 XP evenly among the characters if they defeat the bandits. If they free the captives, award them a bonus of 100 XP.

3. RAZORBAT ROOST

This large cavern is home to a colony of razorbats. When the characters enter the area, read the following text aloud:

The leathery flapping of wings and shrill cries of bats echo from a flock of roosting bats hanging overhead. The emaciated body of a young human lies face-down in the center of the cave, one bloodied hand clutched protectively around a small object.

A **razorbat swarm** hangs from the ceiling of this cavern. The razorbats are fiercely protective of this chamber and will attack anyone they notice moving below. The body on the floor of the cave is that of a pickpocket from Blackwater who

stumbled into the chamber and fell victim to the slashing bats. She was a member of Pip the Needle's family and is clutching a stolen *dragon coin*. Any character who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (History) check recognizes the coin as an arcane token of the Dragonfather.

4. CAVEWORT CAVERN

Cavewort is commonplace in the Catacombs. This corrosive fungus is a useful alchemical resource but can be deadly to those who try to harvest it. When the characters enter this area, read the following text aloud:

The irregular walls of this cave glisten with a dark, algae-like substance, and the air is filled with an acrid scent that overpowers the constant smells of dampness and salt found elsewhere in the Catacombs. The bodies of several small humanoids litter the floor, the flesh long since stripped from their small bones.

A family of blighted bogrin came to the cavern to harvest its cavewort. Unfortunately for them, their lack of caution allowed the fungal growths to slaughter them all.

A character who takes a close look at the fungus upon entering the cavern can make a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check. If the check succeeds, the character recognizes the distinctive pattern of cavewort growing on the cavern's walls and ceiling.

Cavewort. Cavewort is a thick, sticky mat of fungus that grows on caverns and abandoned structures. When a warm-blooded creature ventures near cavewort, the fungus extends clumps of long, sticky tendrils in an attempt to ensnare its prey. Prey is digested in place, leaving nothing but bones and other debris behind.

Small patches of the corrosive sludge cling to the walls of the cavern, but a 10-foot-square patch of it clings to the ceiling over the skeletons. Any warm-blooded creature that investigates the bodies must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw to avoid being injured by the cavewort. The creature takes 9 (2d8) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Dealing any fire damage to a patch of cavewort destroys it.

Bogrin Corpses. There are four bodies in the cavern. Each body has 1d4 vials of cavewort (treat as alchemist's acid) and 5 (2d4) gp. The largest of the four bodies also has a *potion of acid resistance*, tragically unconsumed.

5. NECROMANCER'S CAVE

The Catacombs are home to all manner of odd inhabitants. This chamber is the dwelling of Kracia the Stitcher (NE Satyxis **necromancer**). When the characters enter the area, read the following text aloud:

This cavern is wide and damp, and its low ceiling is covered in glowing fungus. Oddly, a small hovel has been erected against its back wall.

DRAGON COIN

Wondrous item, Rare (requires attunement)

This blight-tainted coin was minted in Skell, the capital of the Nightmare Empire. Tempered in blighted blood in the shadow of Toruk's Citadel, it bestows a sliver of the Dragonfather's blessings on those who bear it—but the Dragonfather is fickle.

A creature who is attuned to the coin can tap into its power as a reaction before making an ability check, skill check, or saving throw. The creature then rolls a d4. On an odd result, the check or saving throw takes a penalty equal to the number rolled. On an even result, the check or saving throw gains a bonus equal to the number rolled. The coin regains this ability at the next sunset.

Kracia and her current batch of thralls (two **risen thralls** and one **thrall warrior**) currently occupy the chamber. The necromancer is suspicious of any intruders and ready to fight anyone who intrudes upon her domain, but a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces her that the characters are not interested in harming her.

Doorbells. Kracia has strung a simple trap across the entryway to her cavern to alert her to intruders: a thin tripwire attached to bells on the ceiling of her home. A character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher automatically spots the tripwire, and any character who is actively searching for traps spots it on a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check. Once spotted, the tripwire is easily avoided and disarmed (no ability check required).

Any creature that walks through the entrance without avoiding the tripwire alerts Kracia to the creature's presence. The necromancer assumes that the bandits from area 2 have come to harass her and orders her thralls to attack while she slips away through the side passage in her cave.

Side Passage. A small tunnel behind Kracia's shack leads down and out of the Catacombs. The necromancer uses a small, camouflaged rowboat on the beach outside the tunnel to travel to Blackwater when she needs supplies.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters defeat the thralls or convince Kracia they are not interested in attacking her, divide 550 XP evenly among them.

6. PIT OF DISCARDED THRALLS

This chamber is where Kracia discards thralls that fail to meet her standards, that have been badly damaged, or that have simply annoyed her. When the characters enter this area, read the following text aloud:

The floor of this cave is almost fifteen feet lower than the surrounding chambers. In its center, a dozen skeletal and rotting bodies shuffle around aimlessly, trampling on top of more discarded bodies. Some are missing limbs, and many bear the marks of battle: holes punched through torsos, missing jaws, axe wounds that split faces in half, and so on.

A **swarm of risen thralls** occupies the cave, with the inert bodies of dozens more littered across the floor. Despite having been discarded by their maker and pitched into what amounts to a garbage pit, they have been instructed to stop any intruders who try to sneak past them. Lacking any other instructions, the swarm moves around the chamber whenever it detects an intrusion and attacks as a single mob, whether the intruder is something as large as a humanoid or as small as a rat.

Climbing out of the pit requires a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.



TREASURE

Despite serving as a garbage pit, the cave contains a few useful items Kracia has discarded. One of the thralls in the swarm has a mechanical prosthetic eye powered by a clockwork capacitor, three of them still have rings on their fingers worth a total of 10 gp per thrall, and one has a set of silver teeth worth 20 sp.

7. FLOODED PASSAGE

When the characters enter this area, read the following text aloud:

The path ahead ends at the edge of a large underground pool. Ripples on the water indicate the existence of a moving current whose rhythm seems to fluctuate in time with the crashing of the tides outside the Catacombs. Silhouettes of sea life flit around under the surface.

This area is flooded with seawater that entered the Catacombs from narrow channels deep beneath the passage. A character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 13 or higher notices a faint shimmer of light below the surface, indicating an exit somewhere on the other side.

Characters can easily swim through the flooded passage. The flooded area is not particularly long or dangerous except for the large, blighted creature that calls the passage its home.

Deathly Embrace. A blighted **giant octopus** rests on the bottom of the flooded area of the tunnel. The blight has made the animal more aggressive than normal, and it is eager to get its tentacles on any passing creatures. If the blighted giant octopus detects a creature swimming through the passage, it attempts to grapple the creature with its tentacles. If the octopus is reduced to less than half of its hit points, it releases a cloud of ink and dashes away, squeezing through a small gap in the passage's wall to escape.

8. NECROTITE MINE

At one point many years ago, a crew of Blackwater workers learned of deposits of necrotite deep in this part of the Catacombs. They established a mine to extract the necrotite and dug out this large main cavern and several exploratory mine shafts over the course of many years. Prior to establishing his treasure hoard, Craethen Morvaen had the miners killed, and the mine has been left relatively undisturbed ever since.

When the characters enter the mine's main chamber, read the following text aloud:

This large chamber appears to have been a mine of some sort. Large ore-processing rigs and overturned carts clutter the main cavern, and smaller tunnels shoot off in multiple directions like the limbs of a spider. A small shack near the north wall appears to be some manner of office or bunkhouse.

It is obvious to the characters that the bunkhouse and tools in the main cave have gone untouched for years. Any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 10 or higher

hears the faint hammering of pickaxes from the east tunnel that leads to area 8c.

At this point, have the characters make a group DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check. Characters with backgrounds that would give them experience working with necrotite or mining have advantage on the roll. If the group succeeds, they identify the area as a necrotite mine and notice the hazardous necrotite fumes in the cavern.

NECROTITE FUMES

Each living creature that enters the mine is exposed to toxic necrotite particles in the air and must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or take 3d6 poison damage and be poisoned for 10 minutes. A creature that is wearing a gas mask or that has an alternative source of air doesn't need to make the saving throw.

BUNKHOUSE

If the characters explore the bunkhouse, read the following text aloud:

The building looks like it was once a bunkhouse for the miners who worked here. The interior has been stripped of almost every item of any value, and two corpses lie in tangled heaps on the wooden floorboards.

Morvaen's thugs took almost every scrap of any value in the bunkhouse, but they left behind two useful items: a pair of dust-covered but still functional gas masks hanging on the southern wall. The masks fit any Medium or Small humanoid. They stink faintly of necrotite, and the long-dead body of a spider hangs in one of the eyepieces of one mask.

Bodies. A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that the bodies were left to rot in the bunkhouse years ago. Despite the many years that have passed, no vermin have tried to scavenge the bodies, and the residue of necrotite in the bunkhouse has left the bodies in a surprisingly preserved state. One body was decapitated with some manner of jagged weapon, and the other's torso is filled with bullet holes.

8A-8B. MINING CHAMBERS

These side chambers were excavated during the mining process. The mine's founders were killed before they could fully excavate the necrotite in these areas, but enterprising characters can extract the valuable ore.

Necrotite Veins. Veins of exposed necrotite are visible in both chambers. A character with a pickaxe like those in area 8 can extract 1d4 pounds of necrotite ore by spending 1 minute of labor and succeeding on a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

Mining Charges. A single mining charge remains in each chamber. These mining charges use a slight variant of binary blasting powder similar to that used in firearms across the Iron Kingdoms. Each charge has a 1-minute fuse and detonates in a 20-foot-radius sphere. Each creature in the area must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 55 (10d10) fire damage on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage on a successful one.

CONSTITUTION SAVE DC

Number of
Participants

Save DC

1	20
2	18
3	16
4	14
5+	12

8C. THE LAST SHAFT

This side chamber was the last shaft dug in the necrotite mine. Risen thrall laborers still chip away at the stone walls, carrying out the last order given to them by their handlers. Three of them, each wielding a pickaxe, have chipped away the east face of the cavern almost deep enough to reach the tunnel leading to the passage in area 10. Fitted stone blocks are visible in a few small areas where the thralls have managed to clear away the rock walls.

Thrall Miners. Three **risen thralls** armed with pickaxes (treat as light hammers that deal piercing damage) have continued following their final instructions, systematically hacking away at the stone walls of this cave. The thralls continue their task if left alone but become hostile to anyone who tries to impede their work.

Breaching the Wall. The stone wall of the passage in area 10 is more durable than the raw stone of the cavern. A character can use a pickaxe to continue the excavation, but this work takes time and can be quite tiring. A single creature can breach the wall in this manner with 1 hour of labor. Additional characters can help the effort, as can any accompanying steamjacks or thrall miners left to do their work. At the end of this time, each character that participated in the excavation must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or suffer one level of exhaustion. The number of characters participating in the effort determines the DC of the saving throw, as shown in the Constitution Save DC table.

Blowing through the Wall. Alternatively, if the characters discovered the mining charges in areas 8a and 8b, they can use the explosive charges to breach the wall. Blowing through the durable walls of the passage in area 10 requires 100 points of damage. This damage can be supplemented by any other explosives or spells the characters have at their disposal.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters defeat the thrall workers, divide 150 XP among them.

9. SINKHOLE

When the characters enter this chamber, read the following text aloud:

Water has eroded a large pit in the center of this cavern. A narrow rim of rock near the walls allows passage around the sinkhole. The movement of the tides causes the water twenty feet below to surge and recede like the breath of a giant beast.

Any character who wants to move across the algae-slicked rocks around the perimeter of the sinkhole must make a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. If the check succeeds, the character manages to creep safely around the edge of the pit; if it fails, the character slips and falls into the hole. Although the pit is deep, its bottom is filled with water that prevents characters from taking damage from the fall.

A character can try to climb out of the pit by spending 1 minute of effort and making a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check. If the check succeeds, the character climbs out of the pit. If it fails, the character slips back down. A character who fails three such checks suffers one level of exhaustion.

Feeding Frenzy. Any character who spends more than 5 minutes in the water draws the attention of predatory fish living in the sinkhole. The fish begin to strike at the character as a swarm (use the **swarm of quippers** stat block).

10. TRAPPED PASSAGE

This obviously man-made corridor connects the vault holding Morvaen's treasure to the rest of this portion of the Catacombs. Morvaen had it rigged with several traps, both mechanical and arcane. When the characters enter the passage, read the following text aloud:

The carved stone walls here seem almost out of place among all the raw stone of the Catacombs, but this hallway appears to lead to the pirate king's hidden treasure. The dusty corpse of a would-be treasure hunter lies on the floor about twenty feet down the hall.

THE FIRST TRAP

The first trap—a mechanical blade that slides out of slots in the stone wall—is set fifteen feet down the corridor.

Trigger. The trap activates when more than 60 pounds of weight is placed on a pressure plate hidden under the floor.

Effect. A 15-foot-long blade slashes through the corridor three feet above the pressure plate. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) slashing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Countermeasures. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the narrow slot in the wall that houses the blade. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check allows a character to deduce the presence of the pressure plate from the slightly raised flagstones below the slot. Wedging an iron spike or other object under the pressure plate prevents the trap from activating.

THE SECOND TRAP

The second trap consists of a concentrated spray of pressurized acid that sprays out of small holes fitted into the stone walls. The body of the would-be treasure hunter

lies here. Any character who investigates the body sees that the skull, the ribs, and one limb have been dissolved by a corrosive substance (no check required).

Trigger. The trap triggers when more than 60 pounds of weight is placed on a pressure plate hidden under the floor.

Effect. A 15-foot cube of acid sprays out of the wall, covering the pressure plate and the area around it. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 17 (5d6) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Countermeasures. The acid sprays out of small nozzles in the wall. The DC to spot them is 15. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check allows a character to deduce the trap's presence from small pits that have been corroded by the acid spray. Wedging an iron spike or other object under the pressure plate prevents the trap from activating, and the nozzles can be clogged with wax or a similar substance to prevent the acid from spraying.

THE THIRD TRAP

The third trap is an arcane ward that protects the iron door to Morvaen's vault. In addition, the door is locked.

Trigger. The trap triggers when more than 20 pounds of weight is placed on a pressure plate hidden under the floor.

Effect. A crystal affixed above the door releases an enervating blast of necrotic energy in a 30-foot-long, five-foot-wide line. Each creature in the area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. If the triggering creature is a steamjack bonded to a warcaster, the

steamjack's controller takes psychic damage equal to half the damage dealt to the steamjack.

Countermeasures. The DC is 15 to spot the pressure plate or the faint runes etched on the lintel of the door. A spell or other effect that can sense the presence of magic, such as *detect magic*, reveals an aura of necromancy magic emanating from the crystal. A character with the ability to read arcane runes can determine that the crystal focuses the energy of a bound *doom spiral* spell. Wedging an iron spike or other object under the pressure plate prevents the trap from activating. A successful *dispel magic* (DC 13) cast on the statue destroys the trap. The gemstone is worth 100 gp if removed.

11. MORVAEN'S HOARD

Hidden deep under the cliffs, Morvaen's treasure hoard is a vast cavern with worked stone walls. When the characters enter the cave, read the following text aloud:

A faint glimmer of light filters down into this large cave, sparkling off of a massive hoard of treasure piled haphazardly in the center of the room. Iron cages containing the skeletal remains of long-dead pirates stand in the shadowy depths at the edge of the cavern.

A skeleton clad in armor rises from a seated position and casts a baleful glare at you, green fire glowing in its eye sockets. As it hefts its mechanical longsword, a rune on its skull flares like fire.



The skeleton is an elite thrall named **Korandil**. It was left here to guard Morvaen's treasure against any who made it through the Catacombs. The thrall has instructions to slaughter anyone other than Morvaen who enters the treasure room.

DEVELOPMENT

After the characters defeat the treasure's protector, Gaddis enters the cavern with the soul cage of Craethen Morvaen, as detailed in the "Confrontation with the Witch" section.

TREASURE

The following treasure is piled in the center of the cave:

- 90 pp, 2,000 gp, 5,000 sp, and 600 cp minted in numerous different kingdoms
- Eight gemstones worth 50 gp each
- Four pieces of gold jewelry worth 25 gp each
- A portrait of King Alvor Cathor III of Ord, signed by the legendary artist Bradig Doyle, worth 250 gp
- A deactivated Defiler bonejack

The bonejack is not fueled, but the characters can power up the machine with any necrotite harvested from area 8.

CONFRONTATION WITH THE WITCH

Although Gaddis told the characters she would catch up with them once she recovered from her ritual, she has actually been following them this whole time under the cover of an *occultation* spell while she waits for the characters to find the treasure trove. The witch has been cautious, keeping her distance and concealing herself with shadows both magical and mundane.

As the characters will soon learn, Gaddis is not interested in splitting Morvaen's treasure with some Blackwater toughs she picked up in a seedy cantina; she wants it all for herself and will not hesitate to kill anyone who stands between her and her goal. When you're ready to reveal the sea witch's duplicity, read the following boxed text aloud:

A metal cylinder sails through the air and lands atop the pile of treasure before you, scattering gold and silver like bits of shrapnel. After only a moment, you recognize it as a soul cage. The cage hangs open, and a spectral figure coalesces in the air before you, its face contorted by pain and confusion.

"He always did want to be surrounded by his precious treasure," comes a voice from the doorway. Standing there, the sea witch Gaddis Naill casts her gaze on all of you. "And now he can stay here forever. I think I'll be keeping the treasure, though."

She raises a hand ringed by glowing green spell runes. "It isn't so bad, Cray, my dear. At least you'll have company."

Gaddis immediately attacks the characters. Having cast *mage armor* on herself prior to entering the treasure vault, she relies on her spells during combat, attacking with her dagger only as a last resort.

Gaddis has been waiting for some time to get her hands on Morvaen's treasure, and she is singularly driven by this goal.

She will neither retreat nor break off her attack under normal circumstances. If the players try to reason with the witch, give them whatever chance of success seems appropriate for their efforts, but remember that the witch covets the wealth and believes she has a right to it, so convincing her to give up on her dreams of the treasure will not be easy.

Morvaen's Ghost. The pirate king's ghost is weak due to years spent trapped in a soul cage, but if you'd like to give the players some assistance against Gaddis, or if they appeal to the spirit for aid, you can use the stat block for a **shadow** to represent him. If you do, Morvaen's spirit uses its Strength Drain attack on each of its turns.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE

If the characters defeat Gaddis or somehow convince her to divide the treasure with them, divide 1,100 XP among them.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Once the characters have dealt with Gaddis' betrayal, those who survive will have earned a hoard of treasure. This newfound wealth can finance their further adventures in the Nightmare Empire and can even help soothe things over with any groups they might have wronged along the way, such as the Admiralty or the Quay Slayers.

If the characters return to the Lamprey's Kiss, they can discover more about the history of Gaddis Naill and Craethen Morvaen.



"DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES" NPC & BESTIARY



BANDIT (SRD)

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-lawful alignment

Armor Class 12 (leather armor)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

ACTIONS

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) slashing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

BANDIT CAPTAIN (SRD)

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-lawful alignment

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +4, Dex +5, Wis +2

Skills Athletics +4, Deception +4

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any two languages

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The captain makes three melee attacks: two with its scimitar and one with its dagger. Or the captain makes two ranged attacks with its daggers.

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

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage. Reactions

Parry. The captain adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the captain must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.



GIANT OCTOPUS (SRD)

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 11
Hit Points 52 (8d10+8)
Speed 10 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	4 (-3)	10 (+0)	4 (-3)

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Hold Breath. While out of water, the octopus can hold its breath for 1 hour.
Underwater Camouflage. The octopus has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made while underwater.
Water Breathing. The octopus can breathe only underwater.

ACTIONS

Tentacles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the octopus can't use its tentacles on another target.

Ink Cloud (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). A 20-foot-radius cloud of ink extends all around the octopus if it is underwater. The area is heavily obscured for 1 minute, although a significant current can disperse the ink. After releasing the ink, the octopus can take the Dash action as a bonus action.

HULL GRINDER

Huge beast, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 190 (20d12 + 60)
Speed swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +6
Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages —
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Keen Hearing. The hull grinder has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing.
Spinal Scourge. When the hull grinder moves, each creature, ship, and structure that it passes within 10 feet of is torn asunder by its massive dorsal spines. Each affected ship and structure takes 55 (10d10) slashing damage, and each affected creature must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 27 (5d10) slashing damage. Each affected target can be damaged by this trait only once per turn. Additionally, a creature that touches the hull grinder or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 5 (1d10) slashing damage.

Water Breathing. The hull grinder can breathe only underwater.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The hull grinder makes three melee attacks.
Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) piercing damage.

QUAY SLAYER

Medium humanoid (any race), chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (studded leather)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +4, Intimidation +2

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Five Cant, Scharde Tongue

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Sea Legs. The Quay Slayer has advantage on ability checks and saving throws made to avoid being knocked prone.

ACTIONS

Cutlass. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Light Pistol. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 30/90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

QUAY SLAYER THUG

Medium humanoid (any race), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (scale mail)

Hit Points 16 (3d8 + 3)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +4, Intimidation +2

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Five Cant, Scharde Tongue

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

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

Sea Legs. The Quay Slayer has advantage on ability checks and saving throws made to avoid being knocked prone.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Quay Slayer makes two melee attacks.

Cutlass. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Light Pistol. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 30/90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.



RAZORBAT SWARM

Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 60 (11d8 + 11)

Speed 5 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	19 (+4)	12 (+1)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	4 (-3)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Echolocation. The swarm can't use its blindsight while deafened.

Keen Hearing. The swarm has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny razorbat. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The swarm uses Sonic Shriek if it can and then makes a melee attack.

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 25 (10d4) piercing damage, or 12 (5d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. A creature damaged by the swarm must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be lacerated by the swarm. While lacerated, a creature takes 1d4 necrotic damage from bleeding at the start of its turn until it receives healing, or until a creature makes a successful DC 10 Medicine check to stop the bleeding.

Sonic Shriek (Recharge 6). The swarm emits a piercing shriek. Creatures within 10 feet of the swarm must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the start of the swarm's next turn. In addition, a nonmagical object made of crystal, glass, ceramic, or porcelain shatters if it's within 10 feet of the swarm, weighs less than 1 pound, and isn't being worn or carried.

SWARM OF QUIPPERS (SRD)

Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 28 (8d8 - 8)

Speed 0 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	9 (-1)	1 (-5)	7 (-2)	2 (-4)

Damage Resistance bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

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

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny quipper. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Water Breathing. The swarm can breathe only underwater.

ACTIONS

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) piercing damage, or 7 (2d6) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

SWARM OF RISEN THRALLS

Huge swarm of Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 152 (8d12+24)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	5 (-3)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Medium humanoid. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

JIHN GORHALL

Medium ogrun, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 17 (studded leather, shield)

Hit Points 66 (12d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

Skills Athletics +4, Intimidation +4

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Scharde Tongue

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Brave. Jihn has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Jihn hits with it (included in the attack).

Thick Skin. Jihn gains a +1 bonus to AC when not wearing heavy armor (included in the Armor Class).

ACTIONS

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage, or 11 (2d8 + 2) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Shield Bash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

REACTIONS

Parry. Jihn adds 3 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, Jihn must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

GADDIS NAIL

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (16 with mage armor)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +4, Cha +5

Skills Arcana +3, Deception +5, Perception +5

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Five Cant, Scharde Tongue

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Special Equipment. Gaddis carries a soul cage with 25 Hit Dice of captured souls.

Spellcasting. Gaddis is a 5th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting

ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks).

She has the following sorcerer spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch*, *mage hand*

1st level (4 slots): *fog cloud*, *mage armor*,* *thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *mirror image*, *misty step*

3rd level (2 slots): *fear*

*Gaddis casts this spell on herself before combat.

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4+3) piercing damage.

Chill Touch (Cantrip). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 120 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d8) necrotic damage, and the target can't regain hit points until the start of Gaddis' next turn.

Vampiric Touch (3rd-Level Spell; Requires a Spell Slot).

Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) necrotic damage, and Gaddis regains hit points equal to half the necrotic damage dealt. If Gaddis casts this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, the necrotic damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 3rd.



KHARYBDIS

Large construct (helljack), unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 115 (11d10 + 55)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	10 (+0)	20 (+5)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	4 (-3)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +8

Skills Athletics +8, Perception +3

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities acid, poison, psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages understands the languages of its manufacturer but can't speak

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

All-Terrain. Kharybdis ignores movement penalties imposed by nonmagical difficult terrain.

Deep Walker. Kharybdis can't swim, and it sinks to the bottom of any body of water it enters. It ignores movement restrictions and attack penalties caused by being underwater. It can remain underwater for up to 1 hour without extinguishing its furnace.

Cortex. Kharybdis' cortex allows it to understand basic commands from its controller (spoken verbally by most but usually communicated telepathically by warcasters). Verbal commands must be akin to those issued to a trained animal, such as "stay," "guard," "attack," and so on. Kharybdis will carry out these commands with no regard for its own safety.

Heavy Metal. Kharybdis' attacks are magical for the purpose of overcoming resistances and immunity to nonmagical attacks for steamjacks, colossals, and warbeasts.

Steam Powered. Kharybdis requires coal and water to function. When not in combat, it can function for 12 hours with a full fuel load of 100 pounds of necrotite or 265 pounds of coal and fresh water in its boiler. While in combat, Kharybdis can function for 2 hours with a full fuel load. If Kharybdis' fuel and water are not refilled at the end of this time, it suffers one level of exhaustion at the end of each minute. Due to the amount of noise its steam engine produces, Kharybdis has disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Kharybdis makes two tendril attacks, each of which it can replace with one use of Fling.

Tendrils. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. **Hit:** 14 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 18). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained. Kharybdis has two tendrils, each of which can grapple one target.

Black Ink (Recharge 6). Kharybdis sprays corrosive black ink in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 36 (8d8) acid damage and is blinded for 1 minute. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't blinded. A blinded creature can repeat the saving throw at end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Fling. One Large or smaller object held or creature grappled by Kharybdis is thrown up to 30 feet in a random direction and knocked prone. If a thrown target strikes a solid surface, the target takes 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet it was thrown. If the target is thrown at another creature, that creature must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take the same damage and be knocked prone.

Acid Cloud (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). A 20-foot-radius cloud of acidic vapor extends all around Kharybdis. Each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 18 (4d8) acid damage. The area is heavily obscured for 1 minute, although a significant wind can disperse the cloud. After releasing the acid, Kharybdis can take the Dash action as a bonus action.

KORANDIL

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (plate mail)

Hit Points 59 (7d10 + 21)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +4

Skills Perception +2

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Korandil hits with it (included in the attack).

Incorporeal Movement. Korandil can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If Korandil fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Special Equipment. Korandil carries a mechanical greatsword inscribed with the Necrosis rune and powered by a clockwork capacitor with 10 charges.

Turn Resistance. Korandil has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces Korandil to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, Korandil drops to 1 hit point instead.

Void Shroud. Non-undead creatures within 10 feet of Korandil regain half as many hit points as normal when they regain hit points.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Korandil makes two attacks with its greatsword.

Mechanical Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d6 + 3) slashing damage. Korandil can expend 2 charges from the sword's capacitor to add 9 (2d8) necrotic damage to the attack.



"DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES" SHIPS

THE CHASE

Small ship (40 feet by 20 feet)

Armor Class 14
Damage Threshold 10 (critical threshold 20)
Hull Points 150
Initiative +6

Crew 8, maximum 20
Crew Quality Trained
Crew Proficiency Bonus +2
Maneuver Check +6
Speed (sails) 2 (minimum 5 crew)
Travel Pace 4 miles per hour/96 miles per day
Tonnage 25 tons

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, stunned, unconscious
Sails. The ship's speed decreases by 1 when sailing into the wind and increases by 1 when sailing with the wind. The ship's travel pace decreases by 2 miles per hour/24 miles per day when sailing against the wind and increases by 2 miles per hour/24 miles per day when sailing with the wind.

WEAPON BATTERIES

Long Nines. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range medium/long, one target. *Hit:* 26 (4d12) bludgeoning damage, or 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage if the ship is at half crew.

THE JAGGED MAW

Small ship (40 feet by 20 feet)

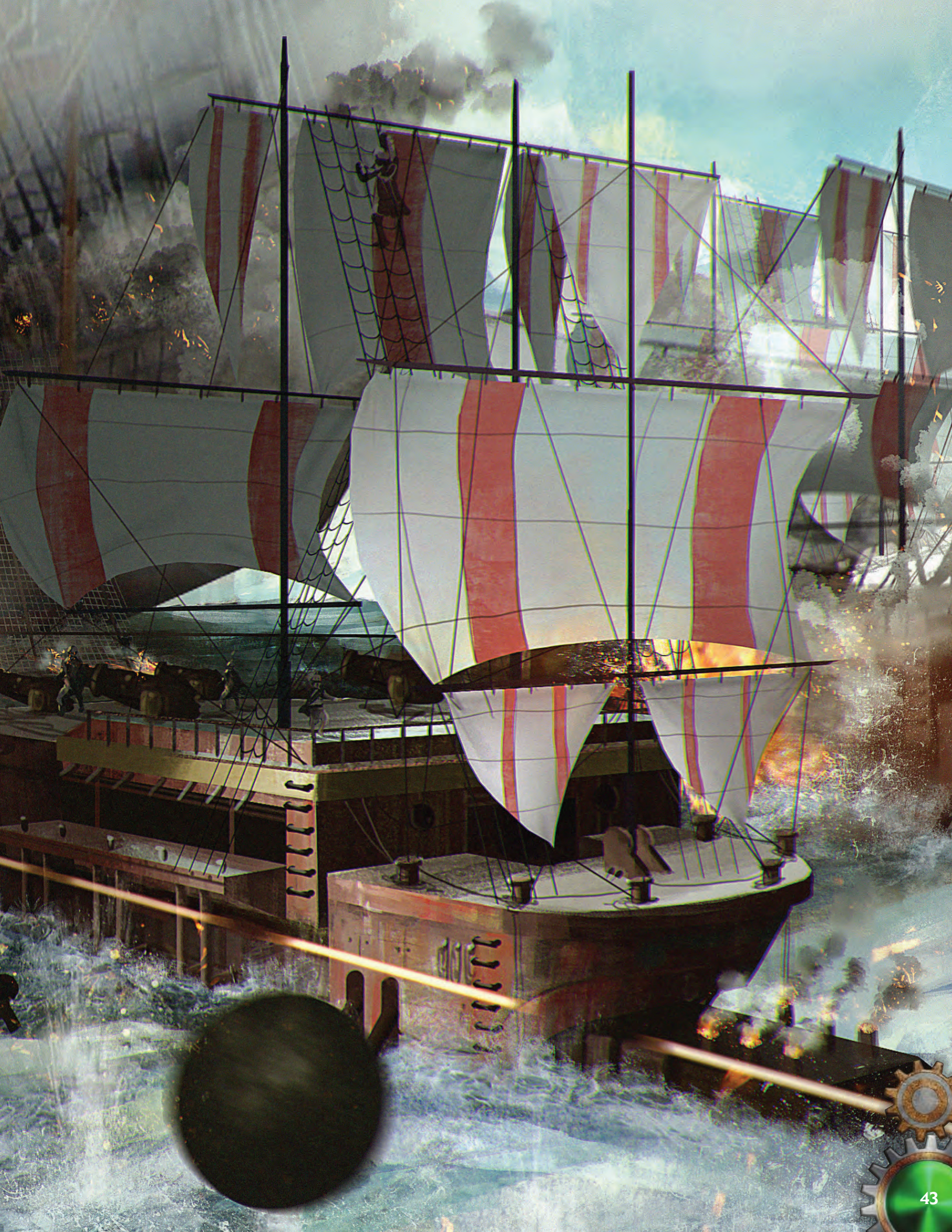
Armor Class 14
Damage Threshold 10 (critical threshold 20)
Hull Points 150
Initiative +6

Crew 8, maximum 20
Crew Quality Trained
Crew Proficiency Bonus +2
Maneuver Check +6
Speed (sails) 2 (minimum 5 crew)
Travel Pace 4 miles per hour/96 miles per day
Tonnage 25 tons

Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, stunned, unconscious
Sails. The ship's speed decreases by 1 when sailing into the wind and increases by 1 when sailing with the wind. The ship's travel pace decreases by 2 miles per hour/24 miles per day when sailing against the wind and increases by 2 miles per hour/24 miles per day when sailing with the wind.

WEAPON BATTERIES

12-Pound Cannons. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range medium/long, one target. *Hit:* 26 (4d12) bludgeoning damage, or 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage if the ship is at half crew.



2

CHASING SHADOWS



CHASING SHADOWS™ IS AN ADVENTURE SET IN THE city of Dreggsmouth in the south of Cryx and the nearby Scharde Islands. It puts the characters in contact with an eccentric iron lich and arcane mechanik who wishes to develop a weapon to protect against the return of the infernal menace that nearly destroyed the world.

This adventure is suited for a group of four player characters between 5th and 10th level and is balanced for a group of 7th level characters.

BACKGROUND

In the final days of the Claiming, when all seemed on the precipice of oblivion, Lich Lord Asphyxious traveled to the Iron Kingdoms with an army of undead thralls, bonejacks, and helljacks to wage war against the infernals. The lich lord's motivations were unclear to all but himself, but those who knew him best surmise that Asphyxious wished to be looked upon as a living god and savior by the people of western Immoren.

Asphyxious was lost to Caen at the battle of Henge Hold, traveling through a celestial gate erected there by the Cyriss-worshiping clockwork cultists of the Convergence. But the Cryxians who fought the infernals eventually returned to the mainland, bearing knowledge of the strange invaders from another realm.

Cryx has long been a seeker of forbidden occult knowledge, and the new discoveries made fighting the infernals were no different. Cryxian necromancers and occult arcanists wished to discover more about the abilities of the infernal horrors and how to defeat—or control—them.

One such individual is the iron lich Sciosar. In life an arcane mechanik, in death he has risen in prominence as a masterful necrotech and coordinator in Dreggsmouth, the foul heart of Cryx's black industry.

Sciosar overheard accounts of the fight against the infernals, taking a particular interest in a mechanism of their death. When the horrors fell in combat, their bodies did not remain. Instead, their soul-made flesh was rapidly devoured as if by some kind of invisible, otherworldly scavengers, denying enemies study of the corpses to learn of the infernals' potential weaknesses.

Sciosar believes that some kind of spectral necrophages clean up after the infernals, and he is curious about the potential energy that could be harvested from them. The iron lich wishes to study the dissolution of an infernal's flesh firsthand, so he can better understand the energies at work and how to go about bending them to his own purposes.

To that end, he has put out a call across the Nightmare Empire. As a highly stationed iron lich in Dreggsmouth, he has access to substantial resources—both financial and more esoteric—to reward agents. All he asks of them is the simple task of capturing an infernal entity and delivering it to him for research.

ADVENTURE HOOK

By default, the adventure assumes the characters are traveling to the city of Dreggsmouth on the island of Cryx. Ask your

players why they would be heading to the industrial port. Perhaps the characters are hoping to purchase a newly made vessel from the Dreggsmouth shipwrights; maybe they are taking a consignment of mechanithralls for delivery to a powerful iron lich; or they might be traveling there to deliver a message from a significant individual elsewhere in the Nightmare Empire.

If the characters have already worked together in a previous adventure, such as *Dead Men Tell No Tales*, they already know each other's strengths and weaknesses, and have a reason to be working together. If your players are creating new characters for this adventure, you can determine if they already know each other and how. Keep their motivations and connections in mind during the initial scenes of the adventure.

Unless the characters are up for a treacherous overland journey from a port such as Blackwater, they will most likely arrive in Dreggsmouth by boat. Cryx has almost no maintained roads, as the locals are more comfortable on the water than they are on land. Besides sea travel, another way to Dreggsmouth is by river down the Scalesflow. The blight-tainted water of this river feeds into Broken Skull Cove, on which the industrial necropolis sits.

Whether they come by sea or by river, the adventuring company spends time together on the same vessel before arriving in the city. Before the first scenes, you can give the players an opportunity to share what their characters do during this journey. How do they occupy the time? Are they willing to assist in the daily running of the ship, or do they sequester in a cabin to avoid being on the heaving deck?

You can, of course, come up with any other hook of your own creation to get the adventuring company to this unlikely city of soot, manufacturing, and undeath. The important thing is to get them all there at the same time, near the imposing docks of the Dragonfather's navies.

DREGGSMOUTH

As the industrial center of Cryx, Dreggsmouth focuses on the production of necrotech constructs, bonejacks, helljacks, and heavy warships.

Recent events have not altered the identity of the city, but as Cryx is not waging open war on the mainland, things have gone from total wartime production back to a more subdued pace. Many of the necrofactoriums that were active round-the-clock have scaled back their manufacturing efforts in favor of research and development. As the mainlanders work to heal from the Claiming and update their aging military doctrines, so too do the Cryxians pursue new weapons systems, helljack designs, and scientific advancements.

However, as is the case in every corner of the Nightmare Empire, the people of Dreggsmouth are not content to innovate on their own. They prefer to let others make the great scientific and arcane leaps forward, then steal the secret of those advancements from their inventors through forensic necromancy and interrogation of captured spirits. So it has been for centuries, and will be for centuries to come.

CORRUPTION EFFECTS

d8 Effect

- 1 **Blight Spurs.** Blighted ash has caused thorny growths to emerge from your skin. These spurs have no game effect, but you are visibly blighted.
- 2 **Hacking Cough.** You have a persistent dry cough. The first time each day you take the Dash action, after moving you must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, you begin violently coughing and cannot take reactions until the start of your next turn.
- 3 **Lung Disease.** The toxic air has scorched and seared your lungs. The first time each day you make a Constitution saving throw to avoid gaining a level of exhaustion, roll 1d4 and subtract the number rolled from the saving throw.
- 4 **Muscle Spasms.** The poisons of Dreggmouth cause you to suffer momentary fits. The first time each day you fail a Dexterity saving throw, your body begins to twitch violently, and you cannot take bonus actions until the end of your next turn.
- 5 **Mind Fog.** An accumulation of toxins in your nervous system has left your mind sluggish. The first time each day you make an Intelligence skill check, roll 1d4 and subtract the number rolled from the check.
- 6 **Lockjoint.** The pollution has settled into your neuromuscular system, causing your joints to swell and seize at inopportune moments. The first time each day you roll initiative, you must make a choice: either take 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage that ignores resistance or immunity, or have your speed reduced by 10 feet for 10 minutes.
- 7 **Skin Lesions.** Acidic and noxious smog has left your skin pitted with necrotic lesions. The first time each day you take bludgeoning damage from an attack, roll 1d4 and add the number rolled to the damage you take.
- 8 **Blood Poisoning.** Your blood is tainted by pollution. The first time each day you expend a Hit Die to regain hit points, roll one Hit Die twice and take the lower result.

Reducing Corruption. For each 24-hour period spent away from the environs of Dreggmouth, a creature can make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a successful save, the creature reduces its corruption level by 1. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of every 24 hours spent outside Dreggmouth.

DREGGSMOUTH POLLUTION

The toxic soup of necrotite smog, alchemical runoff, and the blighted waters of the Scalesflow River make Dreggmouth an inhospitable region, particularly for the living. The pollution permeates every aspect of the city, and its touch is impossible to fully escape. The longer someone spends in Dreggmouth, the more this toxic environment seeps into their bodies. The living who are exposed to it for too long are likely to die bedridden in agony, and even the undead—or at least those with a physical form—can be tainted by it.

TOXIC CORRUPTION

Every 24 hours a creature spends in Dreggmouth puts it at risk of corruption from pollution. At the end of those 24 hours, the creature must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. Corporeal undead creatures and those wearing appropriate protective clothing (such as a gas mask, heavy outerwear, or goggles) have advantage on the saving throw. Incorporeal undead creatures automatically succeed on the saving throw—they have no physical bodies to corrupt.

On a failed save, a character gains 1 level of **corruption**. The effects of the corruption increase with time. Each time a creature gains a new level of corruption, it takes 1d10 poison damage that bypasses resistances and immunities. A creature that drops to 0 hit points from this poison damage is not killed but instead gains a permanent **corruption effect**. A creature can gain multiple corruption effects in this way.

Corruption Levels. A creature can have up to 6 levels of corruption. For each level of corruption a creature has, its maximum Hit Dice are reduced by 1. A creature reduced to 0 Hit Dice from this corruption dies. Removing a level of corruption removes this maximum Hit Die reduction.

Corruption Effects. You can have a player roll to determine a random corruption effect on the Corruption Effects table, or choose one appropriate for the environment. A corruption effect remains until it is removed by the *remove curse* spell or similar magic. A creature's level of corruption can be reduced, but even removing all levels of corruption does not end a corruption effect on the creature.



PART 1: A SIMPLE REQUEST

The characters arrive as newcomers in Dreggsmouth. Before they even have a chance to take in the city, an enterprising figure marks them as a potential asset and offers them an opportunity to earn some pay and prove their worth with a relatively straightforward task.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

As the characters approach Dreggsmouth and the adventure begins, read or paraphrase:

Vague shapes loom like prehistoric beasts out of the polluted smog clinging to Broken Skull Cove. As your vessel draws closer, they resolve themselves into towering constructions of steel. These enormous derricks tower over you on barnacle-crusting legs, each piling almost double the width of the ship.

Beyond them, the bustling harbor of Dreggsmouth comes into view. Busy figures move like a swarm of ants on the exposed ribs of half-built ships, all under the strangling clouds of black smoke that belch from the smokestacks of dozens of factories.

As the ship moves to the docks, a swarm of labor thralls detaches from the larger throngs on the waterfront to intercept it. These mindless servants catch lines thrown from the crew, manually hauling the vessel into position with a jarring impact. A handful of skarlocks are directing the efforts of the thralls with screeching voices.

As the thralls pull the ship against the dock, the imposing figure of an iron lich moves into view. The lich is in the market for some capable assistants for his important work, and has been on the lookout for newcomers to Dreggsmouth who have not already sworn fealty to someone else in the city. The character with the highest passive Perception spots

the figure of the lich.

Read or paraphrase:

Behind the scurrying army of undead and black iron, a tall robed figure comes into view. Its head is a polished skull inscribed with delicate runes like tattoos, and it raps a metal talon against its mandible in a thoughtful gesture. As your eyes meet, the figure inclines its skull in a gentle nod.

As the characters disembark, the lich moves through the army of thralls to greet them at the bottom of the gangplank.

A FORTUITOUS MEETING

Iron Lich Sciosar has taken the measure of the characters as capable individuals who can help with his ambitious projects. Knowing how competitive his fellows in the upper echelon of Dreggsmouth's society can be, he wants to quickly get them working for him before a rival can have a chance to scoop them up.

Read or paraphrase:

The lich trails wisps of necrotite smoke from his back as he intercepts you on the dock, bowing in a surprisingly fluid gesture.

In a sonorous voice that echoes from his hollow skull, the lich says, "I make it a habit to examine the ships that arrive unannounced in Dreggsmouth. More often than not, I find some small nuggets of value among the great tide of flotsam that washes up on my shores."

The lich extends a hand to you. "I am Sciosar. Please, allow me to welcome you to the city."

The iron lich quickly instructs his skarlock to see to the characters' possessions and begins walking toward the city, expecting them to follow him. As he moves, the labor thralls shuffle aside to create a passage for the lich and the characters.

As they travel, Sciosar explains his position in Dreggsmouth. He has been entrusted by Lich Lord Mortenebra to explore potential avenues for technological and arcane development. With some pride the lich mentions that his refinement to the Cryxian arc node was first deployed in 608 AR as a part of the Thornwood IncurSION against the armies of the Iron Kingdoms, where it operated above expected parameters. Then, with a twinkle of green hellfire in his eye sockets, the lich turns back to the characters.

"I won't lead you on. I have an important task coming up, but I'd like to evaluate your ability to get it done. A paid evaluation, of course. An associate of mine, the necroalchemist Alvin Grise, has been complaining about recent developments that are impeding his work. If you can take care of this issue of his, I can pay you, and my associate will owe me a favor in future—we both win. What's more, I'll know that you possess the ability to handle a more delicate matter for me... one with the potential of much greater reward."

Sciosar explains:

- The necroalchemist Grise was working on an order of alchemical capacitors for an upcoming experiment at Sciosar's facility in downtown Dreggsmouth.
- Sciosar expected delivery yesterday evening. Instead, Grise arrived at his door in a state of near panic.
- The necroalchemist described how a tainted thrullg, an aberrant creature that feeds on alchemy and magic, broke into the facility from the drainage pipes on the factory floor.
- Grise claims he tried to fight the creature, but in the battle some of his experimental concoctions spilled and combined. Grise said he fled the lab as the admixture began to take on a more animated form.

"As things stand, my experiment cannot proceed without Grise's lab up and functioning. I would see to it myself, but I have much yet to do, and why waste a perfectly good opportunity to find new assets and partners for future endeavors? What say you?"

What Can He Pay?

"Coin, of course, is an option. But if you're interested in more than what you can pilfer from the hold of a passing merchant vessel, then I can offer you something much more tangible."

Sciosar is skilled at the fabrication of necrotech and offers, upon completion of the task, to retrofit a single weapon for each character to be a mechanical housing, along with inscribing 2 rune points worth of necrotech runes onto the weapon's runeplate. If the characters instead opt for gold,

ROLEPLAYING

IRON LICH SCIOSAR (SKEE-OH-SAHR)

Sciosar is a consummate arcane mechanik whose inquisitive mind is equally intrigued by matters of the occult and more practical, technical concerns. He serves Lich Lord Mortenebra as a theoretical engineer and mechanik, applying his unusual intellect to develop and refine new weapons in the Cryxian arsenal. While he is not alone in this venture—indeed, there are dozens of others who fulfill similar roles—Sciosar's willingness to test the boundaries of esoteric theory have made him a rising star in Dreggsmouth.

His eagerness to chase any lead, no matter how tenuous, and perform hands-on experiments with untested mechanika would likely have meant the end of Sciosar, were he not an iron lich. In fact, his current body is the fifth of its kind: each of the others was lost in increasingly improbable accidents during his work. To that end, Sciosar has several "backup" bodies ready to go at a moment's notice. Fearing not for his safety has made him unpopular with his skarlock assistant, but the lich pays it little mind.

Quote: "Never listen to anyone who claims that science is safe or easy. Until you've been blown up a time or two, I dare say you've never felt the thrill of true discovery!"

Sciosar can pay them 300 gp each of precious gemstones. The iron lich also emphasizes that if they succeed, he has much more lucrative opportunities on the horizon.

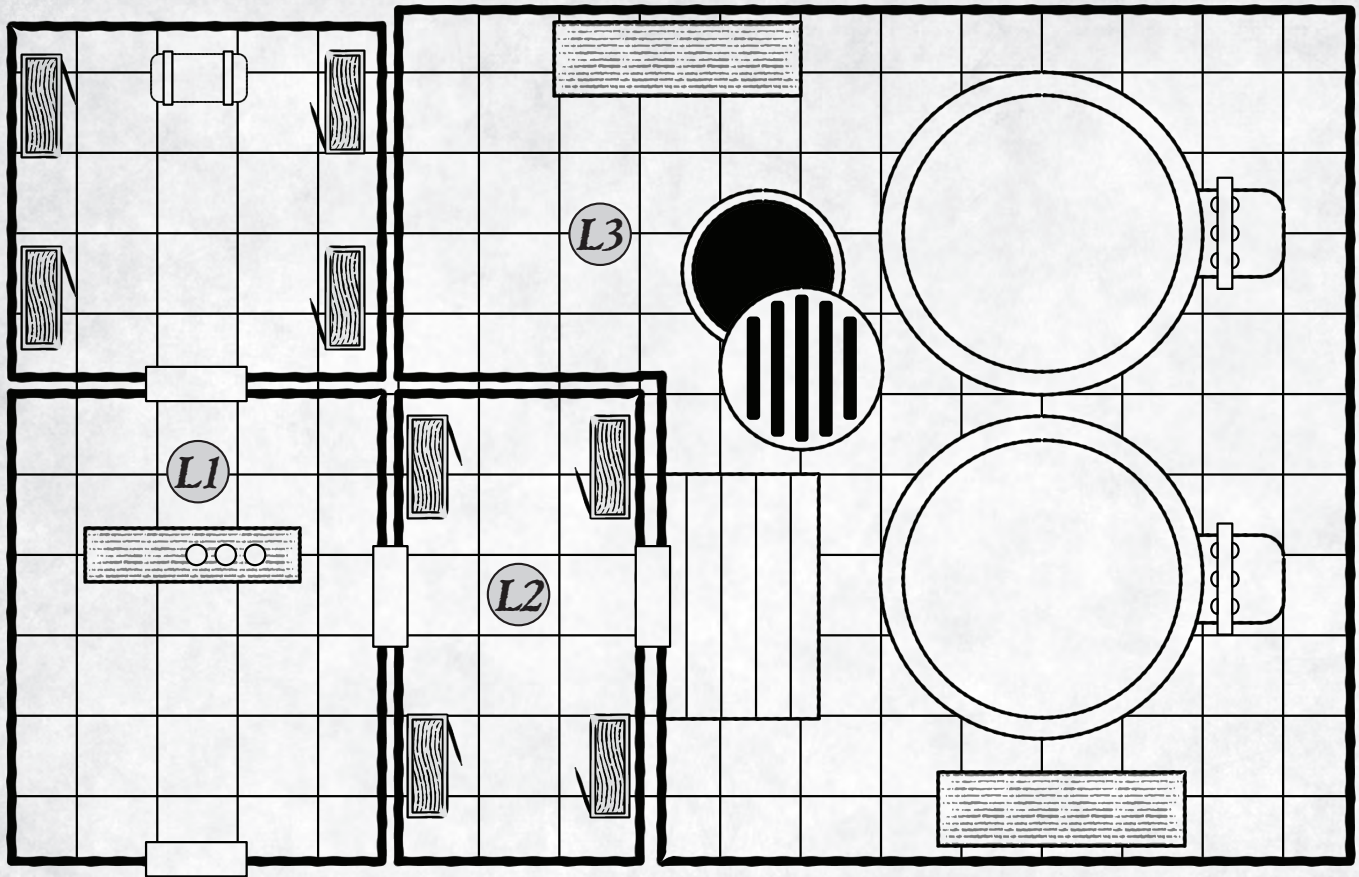
Getting a Better Deal. Sciosar enjoys working with shrewd individuals who are aware of their worth. Characters who want to negotiate for a better deal can make a group DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If the group succeeds, Sciosar increases his offer: the mechanical work plus 150 gemstones per person, and Sciosar compliments them on not settling for what's offered.

DEVELOPMENT

If the characters agree, Sciosar acquires a brute-thrall-drawn carriage for them. He gives the characters directions to Grise's laboratory and his own domicile. The iron lich offers to hold onto any possessions the characters don't wish to bring with them at his home, giving his word that their items will remain under his care until their return. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check confirms the iron lich intends to keep his word in the matter.

XP AWARD

If the characters agree to aid in the task, they gain 50 XP each. If they managed to negotiate a better deal from Sciosar, they gain a bonus 25 XP each.



Grise's Laboratory

PART 2: SLUDGE IS IN THE AIR

All of Dreggsmouth is a toxic hellscape of pollution, but nowhere is as foul as the district of necroalchemists near the city's center. Here, a rainbow sheen of polluted water leaves the streets slick year-round, a miasma of yellow-brown smoke lingers near the rooftops, and crystalline alchemical waste grows like mold on almost every surface. What few inhabitants are on the streets are typically the undead, and even they somehow manage to seem sickly and infirm.

The brute-coach hired by Sciosar moves unerringly toward its destination—with no regard for pedestrians who might be in its way—and delivers the characters to the street in front of Grise's necroalchemical lab.

Read or paraphrase:

With a venting of smoke, the brute thrall pulling the carriage comes to a jarring stop in the middle of the road. Pollution-blackened buildings flank you on either side, but to the west a large edifice with the appearance of a factory has a tarnished iron sign proudly declaring it as "Grise & Co; Finest Alchemicals."

Beneath the sign, a bloated undead figure on four metal legs affixes a hand-painted sign to the door: "Closed Until Further Notice."

ROLEPLAYING ALVIN GRISE (AL-VINN GREEZ)

Grise is a small fish in a large, poisoned pond. The bloated alchemist thinks of himself as an underappreciated genius, but due to the imbalance of power between himself and the more influential inhabitants of the city, his initial approach to any situation is deferential to the point of sycophancy. However, if anyone shows Grise even a hint of interest in his alchemy, he becomes self-aggrandizing and attempts to impress upon them his true brilliance.

Quote: "A dash of squid ink, a touch of shark bile, and just a bit of magic..."

ALVIN GRISE

The figure outside the laboratory is the necroalchemist Alvin Grise. Grise has lived in Dreggsmouth for over a century, brewing concoctions in his lab. Now, after being forced out by the creatures taking over his home, he is prepared to board up the facility and move on.

When the characters arrive, Grise turns to face them and offers an apologetic excuse:

"Sorry-sorry. Due to an abundance of, ah, byproducts, Grise & Company, purveyors of finest alchemicals, is temporarily not open to the public. Be sure to find us at our new location... uh, location pending."

The characters can get the lowdown from Grise about the situation inside the lab. Slightly over 24 hours ago, he was working on finalizing the alchemical capacitors for Sciosar when he heard a strange noise from the drainage gate on the main processing floor. When he went to investigate, he saw the tentacles of a creature within the drainpipe ripping the gate free, and a thrullg crawled into the room—likely drawn by the scent of his "masterwork" alchemy.

In his haste to deal with the creature, Grise admits he hurled a variety of different compounds at it without thinking about what the combination of these items might produce. Unfortunately the thrullg was undeterred, and in the ensuing chaos he "might have given birth to a new and altogether alarming kind of alchemical pest. Damn my genius!"

Once Grise finishes explaining the situation, a loud bellow from inside the lab rattles the alchemist, causing him to cower behind the characters.

SLIME AND TENTACLES

Grise hastily unlocks the door to the laboratory to let the characters in and scurries away the instant the mechanism clicks free.

The interior is a reeking, dimly lit space that combines the features of an unkempt apartment, alchemy lab, and some of the least-charming elements of a sewage treatment plant.

LABORATORY LOCATIONS

The following locations are keyed to the map of the laboratory.

LI. ENTRY & APARTMENT

Immediately beyond the doorway is a small consultation area where Grise takes orders. A door on the west wall of this area leads to his small apartment. A door on the north wall leads to the ingredient storage room in area L2.

Brass bells tinkle as the door opens inward. The entrance of the lab is a small, dimly lit space. A counter runs most of the length of the 20-foot-square area, with a brass scale and bottled samples of Grise's goods on its polished surface. A piece of slate on the wall behind the counter lists prices of different items in chalk. A door behind the counter has an inset brass peephole. A second door on the north wall has a sign above it declaring: "Employees Only!"

When the characters enter the lab, have them each make a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check. The check is made with disadvantage due to the gloom, the haze of smoke caused by the mixture of alchemy, and the reek in the air.

Characters who succeed on the check hear a wet slapping

GENERAL FEATURES

The following general features apply to the alchemy lab unless otherwise noted.

Doors. The doors in Grise's lab are made of sturdy, alchemically treated oak and are locked unless otherwise stated. Unlocking a door requires a DC 12 Dexterity check made with thieves' tools, and they can be forced open with a DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check.

Illumination. As an undead creature, Grise has little need for light. The rooms are dark but for what light the characters bring with them.

Smells. Spilled embalming fluid, alchemy ingredients, and the mixture of seawater and refuse from the drainage pipe.

Sounds. Viscous bubbling sounds and the wet slurping of a hungry creature.

Toxic Haze. The byproduct of alchemical admixture fills the interior of the lab with a noxious haze. Areas L2 and L3 are filled with this poisonous miasma. A creature that breathes this substance must make a DC 12 Constitution save, taking 2d6 poison damage and being poisoned for 1 minute on a failed save; it takes half as much damage and is not poisoned on a successful one. A poisoned creature can attempt this save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a successful save.

sound against the door to the north: the two sludge brutes trapped in the ingredient storage room are trying to break free of their imprisonment—as is the thrullg in area L3. A character who succeeds by 5 or more also sees a glistening black fluid oozing under the door into the entry area.

Free Samples. Three bottles on the countertop contain samples of Grise's work. The bottles are unlabeled—Grise enjoys the theatricality of demonstrating them to his clientele—but contain, from left to right: bottled light, fortomorphic elixir, and vitriolic fire.

Doors. Grise locked the doors leading to his storage room in his flight from the thrullg. Breaking down the doors alerts the two **sludge brutes** in area L2. The door to his apartment is unlocked.

Grise's Apartment. This small space is more of a closet than a proper apartment. As an undead creature, the necroalchemist has little need for a comfortable bed or amenities, and instead uses this room to store his ledgers, formulas, and a chest containing some of his profits. His formula book contains the formulas for bottled light, fortomorphic elixir, somnolence elixir, and vitriolic fire. A small iron chest contains 150 gp in assorted coins and a copy of the book *Influence Others through Groveling* by the goblin Riknoklakkun (worth 5 sp). The chest is locked but opens with a successful DC 14 Dexterity check made using thieves' tools.

Development. If the characters take more than 10 minutes to explore the area, the pair of sludge brutes in area L2 manage to squeeze under the locked door. The two brutes are more interested in escaping the thrullg than anything else but will attack any creatures that try to impede their escape.

L2. INGREDIENT STORAGE

This room is where Grise stows the ingredients for his alchemical work. The ingredients are locked in iron cases on the north and south walls, and a door to the east leads into the main laboratory floor.

Currently, a pair of agitated **sludge brutes** occupy the room. Created during Grise's ill-advised attempts to drive off the thrullg, they are animated oozes made of random alchemical admixtures. The sludge brutes are trying to evade the **thrullg** in area L3, which views them as just another source of alchemical food.

Door. The door to area L3 on the eastern side of the room is unlocked.

Storage Lockers. The rows of lockers on either side of the storage room contain a comprehensive supply of raw alchemical ingredients. A character searching the lockers can find any alchemical ingredient worth 5 gp or less, but locating a specific substance takes time: Grise has his own cataloging method that follows no rhyme or reason. Finding a specific ingredient requires 1 minute and a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

L3. LABORATORY FLOOR

When the characters head through the door from area 2, read or paraphrase:

A short flight of gray-tiled stairs leads down into the main laboratory floor. The whole space is similarly tiled and shaped like a huge basin, thirty feet deep and fifty feet long. Tables on either side of the basin contain the apparatuses of alchemy, while a pair of great copper vats fill most of the space. A metal cover lies on the cracked tiles next to a large drainpipe.

A great, hunchbacked creature emerges from one of the vats, dripping with noxious chemicals. Two long tentacles hang on either side of its fanged maw, twitching in the air.

The creature is the **thrullg**, drawn to Grise's lab by the discarded alchemical waste he dumped down the drainage pipe and out into Broken Skull Cove. After catching the delectable whiff of the sludge, the thrullg spent days squirming up the pipe to breach the lab. Since scaring off the alchemist, the thrullg has been bathing in the mixing vats, sampling some of the concoctions left on the laboratory tables, and having the time of its life.

When the characters enter the chamber, the thrullg becomes protective of its new den. Juiced up on alchemy, the beast is eager to throw itself at the intruders.

Alchemical Capacitors. A character with a passive Perception of 13 or higher, or one who makes a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, notices a crate of alchemical capacitors on one of the tables. The capacitors are currently inert and thus do not draw the thrullg's attention, but if activated can be an effective lure. There are twenty capacitors in the crate. A character can activate a capacitor as a bonus action.

Extraordinary Zoology. A character can make an Intelligence (Nature) check on seeing the thrullg to recall the following information:

- **DC 8:** Thrullgs are rare creatures that occasionally lair within the sewers of industrial cities. They feed on arcane energy, particularly in the form of mechanical devices and steamjack cortexes.
- **DC 12:** The absorption of arcane energy causes an extreme buildup of arcane extract within the creature's tissue, particularly in the nodules at the base of its tentacles. Arcane energy is only a small (if essential) portion of a thrullg's diet, and thrullgs will starve without normal sustenance.
- **DC 14:** The more powerful and concentrated the source of arcane energy, the more intensely it will draw a thrullg's attention. These creatures also exhibit a preference for tangible physical sources, and a thrullg facing both a sorcerer and a steamjack will go after the steamjack's cortex first.

Stun the Beast. A character who knows about the buildup of arcane extract in a thrullg recognizes that this oversaturated environment is overwhelming its system, and that additional arcane energy can disrupt it. Casting a spell at the creature forces the thrullg to make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 10 + the level of the spell. On a failed save, the thrullg is poisoned until the end of its next turn as the sudden surge of magic overfeeds it momentarily.

Drive it Off. The thrullg is protective, but not suicidal. If it is reduced to 21 hit points or fewer, the creature retreats to the drainage pipe and tries to escape with its life. Similarly, a character can lure the beast away by tossing a piece of mechanika or a magic item down the exposed drainpipe—not an ideal solution, but certainly a possible one. The alchemical capacitors in the chamber, once activated, also work for this purpose.

DEVELOPMENT

Once the characters deal with the sludge brutes and thrullg infesting his place of business, Alvin Grise is grateful for their assistance in clearing his lab of the creatures.

He tells them to inform Sciosar that he will prepare the shipment of capacitors at once, and that he will commend their efforts to the iron lich. Then the necroalchemist returns to his lab, tutting about the mess on the floor and wondering if he can bottle the remains of the sludge brutes as a "mystery concoction," calculating how much it will cost to reinforce his drainpipe against future incursions, and pondering aloud if he should hire on permanent security.

Before they leave, if the characters haven't already taken it, Grise rewards them with the 150 gp from the chest in his apartment. He gives them directions to Sciosar's location, to which the thrall-coach can carry them.

XP AWARD

If the characters defeat or drive off the sludge brutes and thrullg, divide 2,000 XP among them.



PART 3: SAIL FOR DISTANT SHORES

The events of this section happen after the characters return to Sciosar after dealing with the necroalchemist's problem.

Read or paraphrase:

The imposing three-story structure of the necrofactorium stands facing the docks district of Dreggsmouth. Its smooth stone face is studded with waste pipes tarnished by exposure to the noxious air of the city. A bristling spine of smokestacks on the roof add to the toxic fog, belching out columns of choking black smoke. On the building's face, stenciled letters give it a close approximation to an address: "Necrofactorium 13."

Sciosar has been expecting the characters' arrival, but he is a busy lich and has left the job of waiting to his diligent skarlock, Ashlunen.

As your thrall-coach heaves to a stop in front of the building, the slender figure of the lich's skarlock appears in the doorway. It bows deeply to you, arcane runes on its skin crackling with brilliant green light.

"Forgive me for presuming you desire to know, but I am Ashlunen. I serve Sciosar. My maker-master has instructed me to lead you to him upon your return."

The skarlock steps aside, leaving the way through the large brass doors open for the characters to enter. Ashlunen guides them to Sciosar's workshop.

The thrall leads you through a long and dimly lit hall, the radiance of his runic scars the brightest light present. The path meanders through corridors of polished teak and iron piping. Parlors on either side of the hall contain glass display cabinets holding unusual pieces of necromechanika and what appear to be archeological relics from a wide range of cultures and eras.

As the characters move through the iron lich's home, they can study the strange objects he has put on display. A character who makes a successful DC 14 Intelligence check can recognize a few of the necromechanical objects as prototypes of some commonplace items that have been in use for centuries. A character who makes a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana or History) check identifies some of the historical relics on display: they are artifacts from cultures as diverse as the Black Kingdom of Morrdh, scorched Orgoth relics from the fortress Drer Drakkerung, and even the blackened crown of a Tordoran king.

Ashlunen is in no hurry and does not comment if the characters wish to study some of the items. If asked, he says that his master is a creature of many interests and politely

CREW NAMES

d20	Nickname	Name
1	Halfhead	Cleen
2	Salty Ol'	Joelis
3	Threefinger	Jack
4	Limpin'	Billy
5	Pegleg	Emon
6	No-Nose	Kasson
7	Goldtooth	Elber
8	Dread	Cora
9	Dirty	Annie
10	Bleedin'	Mary
11	Barnacle	Cutler
12	Dreggsmouth	Avis
13	Stinkin'	Thom
14	Lowtide	Brann
15	Leadline	Ursula
16	Rotten	Bonnie
17	Flotsam	Reynold
18	Jetsam	Rikard
19	Ratline	Solomon
20	Chumbucket	Edgar

reminds them that the iron lich awaits them.

Eventually, their tour of the building ends in the main workshop of the necrofatorium.

You enter a vast atrium filled with the tools of the mechanic's art. In the center of the cylindrical chamber, a many-story scaffold of brass, arcane condensers, and glass rises like a monolith. At its pinnacle, a series of brass orbs on swivels create a kind of false planetary system, among which arc filaments of green electricity.

The skarlock announces your presence: "Master, I have brought the newcomers to you, as instructed."

From the top of the monolith, Sciosar's face emerges over a low railing. "How exhilarating! Ashlunen, see if our guests require any refreshments. I will be down momentarily."

Sciosar descends from the top of his metal monolith, almost giddy as he comes down a set of spiral stairs at its heart to meet them.

The iron lich listens to the characters' account of their handling of the necroalchemist's infestation, acting suitably impressed if the characters describe their accomplishments. A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check notices that the lich is evaluating their responses in a quiet, studious manner, as if judging their capabilities.

Once he's heard what they have to say, Sciosar explains his situation:

The iron lich moves between workstations on the workshop floor as he speaks, "It's been five years since the 'Claiming.' Five years since the infernals came. We won but... what if they return? The world is still healing from their first attack. Do we possess the tools to drive them off a second time?"

He gestures to the monolith in the workshop's heart. "That is where I stepped in. Lich Lord Mortenebra tasked me with the discovery of a weapon that could destroy the infernals. This machine will help me unveil it."

Sciosar explains his theory to the characters:

- During the Claiming, an unusual phenomenon occurred whenever an infernal died. The flesh was rapidly consumed by some invisible force. Powerful spellcasters who possessed the gift of true sight described swarms of parasitic creatures that devoured the corpses, robbing their enemies of the opportunity to study them.
- Sciosar believes that these invisible scavengers, if harnessed, could be an effective weapon against the infernals. To that end, he has sent out agents across the Iron Kingdoms seeking any infernalists who survived the aftermath of the Claiming.
- One of his spies, a human named Degar Gilfin, responded to him a week past. Degar had located an infernalist in the Scharde Islands, north of White Shark Reef on an island called Omunis, named Kovir Bledmoore. If the characters can locate Degar, the iron lich would appreciate not losing a loyal agent to a pack of infernalists.
- Bledmoore built a congregation of Schardefolk. His second in command, a blighted trollkin named Dovan Mangutter, has been raiding the nearby islands for captives to act as sacrifices for Bledmoore's masters.
- Sciosar believes Bledmoore can be a critical asset in his current research. He hopes that by studying the infernalist, he can provide the Nightmare Empire with a weapon against the infernals if, or when, they return in force.
- He has chartered a clipper, *The Cursed Dagger*, to convey them to Omunis Island.
- Upon their return with an infernalist in tow, Sciosar will reward them with 625 gp each, as well as provide them an additional mechanical piece of armor or weapon with up to 4 rune points of necrotech runes inscribed on the runeplate.

TREASURE

After informing the characters of the situation, Sciosar provides them with the following treasure.

Injectors. Sciosar plucks two objects from one of his workbenches: a pair of clockwork injectors. He explains that the devices are loaded with potent doses of *somnolence elixir*, which they might consider using to incapacitate Bledmoore. He impresses on them the importance of bringing back the infernalist alive: if he is killed his contract with the infernals will come to an end, his soul will be claimed, and Sciosar will need to start from scratch to find another test subject.

Mechanika or Gems. While *The Cursed Dagger* prepares for

the journey, Sciosar makes good on his promised reward. Characters who opt for gemstones each receive 300 gp worth of black pearls (worth 100 gp each) and amethysts (worth 50 gp each). Those who choose mechanika can have one weapon or piece of armor retrofitted, with 2 rune points of necrotech runes inscribed on the runeplate, powered by an alchemical capacitor.

TRAVELING TO THE ISLAND

To reach the island, the characters must traverse the waters south of Cryx, around the point of Hell's Hook, and sail northwest. These waters are patrolled by elements of Cryx's pirate fleet, but that does not make them safe. Independent pirates, privateers, dangerous beasts such as sea drakes, and the hazards of the Meredius wait for sailors who do not take care in their journey.

THE CURSED DAGGER

The ship Sciosar has chartered is *The Cursed Dagger*, a Cryxian **clipper** equipped with sails and a rear paddlewheel powered by a steam engine. Its crew consists of 20 Scharde **bandits**, a mixture of human, trollkin, and bogrin sailors.

Crew Names. You can use the following table to generate names for the crew—or other Scharde NPCs—as needed. Roll twice, once for a sailor's nickname and once for their proper name. Nicknames can also function as any nautical steamjacks the characters encounter:

TIMING

The trip to Omunis Island is just over 550 miles and takes approximately three days, assuming the ship does not need to stop for any reason. During the first day of the journey *The Cursed Dagger* stays close to the shoreline until rounding Hell's Hook, at which point it passes into the water of White Shark Reef and the Scharde Islands.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

The White Shark Reef Encounters table offers events that can transpire during the journey to Omunis Island. Roll a d20 twice each day for a random encounter, once in the morning and once in the evening. The characters have an encounter on a roll of 16 or higher.

RED SKY

The sky turns a deep, blood red. Depending on the time of day, this can be seen as a favorable omen or an

unfortunate one.

...in the Morning. If this encounter occurs during the first part of the day, the sailors aboard the ship take it as an omen of ill fortune and perilous weather ahead. For the next 24 hours, roll 2d20 when determining if there is a random encounter and choose the higher result.

...at Night. If this encounter occurs during the second part of the day, the sailors aboard the ship take it as a sign of good luck and fair weather to come. For the next 24 hours, each creature on the ship gains a Good Luck die, a d4. Until the end of the 24-hour period, when the creature makes a skill check, attack roll, or saving throw, they can expend the Good Luck die and roll it, adding the rolled number to the skill check, attack roll, or saving throw.

A STORM BREWING

The horizon darkens with storm clouds and the winds begin to pick up. Within the hour, the sky splits open with torrential rains, strong winds, and crashing lightning. Any skill checks to operate the ship are made with disadvantage, and after completing a long rest each creature aboard that is not a construct or undead must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned as they suffer severe seasickness. Characters with backgrounds that would give them a lifetime of experience aboard the sea make this saving throw with advantage.

The storm persists for 1d4 days.

BRINE TROG HUNTERS

A group of brine trogs, **bog trogs** adapted to salt water that dwell among the Scharde Islands, discover the characters during one of their whale hunts.

The brine trogs are in the water 2d10 × 100 feet from the ship when they first discover the characters. Due to their natural camouflage and the distance to them, only a character with a passive Perception of 19 or more notices the brine trogs.

The hunters swiftly swim after the characters' ship and attempt to sneak aboard by crawling up the hull with their sharp claws. They are primarily interested in grabbing one or more of the characters or crew and dragging them back into the water. The brine trogs are not willing to sacrifice their lives, though, and each retreats if reduced to half hit points.

SUNKEN VESSEL

In the shallows off the shore of a nearby island, the characters spot the mast and crow's nest of a sunken ship jutting out of the waves. Broken timbers from the hull have washed up on the nearby shore.

The vessel ran afoul of a reef of sharp coral that punched a hole in the hull below the waterline. The ship rapidly sank and settled on the sandy bottom. The characters need to dive down 30 feet to reach the wreck.

If the characters opt to explore the ship, they can salvage its strongbox. However, a trio of **reef sharks** have turned the sunken vessel into their new home and attack any intruders.

Treasure. If the characters recover the strongbox, they can open it with a successful DC 14 Dexterity check made with thieves' tools, or force it open with a successful DC 18

WHITE SHARK REEF ENCOUNTERS

d6 Encounter

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| 1 | Red Sky |
| 2 | A Storm Brewing |
| 3 | Brine Trog Hunters |
| 4 | Sunken Vessel |
| 5 | Birds of a Feather |
| 6 | Pirate Raid |



Strength (Athletics) check. The strongbox contained the ship's log and maps, rendered a pile of mush by seawater, but there is 50 gp in Cygnaran gold crowns within.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

A mated pair of **saqu** scouting the water for a potential meal catch sight of the ship and come to investigate. Relying on their keen eyesight, the birds stay a great distance up as they study the vessel for a likely victim.

Characters with a passive Perception of less than 15 fail to notice the birds wheeling overhead and are surprised when the attack begins. Characters who spot the saqu at a distance can attempt a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check to reveal them as such—at such a great a distance they might be mistaken for much smaller common birds.

The saqu dive rapidly out of the sky to snatch targets from the deck of the ship before taking to the air again. They plan to drop their prey into the sea and let it tire itself out swimming before coming in to finish the job. The saqu break off their attack after dropping at least four creatures into the ocean, or if reduced to under half their maximum hit points.

PIRATE RAID

While *The Cursed Dagger* navigates the Meredius, a small sloop appears on the horizon. Characters with a passive Perception of 14 or higher spot the sloop's sails while it is still a long way off and note that it is on an intercept course with their own ship.

The sloop is the *Riptide*, a square-rigged pirate vessel captained by Shannon Holdt (female human **bandit captain**). Holdt has a crew of 10 **bandits** aboard, and her ship carries a battery of 12-pounder cannons. The *Riptide* is a fast ship but not a particularly strong one. It was built for lightning raids against unsuspecting prey. The figurehead is traditionally the corpse of a Mercarian League trader in full uniform—though when long stretches pass between successful raids, a wooden dummy in dyed canvas stands in, which is the case when the characters encounter it.

Captain Holdt is interested in some quick plunder. If she thinks the characters' ship is an easy mark, she moves close enough to fire a warning broadside before drawing nearer to communicate, demanding 100 gp worth of loot to let the ship go in peace.

If the characters pay, Holdt thanks them for their generosity before setting course for new hunting grounds.

If they refuse, she orders an attack on the characters' ship. However, she is not looking for a prolonged battle, and if the characters put up a decent fight she and her crew hightail it away as quickly as possible.

Depending on the outcome of their first encounter, further instances might be Holdt returning to an easy mark—after all, if they paid once, they might pay again—her crew under the command of a new bandit captain out for revenge, or another similar group of pirates.

ARRIVING AT OMUNIS ISLAND

The characters' journey ends when they come within sight of Omunis Island. As *The Cursed Dagger* approaches the island, read or paraphrase:

Your destination lies ahead: a small bit of volcanic rock choked by dense jungle. On the island's western shore, a small village of shanties on wooden pilings sprawls across the black sand of the beach. It is little better than a pirate hovel, with a single ramshackle pier jutting out into the water.

There are a handful of small, single-masted fishing boats tied to the dock, but Dovan Mangutter's sloop is not present.

You determine the time of day *The Cursed Dagger* catches sight of the island. A lookout in the crow's nest calls down to the deck when it comes into view. In the early morning, cult members take out the small fishing boats to gather food for the village, returning in the early afternoon for worship—usually in the form of a soul sacrifice to the infernals.

If the characters make no efforts to conceal themselves, the islanders are prepared for them when they arrive. If, however, they take a stealthy approach, such as sailing from the opposite side of Omunis, they have a chance to surprise their quarry.

OMUNIS ISLAND

Omunis Island is typical of the smaller islands in this area of the archipelago. The black sands of its shore glitter with fragments of coral and shells, a heavy and persistent veil of humidity clings to the island year-round, and the dense vegetation encroaches on almost every patch of land.

Reef Sharks. White Shark Reef's name is not an accident. White-skinned **reef sharks** swim in schools in the shallows near every island. A creature that enters the water runs the risk of catching the attention of a school of 7 (2d6) sharks.

The sharks investigate any disturbance in the water after 1d4 minutes. They are particularly aggressive to any creature that is bleeding, or one that thrashes in the water.

GENERAL FEATURES

The island has the following general features.

Terrain. The ground slopes up gently from the shoreline on all sides to the island's approximate center. Most of the terrain is level, but on the north and east sides there are occasional fissures carved by heavy rainfall. In the jungle-covered areas, a dense canopy blocks out most of the sunlight, casting the area into deep shadows. The thick undergrowth offers ample concealment but makes traveling by foot a challenge.



Each Square is 20 feet

Weather. A persistent, humid haze hangs in the jungle and creeps out over the village, growing thicker in the early evening and before dawn.

Light. Other than a few shafts of weak sunlight, the jungle is dimly lit. At night, the cultists hang whale-oil lanterns to provide pools of illumination. During the day, the sun beats down on the cult's structures, glaring off the sun-bleached timbers.

Smells and Sounds. The noise of the jungle is almost constant: the screeching of small creatures, the drone of insects, and the rustle of sea breezes through the trees. The surf crashing against the shore brings with it the scent of salt air and decomposition, which the smoke of cookfires and roasting fish barely cuts through.

OMUNIS ISLAND LOCATIONS

The following locations are keyed to the map of Omunis Island.

O1: RAMSHACKLE DOCKS

The Omunis docks are a haphazard affair of timbers lashed together with natural cording covered by a thick layer of pitch. Four fishing boats (treat as **rowboats** with sails) are tied up here most hours of the day, and the docks are piled with fishing tools, including nets, crab pots, and buoys.

O2: CULTIST HOMES

The cultists live together in wooden shanties dotted around the island. Ill-fitting boards cut from jungle wood meet roofs of oil palm fronds, and every building stands on short stilts to keep it above water when the storm tides swamp the island's shores.

When the characters enter one of the shanties, read or paraphrase:

The interior of the building is a dank, filthy hovel. Cots are crammed against the wooden walls, making room for a circle of unlit candles on the floor. Soot has been used to paint grotesque images across the interior walls depicting strange, inhuman forms hanging like shadows over crude pictograms of tiny humans.

Occupants. Each of the shanties might contain one or more cult members. When the characters enter a home, roll a d6. On a roll of 5 or 6, read or paraphrase:

A group of unwashed figures kneel in the middle of the room, heads bowed in prayer as they feverishly chant to their dark masters.

There are 5 (2d4) **infernal cultists** present in the shanty. When they are awake, the cultists are consumed by ritual prayers to the infernals. A character who makes a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check surprises the group. If the cultists are aware of the characters, they bellow a prayer to the infernals and launch an attack.

Treasure. Each of the cultists' homes has a scattering of

valuables such as looted pocket change, small bronze or silver statues, and personal effects, worth a total of 15 (3d10) gp.

O3: SACRIFICE HOLDING AREA

One of the shanties close to the water is a holding area for the cults' sacrifices. Like the hovels in the village, the walls are made of sun-bleached and warped boards, though its roof is sturdier and made of irregular wooden shingles.

The windowless building has a set of double barn doors secured with an iron chain and padlock. A character can pick the lock with a successful DC 16 Dexterity check made with thieves' tools. Bledmoore also carries an iron key that opens the padlock.

If the characters enter the holding area, read or paraphrase:

A funk of unwashed bodies, urine, and rot hits you as you enter the long, dank room. Sitting on the rotting straw floor, a group of five individuals are shackled together with an iron chain bolted to the thick timbers that hold up the roof. Squinting against the light, the prisoners flinch at the sight of you.

The prisoners chained up in the holding area are:

- Degar Gilfin (chaotic evil male Scharde **thug**) is Sciosar's spy who was embedded as a member of Bledmoore's cult. Degar was discovered when he sent his most recent report to Sciosar by means of a carrion thrall and was thrown in with the prisoners.
- Giana Salo (neutral evil female human Ordric **bandit**) served aboard the *Sawfish*, an Ordric pirate ship. She and her crewmates were captured by Dovan Mangutter after a fierce sea battle.
- Gazo Tieri (neutral evil male human Ordric **bandit**) was also aboard the *Sawfish*.
- "Meg" Megulagekrelkan (chaotic neutral female gobber **wrecker**) was a salvager who had the poor fortune of sailing too close to Omunis Island.
- Aedan Teague (lawful neutral male human Cygnaran **commoner**) was a fisherman captured from the waters off Giant's Head.

All the prisoners are battered and bruised, and afraid that the characters are members of the cult. A successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces the prisoners that the characters mean them no harm.

Each of the prisoners (other than Degar Gilfin) was captured in one of Dovan Mangutter's raids. The pair of Ordric pirates have been here for some time and watched as fellow captives were hauled away to be sacrificed. Talking to the prisoners reveals the following information:

- The blighted trollkin Mangutter left the previous day with *The Rusted Hook*, his raiding ship. The prisoners overheard Bledmoore telling him to round up more captives.
- Bells toll from the north when the sun begins to set: a summons to bring the cultists to the island's temple.
- Every night at midnight Bledmoore performs a sacrificial ritual in his temple (area O4). None of the prisoners have seen the ritual, but they can hear the screams of the sacrifices.

ROLEPLAYING KOVIR BLEDMOORE (KOH-VEER BLED-MORE)

Bledmoore is an infernalist from Cygnar who fled the mainland following the failure of the Claiming. In desperation to escape the hunters of the Order of Illumination he chartered a boat to the Scharde Islands, killed the crew, and went into hiding. Bledmoore has sworn his soul to the Nonokrion Order of infernals, and in order to delay them claiming it he has been forced to provide his masters with a steady supply of souls.

Bledmoore is a desperate, pitiful man. His masters have yoked him to the umbral Yudriah to ensure that he does not attempt to sell himself to the liches of Cryx and guarantee he keeps up a steady diet of souls. Using Yudriah to subjugate the population of a nearby island, Bledmoore has established his minor cult, living off what small items his second-in-command Mangutter can bring him. He resents the failure of the infernals, the impossible bargain he is trapped by, and most of all Yudriah, who he sees as his jailor.

Quote: “Better you than me.”

- Bledmoore has some manner of infernal protector. One of the previous sacrifices, a Scharde ogrun named Djen Skullsnatcher, tried to attack Bledmoore and was stopped when the cult leader’s shadow came alive.

Freeing the Prisoners. Each prisoner wears a locked iron collar, which the chain runs through. Opening the collars requires a DC 12 Dexterity check made with thieves’ tools. The chain has AC 19, has 10 hit points, and is immune to poison and psychic damage. It can be broken with a successful DC 20 Strength check.

If the prisoners are freed, several are willing to fight beside the characters (Degar, Giana, Gazo, and Meg). Aedan is terrified of the cult and Bledmoore in particular, and refuses to fight.

O4: BLEDMOORE’S TEMPLE

The northernmost building on the island is Bledmoore’s temple. The infernalist spends his day here, directing cult rites after sundown. It is a simple wooden structure. When the characters first approach it, read:

Though the largest structure on the island, this building could be mistaken for an abandoned warehouse in Dreggsmouth. The gray wooden board-and-batten walls are stained green with mildew at the base, and the double doors hang unevenly in their frame. The only thing that distinguishes it from a simple hovel is a bit of black iron hanging over the entrance: a symbol of the infernal masters who tried to claim the souls of all.

When the characters enter the temple, read:

Smoldering coals in copper braziers cast the open interior in a dim, reddish glow. From floor to ceiling someone has scrawled occult runes on the walls in chalk: an overlapping network of mad scribbles, looping spirals, and profane proclamations. A sandstone slab at the rear of the room seems to be both a pulpit and sacrificial altar. The only other door is set in the center of the wall behind the stone slab.

The temple is a simple structure, 50 feet long and 40 feet wide, with braziers spaced on the walls to provide light and ritual runes drawn on nearly every surface. Kovir Bledmoore spends much of his time in the temple. When he is not guiding his cult in rituals and performing sacrifices, he sequesters himself in a small back chamber.

Kovir Bledmoore. Unless the characters succeed on a group DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check, Bledmoore comes out to investigate when they enter the temple:

Despite his ostentatious robes, the unshaven man who enters the temple from a small back room looks less like a nefarious infernalist than an exhausted beggar. Hardly paying attention to you, he scuffs at a chalk mark on the wall. “If you’re here to kill me, please get on with it. I have important business that demands my attention.”

A character who makes a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check discovers Bledmoore is bluffing; the infernalist despises his current status but would rather not die if given the chance. He plans to move toward the nearest brazier, where his shadow is strongest, and wait for Yudriah to jump to his defense.

If the characters engage him in conversation, Bledmoore makes no attempt to conceal his status as an infernalist, his involvement with abductions around White Shark Reef, or even his estimation of their chances if they attack him. He is curious about who the spy Degar was reporting to, and if told about the iron lich who sent the characters, asks:

“Iron liches carry soul cages, don’t they? Tell me, do you think one of them would be sturdy enough to keep an infernal out?”

Attacking Bledmoore. If the characters move to attack the infernalist, **Yudriah the Umbral Guardian** makes her presence known and moves to intercept them. Meanwhile, Bledmoore runs, first to the back room of the temple to ring the bell there to summon his followers (see “Congregation”) and then out a window to run off into the jungle.

Congregation. If the characters wait for sundown before moving on Bledmoore, the infernalist is preparing his congregation for the nightly sacrifice. There are 10 **infernal cultists** and 1 **dark sentinel** in attendance. The cultists are loyal to Bledmoore to the point of self-sacrifice and throw themselves at any intruders—giving Bledmoore an opportunity to flee into the jungle (area O5) and hide.

Bledmoore’s Fate. If the characters render Bledmoore unconscious, with a clockwork injector or by some other means, his infernal protector is subdued as well. Rather than press the attack and risk having her charge killed, Yudriah returns to his shadow and waits there, watching and observing, though she will emerge again if she believes the characters plan to kill her ward.

As the characters bring the unconscious Bledmoore back to *The Cursed Dagger*, any survivors of the congregation try to stop them from escaping with their leader and must be fought off.

05: OMUNIS JUNGLE

The dense jungle covering much of Omunis Island is the safest way for the characters to approach. The tangled laurel and kapok trees are wrapped with vines of strangler figs, while oil palms create a thick carpet in the understory. Combined with the elevated center of the island, cultists in the small village have no clear lines of sight to the eastern shore.

When the characters enter the jungle, read or paraphrase:

The vegetation here is thick enough that you have difficulty seeing more than a few feet in front of you. Oily black palms crowd in between the towering trunks of smooth-barked trees slowly being choked to death by a blanket of strangling vines.

The jungle is dense enough that it provides ample concealment to creatures within it, but the undergrowth presents little difficulty to movement.

Eventually the characters catch the scent of death and decay on the wind as they near the cult's charnel pit:

The reek of rotting meat becomes stronger as you move through the jungle, accompanied by the loud drone of insects. The plants give way to a trench almost fifty feet long. Piled at its bottom are dozens of bodies: human, goblin, and even Satyxis and trollkin. The corpses are an undignified pile, crawling with glistening insects the size of your fist.

Charnel Pit. This is where the cult disposes of their sacrifices once their souls have been claimed. A character who succeeds on a DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation or Medicine) check can tell that the oldest corpses here are a few months old, judging by decomposition and how much the insects have scavenged from them.

Bodies that have not fully rotted show signs of ritual cutting on their foreheads. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes the sigils carved into the corpses as infernal in origin. If the check passes by 5 or more, or if the character has the ability to read arcane runes, they recognize the specific sigil to mark an unwilling soul for the infernals.

Blackbottle Flies. The insects feasting on the corpses are blackbottle flies, a **swarm of blighted insects** with the Blood Frenzy and Flyby features. The blackbottles attack anyone who enters the trench or disturbs the corpses.

DEVELOPMENT

When the characters are back aboard *The Cursed Dagger*, read:

The crew of the Dagger let out a cry of victory as you step aboard. Within moments, the officers begin bellowing orders to the crew, who make ready to set sail.

SORRY, BOSS!

It's possible that the characters fail to capture Kovir Bledmoore. Since Sciosar's experiment hinges on having a captive infernalist, this might seem like a dead end for the adventure, but there are workarounds.

First of all, Sciosar is a powerful lich. The player characters might not be the only group of adventurers he has brought on to collect errant infernalists. On their return, the iron lich can surprise them with a different infernalist already captured by one of these other groups. In that case, Sciosar was treating the characters as backup to his main plan and, though discouraged by their failure, it isn't the end of the world—after all, it's always good to have a fallback.

If you'd prefer to keep the player characters in the forefront of the story, Sciosar is disappointed but not ready to give up. The iron lich spends days, weeks, possibly even months searching for a substitute infernalist. He might even send the characters in search of a likely candidate in Five Fingers, Clockers Cove, or elsewhere. His plan is delayed, but the iron lich isn't about to abandon his experiment and expends every asset at his disposal to see it finished.

If the characters have Bledmoore in tow, read:

A pair of burly trollkin hoist Bledmoore between them, stomping off for the stairs leading below deck. One of them snarls, "The lich said to keep him asleep. Get one of the bogrin to brew up some poppy tea. He can sleep the whole way home."

If the characters failed to capture Bledmoore, or if they killed the infernalist, you don't need to stop the adventure. For workarounds, consult the "Sorry, Boss!" sidebar.

In either case, *The Cursed Dagger* prepares to set sail for Dreggsmouth. You can summarize the journey home, but if the characters didn't experience any random encounters, you can use some for the return trip.

MANGUTTER'S RETURN

Eventually, Mangutter and the rest of Bledmoore's cult return to Omunis Island with a fresh batch of captives and discover the current status of the settlement and their leader. From the guts of the dead and wounded, and from the lingering spirits left on the island, the dirge seers reveal what has become of Bledmoore.

A furious Mangutter turns to the ship's dirge seers to pursue the characters and reclaim the master of the cult.



PART 4: NECROFACTORIUM 13

In this part of the adventure, the characters are present for Sciosar's experiment. However, like any good fringe science, there are complications to come. The experiment uses mechanika prototypes that are prone to malfunction, involves a deadly creature from a different realm of existence, and can be complicated by the unexpected arrival of an angry pirate crew.

The experiment and its fallout all occur within the walls of Sciosar's workshop.

NECROFACTORIUM OVERVIEW

The characters have already been in the workshop prior to this point, but it is much livelier in preparation for the iron lich's experiment.

The following sections describe the current situation in the workshop.

NECROFACTORIUM FEATURES

The necrofactorium and workshop have the following general features.

Ceilings. The corridors and main rooms of the necrofactorium have 15-foot-high ceilings, while the workshop atrium is 100 feet tall.

Light. No longer dim, the halls and chambers of the necrofactorium are brightly lit by green-tinted alchemical lanterns.

Thrall Assistants. A parade of mechanithralls moves from area to area within the necrofactorium, carrying components and tending to various tasks. Ashlunen coordinates the thralls, who behave as if the characters were not there.

BUILDING POWER

The necrofactorium is filled with the dull hum of machinery coming online. A palpable electric charge to the air causes sudden crackles of static on every surface.

Once the experiment begins, these discharges become more frequent and powerful. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), a blast of arcane energy discharges from one of the power condensers in the workshop atrium. Roll a d6 to determine the condenser. Creatures within 10 feet of the condenser must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 11 (2d10) lightning damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one. Creatures wearing plate armor or that have bodies consisting of metal, such as an iron lich, have disadvantage on the saving throw.

SCIOSAR'S MONOLITH

The monolith in Sciosar's workshop is a 20-foot-wide, 40-foot-tall cylinder of scaffolding, brass, iron, and mechanika.

Isolation Chamber. The base of the tower contains an

isolation chamber designed to contain an infernalist. Necromantic runes etched into its interior cause painful feedback to any attempts to cast spells. The door of the chamber is made of iron, has AC 19 and 25 hit points, and is immune to poison and psychic damage.

Excruciation Platform. Opposite the isolation chamber at the top of the monolith is the excruciation platform, which produces an energy field intended to contain an infernal and induce intense psychic harm. A creature that starts its turn within the energy field must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) psychic damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one.

THE EXPERIMENT

The experiment at Sciosar's monolith involves three stages: extracting the infernal, inducing the umbral parasites to begin consuming it, and the eventual failure of the device. During the experiment, most of the occult science is performed by the iron lich, but you can give the characters an active role as well, using the following events at any stage of the process.

Door Failure. As arcane energy courses through the monolith, the door to the isolation chamber begins to malfunction. If it fails, the infernalist within will be free and can cause chaos. Keeping the isolation chamber closed requires a creature to succeed on a Strength (Athletics) contest against the infernalist's Strength (Athletics).

Conduit Rupture. One of the power conduits on the monolith bursts from a surge of arcane energy, causing a loss of power. A character can attempt to repair the conduit with a DC 12 Intelligence check made with a mechanic's toolkit or tinker's tools. However, the energy within the conduit still presents danger: a character takes 5 (1d10) lightning damage for each repair attempt. Until the conduit is repaired, a creature in the excruciation platform's energy field has advantage on Constitution saving throws.

STARTING THE EXPERIMENT

The experiment begins when the characters bring Bledmoore (or another infernalist) to Sciosar in his workshop. The iron lich is taking care of the final touches on his experimental device at the top of the metal column in the heart of the workshop. Meanwhile, ten **mechanithralls** perform menial labor around its base.

When the characters enter the workshop, they catch the attention of **Rogan the Clamp**, a revenant mechanic who is here to assist with the experiment. Read or paraphrase:

A small crowd of mechanithralls moves among the pillars of Sciosar's towering prototype, following the instructions of a one-legged revenant. When he catches sight of you, he stumps over on his metal peg leg. "Oy, strangers. The name's Rogan, assistant mechanic to the lich. Let's have a look at your prize, aye?"

The mechanic is dubious about the iron lich's plan, but he takes pains to not let his worry show. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check takes note of the revenant's furrowed brow and occasional furtive glances up to the top of the prototype, where Sciosar gleefully makes

his final adjustments.

Rogan explains to the characters the general process of the experiment:

"The boss explained it like this: we stuff your infernalist in a chamber at the base of the tower, which we've made quite uncomfortable. That's to coax the infernal out of 'is shadow. Then, bam, Sciosar pulls it up t' the containment to the top of the tower, usin' some old Orgoth baubles from Gharlghast. Then he puts some pressure on the beasty, see if we can't convince those parasites that it's time to start eatin'."

Isolation. The characters are instructed to place the infernalist in the isolation chamber at the base of the tower, a coffin-shaped cavity lined with wicked looking barbs that crackle with green energy. Once they do, Rogan secures locks along the perimeter of the chamber, trapping the infernalist within.

Phase One: Extraction. With the subject locked safely away in the base of the tower, Sciosar activates the device for the first phase of the experiment.

"Prepare for phase one!" the iron lich's voice booms from above. A growing hum of power builds all around you before erupting into a deafening crack as bolts of lightning arc up the structure of the tower.

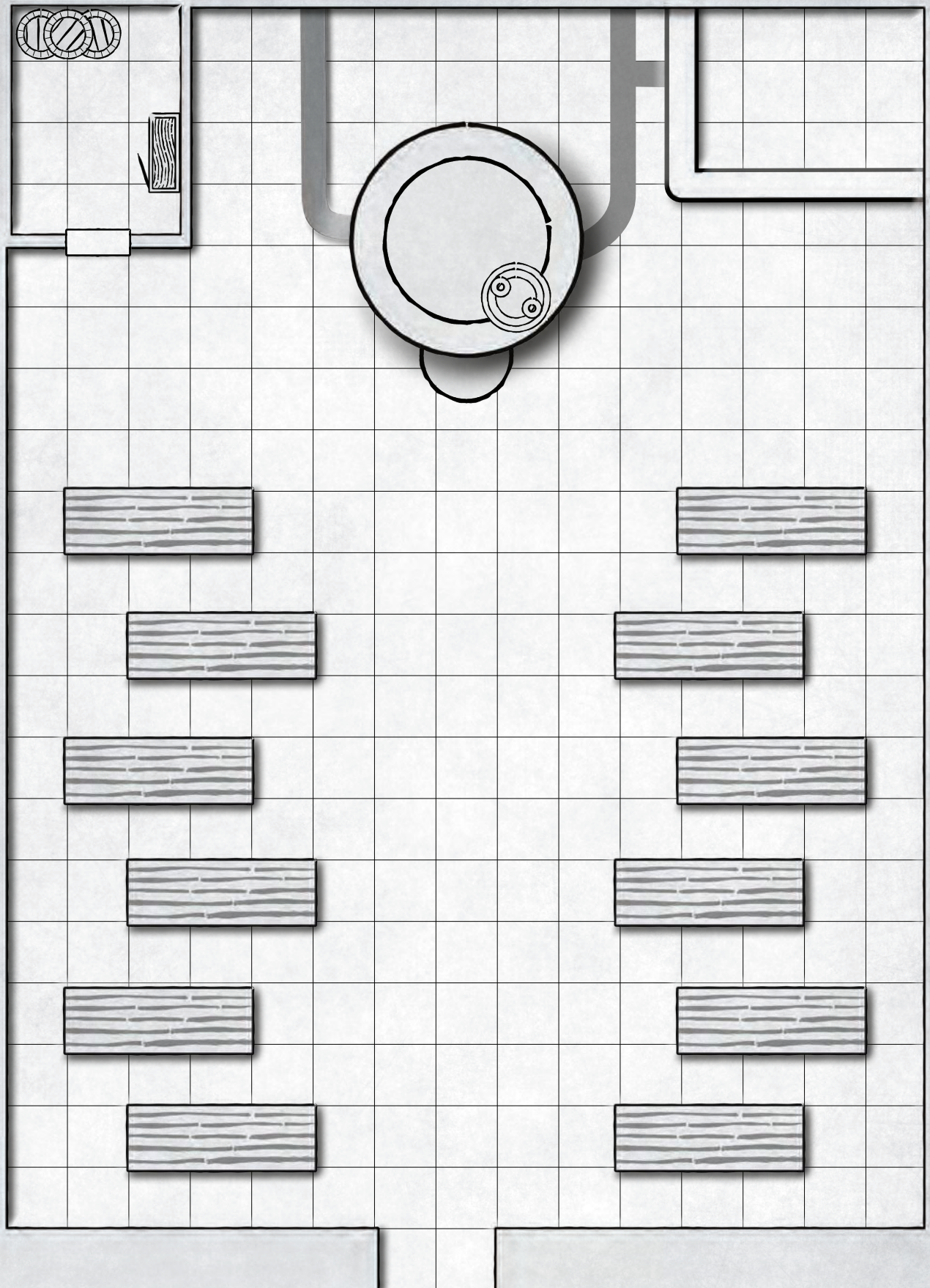
When Sciosar activates the prototype, the room fills with crackling energy. Characters in the workshop must make a DC 10 Constitution saving throw, becoming deafened for 1 minute on a failed save. Characters who succeed on the saving throw can hear the muffled, panicked shout of the infernalist in the isolation chamber, which combines with the angry cries of the umbral guardian.

Eventually, the umbral is wrenched free of the infernalist and drawn through the tower's structure to its precipice. What starts as a mote of shadow in the center of the excruciation platform grows to the angry and tormented form of an umbral.

A character who makes a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that, as the umbral tries to strike at Sciosar, a 10-foot-radius sphere of green energy flares around it, causing the infernal to flinch away.

Phase Two: Excruciation. With the umbral safely contained within an energy field, Sciosar begins increasing the excruciating psychic energy to the imprisoned infernal.

Sciosar is the picture of a mad scientist as he begins increasing the energy field's output. The tormented infernal begins shrieking, its face taking on a more feral and inhuman appearance. Patches of smoking darkness appear on its exposed skin as it hurls threats and insults at the iron lich.



Necrofactorium 13

ASSAULT ON NECROFACTORIUM 13

Just as Sciosar's device is beginning to show promise, the enraged Mangutter and his boarding party arrive in the necrofactorium, following the haruspicy of the dirge seers to locate the leader of their cult.

A commotion echoes from the entry to Sciosar's necrofactorium. You hear the voice of Ashlunen speaking to someone, instructing them to return at another time, followed by the thunder of firearms. Within a moment, a ragged mob of pirates led by a ferocious trollkin burst onto the factory floor.

Mangutter, accompanied by a force of ten **Scharde pirates** and a **dirge seer**, launches an attack on the necrofactorium. The trollkin roars for them to find the infernalist and free him while slashing at the nearest foes, thrilled at the opportunity for combat. Meanwhile the pirates lay into the mechanithralls and start tearing at the monolith's mechanisms.

Tactics. Mangutter and his allies attempt to interrupt the experiment. If at least three of the attackers reach the monolith, they can each use an action to smash sensitive components, rip out conduits, or otherwise damage the device. A cascade of electricity courses across it as it suffers a sudden and catastrophic failure.

Sciosar cries out in panic as one of the metal orbs surrounding the infernal detonates in a shower of sparks. He calls down, "Quickly! Amplify power the remaining field gen—"

The lich's words are cut short by a secondary explosion that rocks the metal column. Pieces of debris fall all around you as the lamps in the workshop flare brilliantly and pop in a spray of glass and metal. Amid all the chaos and cacophony, you hear the deep, echoing laughter of the infernal creature.

It is free.



FAILURE TO INTERFERE

If the pirates and Mangutter fail to land enough attacks to disrupt the monolith's function, you can have the device experience a catastrophic failure in order to get Yudriah into the fight. Or, if you prefer to reward the players for their swift and effective intervention, then you are by no means shackled into "Death by Shadows," but might want to increase the number of pirates and dirge seers with a wave of reinforcements to keep pressure on the players.

DEATH BY SHADOWS

Yudriah wastes no time. Sciosar, damaged by the catastrophic failure of the monolith, is unable to resist the umbral's attack. Manifesting a shadowy blade, Yudriah stabs through his skull and hurls his lifeless form from the top of the monolith. She then moves to assist Mangutter's pirates and free the infernalist.

Shadows. With the lights destroyed, the workshop is plunged into darkness broken only by momentary flickers of sparking light from the failing machine and greasy gray illumination through the glass ceiling of the atrium. The area is dimly lit and filled with deep shadows—perfect for the umbral to conceal herself in.

AFTERMATH

If the characters and their erstwhile allies manage to fend off the cultists, umbral, and infernalist, the immediate threat to the necrofactorium is eliminated. Despite his seeming destruction at the hands of the infernal, Sciosar is still able to function. If Rogan is still alive, the revenant explains to the characters that the iron lich keeps many backup bodies for just such an eventuality, and he can be restored.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

Despite the destruction of the monolith, the experiment is, by Sciosar's estimation, a success. He was able to study the effect of the infernal parasites, even for a short time, and plans to continue his research. As one of the undead, the iron lich believes time is his greatest ally; within a century or two, if the infernals return in force, he will be ready to face them with a new and potent weapon.

Some plot threads that could extend from this adventure include:

- Always on the lookout for more information to feed his research, Sciosar offers additional work to the characters, asking them to explore the Orgoth ruins at Drer Drakerung to see if they can recover any remaining relics.
- The iron lich's search for the infernals' allies have uncovered several cults similar to Bledmoore's across the Scharde Islands and Five Fingers on the mainland. Though his initial experiment did not go off without a hitch, more tests could accelerate the development of a useful weapon.

"CHASING SHADOWS" NPC & BESTIARY



DARK SENTINEL

Medium humanoid (any race), chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (scale mail)

Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +4

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Blood Fuel. When the sentinel reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee weapon attack on its turn, it can cast a spell of 1st level or lower as a bonus action.

Marked Soul. The sentinel has a marked soul. An infernalist or infernal master can use the marked soul to summon horrors into the physical world.

Second Wind (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The sentinel can use a bonus action to regain 5 (1d10) hit points.

Spellcasting. The sentinel is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). The sentinel has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, resistance, shocking grasp*
1st level (4 slots): *bane, hellish rebuke, inflict wounds, shield*
2nd level (2 slots): *darkness, hold person*

ACTIONS

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage plus 2 (1d4) necrotic damage.

DOVAN MANGUTTER

Medium humanoid (blighted trollkin), lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (chainmail)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +5, Con +4

Skills Athletics +5, Intimidation +3

Damage Resistances necrotic, poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Molgur-Trul, Scharde Tongue

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Blood Feast. When Dovan reduces a creature other than an undead or a construct to 0 hit points with a melee attack, Dovan regains 7 (2d6) hit points.

Dark Devotion. Dovan has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Improved Critical. Dovan's weapon attacks score a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20.

Live to Slay. Once per turn, when Dovan scores a critical hit with a melee attack, he can make an additional melee attack.

Unyielding. Dovan gains a +2 bonus to AC against melee weapon attacks.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Dovan makes two attacks: one with his bite and one with his prosthetic blade or deck sweeper, or two melee attacks with his prosthetic blade.

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

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

Deck Sweeper. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 2) piercing damage.

INFERNAL CULTIST

Medium humanoid (any race), chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (scale mail)

Hit Points 16 (3d8 + 3)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	9 (-1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Stealth +3

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages any one language

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Marked Soul. The cultist has a marked soul. An infernalist or infernal master can use the marked soul to summon horrors into the physical world.

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the cultist can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

Spellcasting. The cultist is a 1st-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 11, +3 to hit with spell attacks). The cultist has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance*, *resistance*
1st level (2 slots): *bane*, *inflict wounds*

ACTIONS

Ritual Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage plus 2 (1d4) necrotic damage.





IRON LICH SCIOSAR

Medium undead (necrotech), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 90 (12d8 + 36)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +8, Int +10, Wis +7

Skills Arcana +15, History +10, Insight +7, Perception +7

Damage Resistances cold, lightning, necrotic

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

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Scharde Tongue, Thrallspeak, plus up to five other languages

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Firebox Vulnerability. Sciosar requires necrotite to function. He requires refueling (roughly 5 pounds of necrotite) after every 12 hours of normal activity or every 6 hours of strenuous activity. If not refueled, he suffers one level of exhaustion each hour, bypassing his normal immunity to exhaustion. He can't be killed as a result of exhaustion but becomes stunned at level 6 until his firebox is refilled and lit.

The firebox fails when completely submerged in water or any other liquid. Sciosar is stunned when his firebox is unlit.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Sciosar fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Reconstruction. If it has a phylactery, a destroyed lich can have a new body built. Building a new body requires 5,000 gp in materials and 1d10 days. After gaining a new body, the lich regains all hit points and becomes active again.

Special Equipment. Sciosar has 1d4 empty soul cages.

Spellcasting. Sciosar is a 14th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 18, +9 to hit with spell attacks). Sciosar has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand, prestidigitation, ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, false life, mage armor, shield*
2nd level (3 slots): *acid arrow, detect thoughts, invisibility, ray of enfeeblement*

3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead, counterspell, fireball, vampiric touch*

4th level (3 slots): *black tentacles, blight*

5th level (2 slots): *cloudkill, dominate person*

6th level (1 slot): *create undead, disintegrate*

7th level (1 slot): *finger of death, force cage*

Turn Resistance. Sciosar has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. Sciosar makes three attacks: two with his fell staff and one with Dark Fire.

Fell Staff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage plus 11 (2d10) necrotic damage.

Dark Fire. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +9 to hit, range 100 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) fire damage plus 18 (4d8) necrotic damage. If this damage reduces a living creature with a soul to 0 hit points, Sciosar can immediately capture the soul if he has an empty soul cage, regardless of the distance.

Strength from Death. As a bonus action, Sciosar can consume a soul he has captured in a soul cage. The soul is destroyed, and Sciosar can either make one additional attack during his turn or roll one of the creature's Hit Dice and regain an expended spell slot equal to or lower than the result.

REACTIONS

Soul Cage. If a living creature with a soul dies while within 15 feet of Sciosar, Sciosar can use his reaction to capture the soul in one of his soul cages. Each soul cage can contain only a single soul.



NECROALCHEMIST ALVIN GRISE

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (reinforced chassis)

Hit Points 37 (5d8 + 15)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	9 (-1)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 9

Languages Ordric, Scharde Tongue

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

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

Skittering Legs. Alvin can't be knocked prone while he is conscious unless he chooses to be, and moving through nonmagical difficult terrain doesn't cost him additional movement.

ACTIONS

Poison Needle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. A creature that is not a construct or undead takes 7 (2d6) poison damage and is poisoned for 1 minute on a failed save, or half as much damage and is not poisoned on a successful one.

Poison Bomb. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d10) poison damage, and other creatures within 5 feet of the target must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. A creature that is not a construct or undead takes 5 (1d10) poison damage and is poisoned for 1 minute on a failed save, or half as much damage and is not poisoned on a successful one.

KOVIR BLEDMOORE

Medium humanoid (Scharde human), chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (15 with mage armor)

Hit Points 40 (9d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+1)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +6, History +6

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Five Cant, Ordric, Scharde Tongue

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Blood Fueled. If Kovir reduces a creature to 0 hit points with a melee weapon attack, he can cast a spell of 2nd level or lower as a bonus action.

Marked Soul. Kovir has a marked soul. An infernalist or infernal master can use the marked soul to summon horrors into the physical world.

Spellcasting. Kovir is a 9th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:
 Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, light, mage hand, prestidigitation*
 1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, mage armor, magic missile, shield*
 2nd level (3 slots): *misty step, suggestion*
 3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, fireball, fly*
 4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility, ice storm*
 5th level (1 slot): *cone of cold*

ACTIONS

Ritual Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

ROGAN THE CLAMP

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (leather armor)

Hit Points 55 (10d8 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +3

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Scharde Tongue

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

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

Deathbound. Rogan's soul is bound to Necrofactorium 13.

While Rogan is within 500 feet of the necrofactorium, he regains 5 hit points at the start of his turn, and if damage reduces Rogan to 0 hit points, he must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken. On a success, Rogan drops to 1 hit point instead. If an attack that hits Rogan is a critical hit or Rogan takes radiant damage, these effects do not function until the end of Rogan's next turn.

Additionally, regardless of Rogan's range from the necrofactorium or the type of damage he has taken, when Rogan drops to 0 hit points, his corporeal form disintegrates before reconstituting on the factory floor of the necrofactorium in 1d10 rounds.

Thrall Coordinator (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest).

For 1 minute, Rogan can coordinate the actions of an allied necrotech creature that he can see within 30 feet of him that makes an attack roll or a saving throw. The creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear Rogan. This effect ends if Rogan is incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Rogan makes two 'jack wrench attacks or two musket pistol attacks.

'Jack Wrench. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Musket Pistol. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d12 + 2) piercing damage.



YUDRIAH

THE UMBRAL GUARDIAN

Medium fiend (infernal), lawful evil

Armor Class 21 (soulforged armor)

Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +5

Skills Acrobatics +8, Perception +5, Stealth +8

Damage Resistances poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses blindsight 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages all

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If Yudriah fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Light Sensitivity. While in bright light, Yudriah has disadvantage on attack rolls and Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Magic Weapons. Yudriah's weapon attacks are magical.

Reactive. Yudriah can take one reaction on every turn in a combat.

Shadow Guardian. Yudriah can conceal herself within the shadow of a creature with the Marked Soul trait. While within a creature's shadow, she has total cover against attacks and other effects. If the creature whose shadow she is concealed within is targeted by a ranged attack, she can immediately emerge and appears in an open area within 5 feet of the creature's shadow. She can then use Shield Guard.

Soulless. Yudriah does not have a soul.

Soul Mark. A living humanoid creature slain by Yudriah is considered to have the Marked Soul trait.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Yudriah makes two melee attacks.

Soulforged Longspear. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) piercing damage plus 18 (4d8) necrotic damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of Yudriah's choice that is within 120 feet of her and aware of her must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to Yudriah's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

REACTIONS

Defensive Strike. As a reaction, Yudriah can make a longspear attack targeting a creature that moves within her melee range.

Shield Guard. When a friendly creature within 15 feet of Yudriah is hit by a ranged attack, Yudriah can use her reaction to be hit instead.





GRIEVER

Small fiend (infernal horror), lawful evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 36 (8d6 + 8)

Speed 0 ft., fly 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)	10 (+0)	4 (-3)

Saving Throws Dex +5

Damage Vulnerabilities radiant

Damage Resistances poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Magic Weapons. The griever's weapon attacks are magical.

Mass Summons. A spellcaster can summon one additional griever for every three spell levels sacrificed as part of the summoning.

Soulless. The griever does not have a soul.

Void Inferno. The griever can take the Help action to help an allied griever attack a creature within the normal range of both griever's Void Fire. If the attack hits, the target takes an extra 11 (2d10) fire damage.

ACTIONS

Void Fire. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or 60/180 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 25 (4d10 + 3) fire damage.

REEF SHARK

Medium beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 22 (4d8+4)

Speed Swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	4 (-3)

Skills Perception +2

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 12

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

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

Water Breathing. The shark can breathe only underwater.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.



SLUDGE BRUTE

Large ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 45 (6d10 + 12)

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	6 (-2)	14 (+2)	2 (-4)	6 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned, prone

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Alchemical Consumption. The sludge brute can absorb any alchemical or magic potion it comes into contact with, regaining hit points just as if it had consumed a *potion of healing* of the same rarity as the absorbed item.

Alchemical Scent. The sludge brute has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks to detect alchemical substances and potions.

Amorphous. The sludge brute can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

False Appearance. While the sludge brute remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an ordinary puddle of toxic waste.

Spider Climb. The sludge brute can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

ACTIONS

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) acid damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be affected by a random condition for 1 minute, as shown in the following table. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

d6 Condition

1	Charmed
2	Frightened
3	Invisible
4	Petrified
5	Poisoned
6	Blinded

THRULLG

Large aberration, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 85 (10d10 + 30)

Speed 40 ft., climb 20 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	7 (-2)

Skills Athletics +6, Stealth +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages —

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Amphibious. The thrullg can breathe air and water.

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

Magic Sense. The thrullg can pinpoint the location of magic items and spellcasting within 100 feet of it.

Underwater Camouflage. The thrullg has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made while underwater.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The thrullg makes three melee attacks: one with its tentacle bite and two with its claws.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Tentacle Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 14). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the thrullg can't use its tentacle bite on another target.

Absorb Magic. The thrullg can feed on any magic items held by a creature it has grappled. The magic item loses all its magical properties for 1d4 rounds, and the thrullg regains 28 (8d4 + 8) hit points. If the thrullg feeds off the same magic item for 3 consecutive rounds, the magic item is rendered mundane and permanently loses all its magical properties.

Blackout Pulse. The thrullg releases an aura of arcane static that disrupts nearby mechanika and weakens the energies stored within other magic items. Each mechanical item within 30 feet of the thrullg loses 1d3 charges, and each magic item that utilizes charges within 30 feet of the thrullg loses 1d3 charges.



"CHASING SHADOWS" SHIPS





THE CURSED DAGGER

Small ship (30 feet by 15 feet)

Armor Class 14

Damage Threshold 10 (Critical Threshold 20)

Hull Points 150

Initiative +4

Crew 20, maximum 35

Crew Quality Trained

Crew Proficiency Bonus +2

Maneuverability Check +6

Speed (sails) 3 (minimum 5 crew)

Travel Pace 6 miles per hour/144 miles per day

Tonnage 5 tons

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, stunned, unconscious

Sails. The ship's speed decreases by 1 when sailing into the wind, and increases by 1 when sailing with the wind. The ship's travel speed decreases by 2 miles per hour/48 miles per day when sailing against the wind, and increases to by miles per hour/48 miles per day when sailing with the wind.

Steam (Secondary). The ship's engine requires coal to operate.

WEAPON BATTERIES

12-Pound Cannons. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range medium/long, one target. *Hit:* 26 (4d12) bludgeoning damage or 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage at half crew

THE RIPTIDE

Small ship (20 feet by 10 feet)

Armor Class 14

Damage Threshold 10 (Critical Threshold 20)

Hull Points 100

Initiative +4

Crew 10, maximum 20

Crew Quality Trained

Crew Proficiency Bonus +2

Maneuver Check +6

Speed (sails) 3 (minimum 5 crew)

Tonnage 10 tons

Travel Pace 6 miles per hour/144 miles per day

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, stunned, unconscious

Sails. The ship's speed decreases by 1 when sailing into the wind and increases by 1 when sailing with the wind. The ship's travel pace decreases by 2 miles per hour/48 miles per day when sailing against the wind and increases by 2 miles per hour/48 miles per day when sailing with the wind.

WEAPON BATTERIES

12-Pound Cannons. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range medium/long, one target. *Hit:* 26 (4d12) bludgeoning damage or 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage at half crew.

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SHIPWRECK'D



SHIPWRETCH'D IS SET ON A SMALL, UNCHARTED ISLAND in the archipelago known as the Scharde Islands. Being too far from traffic lanes, this island is generally overlooked by the pirates and undead that sail the region. The adventure begins on the beachhead of the isle's southern shore, when the characters awaken to discover they have been shipwrecked far from home amid the broken remnants of their ship and the corpses of those who sailed with them, including the captain. There are no immediate signs of life and no immediate hope of rescue.

In this seemingly uninhabited wilderness, the characters find themselves embroiled in a battle for survival against not only the island's natural dangers but also the trio of groups vying for control of the island: pirates who were led here by their captain under false pretenses, native islanders who want nothing to do with the outsiders invading their land, and an insane warwitch siren in the heart of the darkness—one who has surrounded herself with evil in preparation for the arrival of a greater host of invaders, the Orgoth.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

As the final battle of the Claiming—the war for the souls of the people of Immoren, waged by infernals from beyond time and space—raged at Henge Hold, the warwitch siren Yssandra Dain dropped anchor in the seas west of Immoren and waited to be called to attack. Instead, she heard a different summons. Lured off the coast of Garlghast by a call from beneath the waves, she and her crew salvaged the wreckage of an ancient vessel, and from it she recovered a skull, malformed and carved with indecipherable runes, that whispered secrets to her in the dead of night: secrets of the Orgoth, who had invaded western Immoren centuries ago.

Secrets about their next invasion.

Like a twisted ambassador with a cursed compass, Yssandra set sail to an uncharted island and its abandoned lighthouse. Despite losing much of her crew along the way, she was determined to follow the Orgoth skull's directive to rendezvous with Orgoth scouts and reveal to them what she knew of western Immoren's defenses and vulnerabilities. And she had learned much before she was warped into a warwitch siren; she and her husband had been soldiers in western Immoren before their village had fallen to Cryxian invaders.

Upon her arrival at the island's northernmost shore, Yssandra ordered her remaining crew members to blast a hole in their ship, *Moon Shadow*, and sink it to the bottom of the nearby lagoon, thereby ensuring that the last of her crew would never leave her side.

Yssandra's fixation on the island did not pass unnoticed. Pirates followed her ship as she sailed into her personal madness. They were led by a blighted captain named Rogan Dain, who promised his shipmates that the island contained artifacts and treasure left behind by the Orgoth. In truth, the buccaneer didn't know what they might find, but he didn't hesitate to deceive his crew; without them, he didn't think he would be able to catch up to his cursed wife and rescue her from the evils that had been inflicted upon her.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

Shipwretch'd is designed for a party of **four 11th- to 16th-level characters** and is balanced for a group of 13th-level characters. The adventure is divided into nine distinct stages, and it is recommended that the characters gain a level at the end of stage 2 and every other stage thereafter.

Unlike adventures that incorporate a great deal of combat, *Shipwretch'd* relies heavily on interaction, negotiation, and roleplaying. Although it presents many opportunities for battle, GMs are encouraged to keep careful track of the various interactions characters have with nonplayer characters and their relationships at any given time. Players should be rewarded for clever dealings with the natives and the pirates.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The adventure begins when the characters awaken on a sandy beachhead on the edge of a thick jungle. The beach winds east and west, curving away from the shore in both directions, suggesting a relatively small island surrounded by the wide, open sea.

Part 1, "Castaways," begins with the characters searching the wreckage, bodies, and other flotsam all along the beachhead for clues about where they are and what's happening to them. Unbeknownst to them, the corpses washing ashore are bait for what lies beneath the sand.

Part 2, "Welcome to the Jungle," takes place in the undergrowth that dominates the island. The characters begin to learn about the clashes between the natives who have lived on this island for generations and the pirates who came here in search of long-forgotten treasure (or so most of them believe).

Part 3, "Creatures from the Lagoon," brings the characters closer to understanding the series of events that sank two ships in the deep lagoon at the island's center and reveals what might be their only means of escaping the island alive before they become the victims of one group or another.

Part 4, "Jungle Law," finds the characters battered by a savage storm that makes its way ashore while they're negotiating their way to the native village, the first stop on their journey to a lighthouse where they hope to find a means of leaving the island.

Part 5, "It Takes a Village," occurs when the characters reach the native village, an old Orgoth hold. They must evade, negotiate with, or battle the locals in order to reach the secret tunnels that wind their way up the mountainside to the lighthouse and the demon that is believed to live there.

Part 6, "The Pirates Attack," features a clash between the pirates and the natives, with the pirates just as intent on reaching the lighthouse as the characters, albeit for very different reasons.

Part 7, "Tunnel Vision," finds the characters weaving their way up the mountain through long-abandoned tunnels. Along the way, they'll need to avoid old Orgoth traps and a kind of undead called "the wretched," who have been sent by Yssandra—the island's "demon"—to defend the passages against intruders while she awaits the Orgoth invaders.

Rogan's pirates and the natives are not far behind, as all three groups head for a final confrontation.

Stage 8, "The Lighthouse, the Warwitch, and the Reunion," brings together the characters, the pirates, the natives, and the warwitch siren, all with their own agendas and goals, though not all of them will get what they were hoping for.

Stage 9, "Rescue?," may or may not result in the characters finding a means of escape from the island, depending on which groups they've supported and which they've opposed.

GAME MASTER GUIDANCE

Shipwretch'd includes a host of distinctive NPCs with conflicting goals, both stated and unstated. It's also designed with an open-ended finale that encourages GMs to juggle plot points as the adventure unfolds. If you want to make sure you keep your end goals for its conclusion in sight, be sure to read through the entire adventure before running it for your players.

Text like this is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased to the players, typically at the start of an encounter or when the characters arrive at a location for the first time.

This adventure is set in the Iron Kingdoms setting. Additional material for this full-metal fantasy setting can be found in the *Iron Kingdoms: Nightmare Empire* and *Scoundrel's Guide to the Scharde Islands* sourcebooks.

Each creature in this adventure is detailed in the core monster book, the *Iron Kingdoms: Monsternomicon* sourcebook, the *Scoundrel's Guide to the Scharde Islands* sourcebook, or appendix A. (Stat blocks for various NPCs are noted in parentheses as being in appendix B.) When a creature's name appears in **bold type**, that's a visual cue pointing you to its stat block in one of these resources. The Creatures table tells you where you can find creatures that do not appear in the core monster book.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Because *Shipwretch'd* begins with the characters in a difficult spot, players will want to know how they ended up in a situation beyond their control. Several backstory elements would make a good prelude to this adventure, including the following:

Captain Barlo Medina—the late captain of the *Forerunner*, one of the ships already at the bottom of the lagoon when the adventure begins—hired the characters to serve as mercenary soldiers as he approached a "hostile client" (namely, the warwitch siren Yssandra). If you choose this option, at least one character recognizes Yssandra by name as someone Barlo was working for.

Captain Barlo agreed to take the characters aboard as paying passengers, since their intended destination didn't require him to deviate far from the course that brought him to within a day of the island. If you choose this option, the characters know nothing of Barlo's goals.

The characters were aboard a different vessel that crashed into the *Forerunner's* sinking hulk, taking both vessels down. If you choose this option, the characters never encountered Captain Barlo and know nothing of his goals.

Whether you choose one of these circumstances or another creative idea that accounts for their presence on the island, the characters should remember a wild storm at sea, a devastating crash (either of the *Forerunner* into the rocks or of their ship into the *Forerunner*), and their near-drowning as they were tossed across the violent sea, pulled under by the tide, and finally thrown ashore.

Be sure to leave the characters with whatever possessions they had before they started this adventure. (After all, being a castaway is hardship enough!)





PART 1: CASTAWAYS

In this stage of the adventure, the characters awaken to find themselves the sole survivors of a shipwreck that has stranded them on a deserted beach on an unknown island somewhere in the Scharde Islands. Clues to what happened are scattered up and down the sands, but with the sun slowly sinking and a storm coming in, the characters don't have much time to regroup. As the hot beach cools with the setting sun, the creatures that live beneath the sands are drawn to the surface to feast upon the unexpected meat tossed on the shore—including the surviving castaways. Before the characters can escape the island, they'll need to escape the dangers of the beachhead first.

When you're ready to begin the adventure, proceed to the "Sun on the Beach" section.

THE ISLAND OF ETERNAL FACES

Over the many years since the Orgoth abandoned this island, it has developed an unusual magical effect: some of the creatures that die on the island are brought back to life, sometimes as they were but sometimes as something twisted and evil. The source of this unnatural effect is the stone totem that emits the guidance beacon light at the top of the lighthouse.

RANDOM BEACH EVENTS

<i>d100</i>	<i>Event</i>
01–20	A high wave crashes on the shore, washing waterlogged corpses onto the beach
21–40	A swarm of carrion birds dives from the jungle to devour the corpses
41–60	A driving rain begins to pound on the beach as a prelude to the approaching storm
61–80	A single spear is thrown onto the beach from the jungle, apparently as a warning
81–90	Shark fins break the surface of the water as sharks begin feeding on bodies still floating at sea
91–95	A severed arm in the sand begins to twitch as if coming back to life
96–00	Human shapes flit back and forth along the jungle's edge as if watching the characters

Although the island is unknown to most outsiders, its natives call it "the Island of Eternal Faces," a reference to the massive stone faces carved into the lighthouse. These visages look out over the sea in every direction and shine the totem's light when the totem is placed in the beacon's projector.

ADDING PRESSURE EVENTS TO THE STAGE

This stage takes place entirely on the beach that runs between the sea and the jungles farther inland. If you want to increase the intensity of the situation and motivate the characters to get off the beach more quickly, consider rolling on the Random Beach Events table.

SETTING THE STAGE

This adventure assumes that the characters know each other before they awaken in the aftermath of the shipwreck. If the players prefer to come together as strangers, now would be a good time to have them introduce their characters to each other.

SUN ON THE BEACH

When your players are ready to begin, set the stage by reading the following text aloud:

You awaken with a jolt on a narrow, deserted, sandy beach with nothing but the vast sea on one side and a thick jungle on the other. The air is heavy with heat and humidity. Up and down the beach lie the remnants of a ship—wooden planks, shredded sails, and miscellaneous flotsam, as well as around a dozen corpses, the broken remains of those who didn't survive the shipwreck that put you here. As you gaze upon the wreckage, you notice other survivors regaining consciousness as well. Clouds begin to obscure the sun as it sinks toward the horizon, casting shadows over the debris around you. A storm is blowing in from out at sea, and the choppy waves that strike the shore are growing harsher by the minute.

Before the characters leave the beach, they'll likely search the wreckage and bodies for clues about their situation. As they prepare to do so, read the following text aloud:

As you begin to search, the sun's warmth begins to fade, the intensity of the waves coming ashore increases, and everywhere you look, the sand seems to shift ever so slightly, as if settling in for the night to come—or perhaps waking up instead.

When the characters inevitably head for the jungle, read the following text aloud:

The heat of the day lessens as you reach the edge of the jungle, although the humidity refuses to fade. You smell the thick scent of green life as you enter the shadows, and this, coupled with the smell of rain in the air, is strangely unsettling. It feels as if there's more than foliage pressing in on you, but you can't hear anything above the crashing waves.

THE LATE CAPTAIN BARLO

The intact corpse of Barlo Medina, the late captain of the ship *Forerunner*, lies among the debris and wreckage on the shore. Despite his imposing, muscular stature, Barlo was an affable

giant who could talk in a surprisingly gentle tone about the vague religious reasons he shaved his body so meticulously as to keep it entirely devoid of hair.

If the characters search Barlo's corpse, they find a pouch containing a note. Although the ink is smeared and the scroll is fragile now that it's wet, the writing is still legible. Unfortunately for the characters, the message is written in code. A character who spends 1 minute trying to decipher the code can make a DC 15 Intelligence check, rolling with advantage if the character has a background that involves espionage or cryptography. On a successful check, the character deciphers the message, which simply says, "Look for the face at midnight."

The pouch also contains 25 gp in very old gold coins. Any character proficient in the History skill immediately realizes that the coins are hundreds of years old and date back to the time when the Orgoth ruled the mainland. A sheath stitched into one of Barlo's pant legs contains a sizable straight razor that served as both the captain's holy symbol and his weapon of choice.

THE EQUALLY LATE SHIP'S MATE, CASSIE

The body of Cassie, the ship's mate aboard the *Forerunner*, also lies on the beach. Characters will remember Cassie as being fiercely loyal to Captain Barlo, though she frequently referred to him as "Baldo." Her body is missing an arm and both legs, and the bite marks on her corpse suggest it was partially consumed by sharks before it washed ashore.

As soon as the characters' attentions are elsewhere, Cassie's body disappears. Although the characters may assume she was somehow dragged back into the sea by the increasingly rough waves, a closer examination of her body's former resting place and a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check reveal drag marks and scratches in the sand, clearly indicating that Cassie's corpse used its one remaining arm to pull itself back into the water.

ENCOUNTER: THE NIGHT FEAST

As the sun descends, ten **swarms of blighted crabs** burrow out from beneath the sands to feast on the bodies that dot the beach. The swarms blanket the entire expanse of the beach, coming up from the sand in a vast living blanket of chitin and claws.

CRAB TACTICS

The crabs instinctively scuttle more quickly than usual with the storm pressing in, but their hunger doesn't allow them to retreat or otherwise give ground. They attack dead and living bodies alike with equal aggression for 10 minutes, after which time they begin digging into the sand again to escape the rising wind and rain. Any crabs still engaged in combat at this time will continue to fight as the others retreat underground but will not pursue anyone who leaves the beach and enters the jungle. Once all characters have left the beach, any surviving crabs burrow back into the sand.



PART 2: WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

In this part of the adventure, the characters encounter one of the major groups on the island and learn about both groups' conflicts and objectives. Each group is hostile toward the other, so the characters need be careful about choosing allies and making enemies if they want to survive long enough to figure out what's going on and what they need to do to get off the island. Each group has something different to offer the characters, so alienating either one might mean being trapped for a prolonged period of time in a hostile and potentially lethal environment.

SETTING THE STAGE

Once the characters have left the beach and are under the canopy of the jungle, read the following text aloud:

The storm headed for the island seems remote now that you're under the protection of the jungle canopy, but you don't feel any safer. The jungle floor is damp and slick with overgrowth, and the trees are coated with all sorts of ivy and moss. Yet even in this seemingly chaotic environment, you can still see places where the brush, vines, and tangles have been parted and trod upon, suggesting there may well be a path here . . . although where it leads and what's at its end, you have no idea.

A character who studies the trails can make a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check. If the check succeeds, the character not only clearly identifies a trail leading deeper into the jungle but also determines that it was not made by animals.

ADDING PRESSURE EVENTS TO THE STAGE

Even though this stage of the adventure includes only one primary encounter—either with the natives or with the pirates—the jungle should feel dangerous enough to encourage the characters to seek safety in numbers. Before they encounter one of the groups, however, roll three times on the Random Jungle Events table, once for each hour in the jungle, rerolling any repeat results. If the characters couldn't find the trail into the jungle or were unwilling to follow it, roll five times instead, with the first roll automatically being 41–60 and without rerolling repeat results.

RANDOM JUNGLE EVENTS

d100

Event

- 01–20 A mudslide threatens to drag characters down a steep slope to a quicksand-like pool below
- 21–40 2 (1d4) **swarms of carrion birds** dive-bomb the characters for invading their territory
- 41–60 Aggressive plant life tries to entangle characters and restrain them
- 61–80 Webs from two **giant spiders** block the characters' paths, and the spiders attack if the characters stop to investigate
- 81–90 A **giant centipede** drops from the jungle canopy on whichever character is last in the party's marching order
- 91–95 A random character begins to feel feverish and dizzy from the heat and must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or suffer one level of exhaustion
- 96–00 A **swarm of rats**, all of them rotted and clearly long dead, attacks whichever character is first in the party's marching order

ENCOUNTER: THE SLOUGH TRIBE OR THE PIRATE CREW OF THE *REQUITE*

Two groups roam the jungle, and the characters will encounter one of them as they make their way deeper into the jungle. The Slough tribe, whose chief is named Arah, has sentinels scattered throughout the entirety of the jungle in order to keep any pirates from getting too close to the tribal village; the pirate crew of the *Requite*, on the other hand, came to the island seeking long-lost treasures supposedly left behind by the Orgoth, though their captain, Rogan Dain, has an ulterior motive. Rogan and his crew all believe their goals lie within the tribal village, and so they've clashed repeatedly with the Slough as they've tried to raid the tribe's holdings.

FIGHT OR FLIGHT?

The Slough village was built in and around an Orgoth hold whose now-barricaded tunnels run through the mountainside and provide the only means of reaching the lighthouse, confronting Yssandra, and finding a way off the Island of Eternal Faces. As a result, how the characters react when encountering the Slough tribe or the pirate crew will drive the climax of the adventure.

As the GM, you'll roleplay both as Arah and her tribe and as Rogan and his crew, with each group encouraging the characters to clash with the other. The adventure will be more enjoyable for everyone if you play up this angle. Each

group has valid reasons for distrusting the other, and neither group is willing to negotiate a temporary truce in light of past conflicts that resulted in deaths on both sides. The more the characters feel caught in the middle, the more engaging the climax of the adventure will be.

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Although you can randomly determine which group the characters encounter, you don't need to do so if you have a good feeling for how the characters will react to each group; instead, you can choose the group that will generate whatever you consider the right amount of conflict for the adventure. Read the descriptions of both groups before you decide which group the characters encounter, keeping in mind that they'll encounter the other group in stage 4.

ARAH AND THE SLOUGH TRIBE

The Island of Eternal Faces is uncharted but not unpopulated. Its inhabitants—a tribe of eighty-four interrelated men, women, and children—call themselves the Slough, and they have lived here for generations beyond reckoning. They are an insular people who are wary of new arrivals, and their natural olive-green skin tone grants them a degree of camouflage while in the jungle. All of them keep their hair extremely short and wear a mishmash of armor bits, skins, wooden shields, and anything they can cobble together from the island itself, flotsam on the shore, or dead enemies. In addition, they all carry wooden spears, bows, and arrows, as well as stone knives.

As the only member of the Slough tribe to have ever left the Island of Eternal Faces, their chief, a young woman named **Arah** (see appendix B), knows that the seas and other islands around her tribe's homeland are populated by dangerous people, so she has decided that the Slough can't allow foreigners to establish a foothold on their island. To that end, her scouts have already killed three pirates who made forays into and around her village over the last week. The Slough acquired two pistols from those battles, but since Arah is the only one who has any experience with firearms, she carries both.

Five **Slough scouts** (see appendix B)—an older man named Gohor, two young men named Kokor and Taligi, and two middle-aged women named Vokah and Paetah—are currently watching the path they have deliberately trampled between the beach and the lagoon. The path is designed to keep both the pirates of the *Requite* and the newly arrived characters from heading in the direction of the Slough's tribal village. These scouts are aggressive and threatening but aren't actually looking for battle. They engage only if they are attacked first; otherwise, their intent is to scare off any outsiders. Even though the scouts aren't looking for a fight, they'll stand down only if they're convinced that the characters aren't part of a second wave of pirates.

Because Arah is the only member of the tribe who speaks the Scharde dialect, the Slough scouts can't communicate verbally with the characters; however, they are smart and



eager to understand any characters who try to quell any perceived distrust. If they reach a peace with the characters, the scouts can use hand gestures and a form of pantomime to communicate the following information:

The pirates arrived on a ship that the Slough sank in the lagoon.

They've killed pirates, but only because the pirates brought the fight to them.

A demon lives on the island, but they don't know where. They think the pirates might be working for the demon and are here to steal from the tribal village.

They're willing to introduce the characters to Arah but won't take the characters to the village; instead, they'll ask Arah to meet them at the lagoon.

The lighthouse predates the tribe's records and is therefore a forbidden place. They strongly suspect the demon is living there and are therefore loath to discuss it.

One of their own may now serve the demon. Although this individual's name is Nahn, they refer to her as "the exile" but will not discuss the matter further.

If the characters have no interest in peaceful interactions with the Slough scouts, or if the parties' respective inabilities to communicate frustrate the characters in an obvious way, all the scouts aim at one character, intending to injure that character as a warning if needed, and then use their camouflage to disappear into the jungle. (If one character has been the primary communicator, the Slough target that character; if no character has taken the lead in communicating, the Slough target a random character instead.) If the characters pursue them for more than 2 rounds, the Slough scouts engage in battle until one or more scouts are incapacitated, at which point the remaining scouts surrender.

In summary:

The Slough want the pirates off their island.

They remain ambivalent about the characters until the characters give them a reason to trust or distrust them.

The Slough want nothing to do with the demon and do not want Nahn among them, believing the exile has been taken by the demon.

ROLEPLAYING THE SLOUGH

The Slough are a cautious people. Having come to the island during the purging of the Molgur from western Immoren, they adapted to their new home on the jungle island. The

Slough are careful in their interactions with outsiders, having had a few bad encounters with local pirates, but they are curious about the world outside the island and show particular fascination for characters who are not humans.

ALLYING WITH THE SLOUGH

If the characters reach an understanding with the Slough scouts, the scouts do their best to explain to the characters that they want them to meet Arah, their leader. If the characters grasp the idea or are willing to accompany the scouts, one of the scouts disappears into the jungle, presumably to summon Arah, while the other four lead the characters to the lagoon to meet her, indicating that they will need to camp overnight at the lagoon while they wait for her.

ROGAN DAIN AND THE CREW OF THE *REQUITE*

Rogan Dain (see appendix B) is the captain of the pirate ship *Requite*, which is currently lying at the bottom of the lagoon alongside *Moon Shadow*. Rogan's wife, Yssandra, was abducted by Cryxian pirates during a raid on their village. Despite being transformed by blight and left behind, Rogan didn't surrender to these horrifying changes; instead, he threw himself into finding his wife and rescuing her. He used his background as a former soldier to recruit a crew for his own ship and then began following his wife's trail as he prowled the trade routes of the Scharde Islands.

Along the way, Rogan learned the horrible truth: his wife had become a warwitch siren in the service of the Nightmare Empire. Unbeknownst to Rogan, Yssandra had heard another call—one that took her first on a salvage mission of a long-forgotten sunken Orgoth ship and then, without explanation, to this small, uncharted island.

When Rogan and the crew of the *Requite* sailed into the lagoon after circling the island, they saw no sign of Yssandra's vessel; it was only after dropping anchor in the lagoon and launching a rowboat to shore that they realized her ship was sunk at the bottom of the lagoon. Although the ship was visible and seemingly intact, there was no indication that Yssandra or any of her crew had survived. But once Rogan saw the lighthouse on the island's lone mountain, he was certain his wife had sailed here to reach it.

The pirate captain took a team ashore to find a way up the mountainside to the lighthouse, leaving seven crew members behind to guard the ship. Finding the mountain impossible to climb without specialized equipment, they returned to the *Requite* to regroup and consider another way. To their horror, they found the *Requite* on fire and sinking and their fellow crew members lying dead on the shore. Rogan and his eight remaining mates found evidence pointing to the Slough as the attackers, and they swore they would avenge the fallen and force the natives to tell them how to reach the lighthouse.

Since then, Rogan has lost three members of his crew who were scouting the natives' village for information about the lighthouse, but the pirates have discovered that the village is constructed around and atop an old Orgoth hold. Given that

Yssandra salvaged an Orgoth shipwreck before coming here, Rogan is certain the villagers can tell him how to find his wife. For their part, his crew believes the village is now their guidepost to find the ancient Orgoth treasure their captain promised them.

The survivors of the *Requite* appear both ahead of the characters and behind them as both groups work their way through the jungle, whether on the path or in the undergrowth. They have weapons at the ready but will make gestures for silence if encountered, indicating with their hands that there are likely enemies all around them and beckoning the characters into a small clearing for conversation.

If the characters reject the pirates' offer to talk, read the following text aloud:

The lead pirate steps forward and growls, "You either throw in with us or build a house and plant a garden, 'cause we're the only way off this island," He gestures around at his crew. "We're not staying. And if you think you are, I'm bettin' you'll find out it's not the most inviting island among the Scharde." He smiles broadly. "But hey, what do I know? I'm just a pirate whose ship didn't sink at sea. I'll get it back, you wait."

One of his pirates grunts in disapproval, and the older pirate waves a hand at him. "Isaak is pretty grouchy—'murderously grouchy' is a good way to put it, I think. Your staying with us would probably make him a bit nicer, don't you think?"

If the characters try to engage the pirates in combat, Rogan and his men fight them until either the first pirate or the first character loses consciousness or dies. At this point, Rogan and his crew retreat into the jungle. If the characters persist in following or harassing the pirates, he follows the same pattern repeatedly until either all of his crew or all the characters are unconscious or dead.

If the characters accompany the pirates to the clearing, Rogan takes the initiative and engages them. If they explain how they ended up on the island and they mention the *Forerunner*, Captain Barlo, or ship's mate Cassie, Rogan asks about the *Forerunner's* crew and expresses his sadness if he learns that Barlo and Cassie are dead. "That Cassie," he says, "was a real survivor."

If confronted about their plans for escaping the island, the pirates become uneasy. They don't seem to have a plan for escape, though if the captain senses they're thinking about the topic too much, he steers them clear with a declaration such as "The rich have obstacles, not problems. We'll get home once we're rich."

In summary:

The pirates want to reach the lighthouse, and Rogan believes the villagers know how to access it.

The five surviving crew members are focused on the treasures they believe lie in the former Orgoth hold beneath the village. (Rogan knows that the treasure was nothing more than a way for him to gather a crew, although he plays along so as not to let his mates catch on to his deception.)

All the pirates, including Rogan, want revenge on the

natives for sinking the *Requite* and killing her crew, although reaching the lighthouse and obtaining the treasure are more important.

ROLEPLAYING THE CREW OF THE REQUITE

Rogan suffers from blight but hasn't let it break his spirit. He's generally good-natured and often jokes about both his condition ("Blight makes right, doesn't it?") and his crew's situation ("Without a ship, we're more squatters than pirates, am I right?"). He ends most of his witticisms with a question but becomes serious and focused when discussing Yssandra. He won't deny that he's in this for her rescue, but he knows he needs to keep the crew focused on treasure and vengeance so that they don't become distracted. He also tends to use the expression "by Grace" with some regularity, though it's unlikely the characters will see any significance in the phrase until the end of the adventure.

Rogan's crew consists of three nondescript cutthroats named Grim, Vellik, and Waylor—run-of-the-mill thugs who say little and are all about getting whatever they can—and two former members of the military named Isaak and Freya, who are polar opposites to one another (see the "Pirate Spotlight: Isaak and Freya" sidebar).

ALLYING WITH THE PIRATES

If the characters and the pirates form any kind of an alliance, Rogan enthusiastically engages the characters in idle banter while leading them to the lagoon, where he plans to make camp for the night and weather the oncoming storm before heading to the lighthouse at dawn. All the while, Isaak drills the characters about their skills—mountaineering, sailing, swimming, and anything else that might be relevant to getting them off the island. For her part, Freya chimes in with references to heatstroke and summer hibernation.

PIRATE SPOTLIGHT: ISAAK AND FREYA

The two key secondary pirates—Isaak and Freya—are useful to the GM as a means of conveying missing information, redirecting characters back to Rogan's backstory, or simply driving the plot if things slow down.

Isaak is a former officer of the Cygnaran Navy. The self-righteous pirate is convinced he should have been ship's mate on the *Requite* even though Rogan declared that the spot was being "saved" for the day when his wife would rejoin them. Convinced that Rogan is more swindler than pirate, he has little faith there's any treasure to be found, and even if there is, he doesn't think the crew has any means of getting off the island with it. Dour and fatalistic, he notes with regularity that "no one gets out alive, you know."

Freya is a former foot soldier in the Khadoran military. Indifferent to danger, she isn't interested in debating the captain's decisions and has more of the devil-may-care attitude one expects from a pirate. Her favorite topic of conversation is how hot the island is compared to Khador, which is far from tropical. ("You know what really makes my blood boil?" she asks routinely. "The weather!")



PART 3: CREATURES FROM THE LAGOON

In this part of the adventure, the characters get their first glimpse of the lighthouse, the primary objective of the pirates and a source of fear for the natives. They also get a major clue about the regenerative powers of the Island of Eternal Faces. Additionally, they sense the force of the storm as it makes landfall elsewhere, and they encounter Nahn, a former member of the Slough who has been exiled from the tribe after falling prey to the magic of the “demon” that lives in the lighthouse.

SETTING THE STAGE

Once the characters emerge from the jungle and approach the lagoon, read the following text aloud:

Somewhere back the way you came comes a rumble of thunder and, in the near-darkness of dusk, a brilliant flash of lightning. The lagoon’s edge offers a natural canopy to weather out the night. The lagoon itself looks like a painting each time the lightning flashes: it is wide, clear, and still; and during those flashes, you can see the wavering outline of two ships sunk below the surface. You look up at the sky and catch your first glimpse of a darkened lighthouse to the north: a thin, square tower with a huge face carved into the stone at the very top on each of its sides, their dark mouths open wide in silent screams.

ENCOUNTER: NAHN THE EXILE

In the late evening, just a few hours before the storm makes full landfall, the characters meet **Nahn** (see appendix B), a Slough woman who was exiled from the Slough village due to her alleged failure to resist the magic of the “demon.” The first time the characters see her, she is kneeling by the far side of the lagoon and holding two pieces of hollow bamboo shoots. She presses one shoot to one of her ears and holds the other to her mouth; the other ends of both shoots are dipped into the water. Given her periodic actions and reactions—she laughs out loud at one point—she seems to be using the shoots to communicate with something in the water.

If the Slough brought the characters to the lagoon to meet Arah, all of them but Arah react with open hostility to Nahn, throwing rocks at her, shouting at her, and making gestures for her to leave. For her part, Arah simply stares sadly at Nahn without displaying any signs of aggression. If the characters express interest in interacting with Nahn, the Slough scouts retreat into the rain and the jungle and wait for the characters to finish their business with the exile. If the characters seem intent on keeping Nahn around for a prolonged period of time, the Slough scouts deliberately and violently drive her off. Arah will not interfere with their efforts, but any character who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check sees that the tribe’s chief wants her people to stop treating Nahn so cruelly.

If the pirates brought the characters to the lagoon, Rogan identifies Nahn as “the one the villagers drove off.” (“How’s that for petty?”) He doesn’t know her name and hasn’t interacted with her, as he suspects she’s crazy, diseased, dangerous, or all three. He warns the characters and suggests they not have much to do with her. He and his crewmates won’t interfere if the characters want to try to communicate with her, but they won’t allow Nahn to come among them. (“We gots enough crazy already,” Isaak notes. “Nobody gets out alive, but she’s one likely to help you get out sooner.”)

THREADING THE NEEDLE BETWEEN THE SLOUGH AND THE PIRATES

Whether the characters came here with the Slough scouts or Rogan’s pirates, the other group will not yet have figured into their plans. Ultimately, the characters’ interactions with these groups will determine whether they spend the coming stormy night camped with one or the other.

If the characters came to the lagoon with the Slough to meet Arah, the pirates will not approach, but any character who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check spies a pirate slipping into the darkness at the lagoon’s edge just before the storm hits the area in full force at dawn. Given the circumstances, the Slough won’t want the characters to chase the pirates, and the storm’s sudden arrival will eliminate the option. At this stage, the characters’ interactions with Arah should follow the same guidelines established in stage 2.

If the characters came to the lagoon with the pirates on

their way to the lighthouse, the Slough will spot them from their hiding places in the jungle, and the characters will have almost no chance of befriending the natives, as they will seem to be allied with the invaders from the *Requite*. Unless the characters openly shift their allegiance by attacking the pirates, the Slough will not allow them to enter their village without intense negotiations or combat (see stage 5, “It Takes a Village”).

ROLEPLAYING ARAH

Arah is a wise and clever woman. She knows the Common tongue but will pretend not to understand questions she’d rather not answer and will feign misunderstanding in an attempt to obtain more information. Whenever the characters speak among themselves, Arah will deliberately seem distracted, nodding and smiling as if their words mean nothing to her when, in fact, she’s gathering more knowledge of their group. Given the opportunity to do so, Arah will try to use the characters to combat the pirates, the demon, or both, playing on the characters’ egos, honor, or greed as needed.

Arah carries a great deal of guilt about exiling one of the tribe’s own, so if the characters are kind to Nahn, Arah will more readily trust them and provide aid to them.

THE EXILE: NAHN SHALL PASS

Nahn will not approach the characters but will not retreat if they approach. She can communicate in an old dialect of the Common tongue, albeit with a heavy accent. She learned the standard version of Five Cant from Arah, but her accent and dialect came from the “demon light” in the lighthouse.

When the characters reach the lagoon, Nahn is speaking into the water and listening to the speech that comes in response. She is communicating with a wretched on *Moon Shadow*, the ship that Yssandra sailed here and then sank to keep her crew from ever leaving her.

Nahn’s entire body is covered in blisters and other sores that resemble faces pressing up against her flesh from within. She doesn’t know exactly how this happened to her, although she remembers an incredibly bright light that temporarily blinded her. She then lost consciousness before waking to find herself in this condition.

Nahn knows she is not welcomed by her tribe but is desperate for anyone’s help in reversing the curse that the “demon” put upon her. She is wary of strangers and used to being distrusted by members of her former tribe, so speaking with her can be difficult. Her desperation is strong enough for her to overcome these issues and speak with the characters, but any aggressive speech or hostile actions directed toward her will cause her to flinch away and become distrustful. If this happens, Nahn will continue speaking with the characters only if a character succeeds on a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

Nahn can share the following information:

She went too far into the caves in the mountainside, which she foolishly explored alone. The caves became tunnels that

led up and up until she encountered the blinding light, which she now believes was the “demon in the sky,” as the natives refer to it.

For many days, she was a blind prisoner of the demon, which seemed to be casting evil spells upon her in some kind of experiment. One of those spells was the gift of a twisted new language, which a successful DC 15 Intelligence (History) check reveals as the Orgoth language. Her other language was once the Common tongue, which she learned from Arah, but it now comes across as a crude variant of the Common tongue that the Orgoth used to communicate with their slaves in the ancient past. She can use this language to speak with the characters, though about a quarter of what she says is garbled and incomprehensible.

When her sight returned, she fled back through the tunnels but became lost for a long time in the darkness. Eventually, she started to hear voices speaking to her. She initially thought she was delirious but now believes that the faces bulging from her skin were speaking directly into her mind. She eventually stumbled back into the Slough village, where the mere sight of her was enough to convince the Slough that she was in league with the demon, and Arah exiled her almost immediately. Nahn is the first Slough to ever be exiled from the village, and she believes there might be another reason behind her banishment, though she will not reveal it. (In fact, Gorah, the village seer, arranged to have Nahn banished because of her loyalty to Arah, as described in stage 5, “It Takes a Village.”)

Nahn can give the characters directions to the Slough village and then around it to the burial grounds and the cave that leads to the tunnels, but only if they’re willing to help her with the demonic faces covering her body like a rash. She also knows that Arah is likely to let the characters enter the village if, as an act of good faith, they kill at least one of the pirates who’ve come to the island.

If the characters are sympathetic to Nahn and attempt to help her—even if the attempt is fake or doesn’t help at all—she will tell them about a branch in the caverns and tunnels that opens up into the tribe’s burial grounds beyond the village, on the far side as they approach from this direction. It has been covered with vines and ivy to hide it from view, she says, but she knows it’s still there, as she saw it when she went there a few days after being exiled in order to dig her own grave so she could still lie among her people when she finally surrendered to the demon’s curse on her flesh. If this revelation doesn’t elicit any sort of sympathetic response from the characters, Nahn will stop talking and retreat into the jungle, feeling judged and ashamed, and a character must succeed on a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check to get her to talk again.

THE WRETCHED LEFT BEHIND

Shortly after her exile, Nahn heard a watery voice rising in the lagoon and concluded that someone was trapped in one of the sunken ships. Through trial and error, she ultimately found a way to speak with the individual, whom she calls

“the demon’s exile”—a wretched she now considers an ally, if not a friend. The wretched can only hear and communicate by speaking through the water, but this has been enough for Nahn to learn the wretched’s name and a bit of its history. Nahn can provide this information, or a character can communicate directly with the wretched just like Nahn does by succeeding on a DC 14 Charisma (Performance) check.

Nahn knows the wretched wants to leave the island via the sunken ship it arrived on, and she is willing to help it if she can. Nahn can talk to the wretched and relay the following information to the characters, or the characters can learn it by communicating directly with the wretched:

The wretched is named **Takkor the Nail**. He was ship’s mate aboard Yssandra’s ship, *Moon Shadow*.

Takkor had doubts about their reasons for being on the island and Yssandra’s plan to sink the ship in the lagoon, but when he told her as much, she had him chained to the wheel and sunk with the vessel. He drowned, died, and then woke up a short time later still chained twenty feet underwater.

Yssandra found an old skull in a sunken Orgoth vessel off the coast of Garlghast, and she quickly became obsessed with it after bringing it aboard. Takkor caught Yssandra whispering to the skull on two occasions, and he’s convinced it cursed her and forced her to bring their ship to this island. On one of those occasions, he heard her arguing with herself (and therefore presumably with the skull), and he thought he overheard her weeping afterward.

Based on his conversations with Nahn, Takkor has surmised that the tribe’s “demon” and Yssandra are one and the same. He is willing to divulge select information that can help the characters, but only if they’re willing to try to free him from the chains that bind him to *Moon Shadow*. He will offer to share one of the following insights about his former captain before the rescue attempt and another two afterward if the characters succeed in freeing him:

Yssandra mourns the loss of her husband, a pirate named Rogan Dain. Takkor believes she’s vulnerable to this pathetic emotional commitment.

Trying to kill Yssandra is pointless as long as the skull is nearby. The object kept her alive during a savage storm *Moon Shadow* encountered en route to the island. She should have drowned twice, but the skull lit up from within like a small sun, and she somehow survived. In doing so, the skull’s light blinded two nearby crew members.

Yssandra came to this island to light a path that will guide invaders to the island. Takkor assumes these invaders are the Orgoth, but it sounds insane to him that this is even possible, as the Orgoth were driven off centuries ago.

Freeing Takkor is a matter of swimming to the ship below and unlocking the chains that bind him to the ship’s wheel. The chains can be unlocked with a successful DC 12 Dexterity check using thieves’ tools. Takkor wants nothing to do with the characters, so once he’s shared the remaining nuggets he knows about Yssandra, he will swim as deep down as he can in order to hide from whichever character frees him. Takkor will fight if pursued.

A SHADOW OF TREASURE

If the characters search the sunken ships for treasure, they discover that only *Moon Shadow* has anything worthwhile left on it. (After all, the *Requite* came to the island in search of treasure in the first place.)

If the characters search *Moon Shadow*, they discover a chest containing 200 gp and a scattering of standard swords and other weapons left aboard when her crew went ashore. In addition, the ship's hold contains all the materials needed to repair the damage that sunk the ship in the first place. Use your discretion on what sets of tools the characters can find, but there should be at least a set of tinker's tools and woodworker's tools. Repairing the vehicle requires a creature to spend 1 hour or more trying to patch the hull. The creature must have the spare parts to make the necessary repairs. After 1 hour of work, the creature makes a DC 15 Dexterity check, adding its proficiency bonus to the check if it's proficient with the tools used to make repairs. If the check succeeds, the vehicle regains 2d4 hit points, plus the creature's Intelligence modifier. If the check fails, the vehicle regains no hit points, but the repair can be attempted again using the same replacement parts.

Repairing Moon Shadow. A character with the proper tools and materials can attempt to mend *Moon Shadow's* hull by spending 1 hour of labor and making a DC 14 Intelligence check. (Any character proficient with the tools can add his or her proficiency bonus to the check.) If the check succeeds, the ship regains 2d6 hit points. If the check fails, the ship doesn't regain any hit points, but the character can use the same supplies to and make another check after another 1 hour of labor. If *Moon Shadow* regains at least 20 hit points, it will float again. (Getting the ship out of the water is its own challenge, however!)

Raising Moon Shadow. Bringing a sunken ship out of the water is no small task. Characters with the ability to cast spells can make creative use of spells such as *create or destroy water* to empty the hold of water in order to make the ship buoyant or *control water* to cause the tide to beach the ship. Alchemists might use their abilities to produce oxygen from the water to lift the ship. Even brute force could be employed, attaching ropes to the ship and laboriously hauling it out of the ocean—possibly with the assistance of steamjacks, allied NPCs, or clever contraptions devised by mechanics. Reward the players for creative thinking and innovative solutions on how to get *Moon Shadow* from the bottom of the lagoon.

ENCOUNTER: THE EMPTIED GRAVES

Whether the characters arrive at the lagoon to meet with Arah and the Slough or in the company of Rogan and his pirates, they discover seven graves, six of which have been dug up. Rogan and his crew dug them for the pirates who died when the natives attacked and burned the *Requite* while its captain and remaining crew were inland.

The six empty graves were clearly dug up from underground. Scratch marks in the dirt begin disappearing as the rain moves in, but the way the soil sinks back into

the holes and the absence of dirt piles around them strongly suggest that the dead pirates climbed out of their own graves. If the characters investigate the remaining grave, they find a dead body within: a burned male human with no treasure on him.

Tracks lead away from the disturbed graves and toward the jungle. A character who examines the tracks and succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check concludes that whatever got out of the graves immediately headed deeper into the jungle, more or less in the direction of the lighthouse and therefore, presumably, the Slough village.

At midnight, the sky explodes in a brilliant flash as the lantern room at the top of the lighthouse lights up so brightly that it makes the night seem like day. Each creature that sees this light must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded for 1d4 minutes. Anyone who isn't blinded by the flash can see how the beacon's beams create the illusion of faces against the impending storm clouds in the night sky. The faces' bright eyes and twisted grins almost make them look alive.

This moment of stark illumination reveals six forms standing in the characters' midst: pirates who were raised from the dead by the island's magic. In the aftermath of the beacon's flash, they immediately attack any character they can reach.

PIRATE WRETCHED

Even though the six **wretched** are barely cognizant of their former shipmates, they attack characters and natives first and living pirates last if they can. Any characters who were blinded by the lighthouse are surprised.

If Rogan and any of his crew are present, they are stunned by the sight of their undead former mates. Rogan doesn't move to intercept the wretched for 1 round; his crew responds 1 minute later.

If Arah or any members of the Slough tribe are present, they recognize Yssandra's handiwork and retreat into the jungle, beckoning the characters to follow. If the characters do not respond immediately, all Slough natives disappear 2 rounds after the sudden light and the appearance of the undead pirates.

If the wretched seem to be an insufficient match for the characters, focus their attacks on a single character until that character succumbs, at which point the wretched retreat into the jungle.

THE SPOTLIGHT

The light from the lantern room shines for only a few minutes. As it ends, it seems to blink out all the way around the lighthouse except on the side facing the lagoon, where the light becomes more intense as the "face" it projects is focused entirely on the lagoon. The face moves around the perimeter of the lagoon, almost as if someone is looking for something in the darkness. It soon comes to rest on the characters, then immediately winks out.

Not long after the face disappears, the storm sweeps across the area.

PART 4: JUNGLE LAW

In this stage of the adventure, the storm unleashes its fury, pounding down throughout the dawn and darkening the sky. The lagoon's waters begin to rise, and the jungle seems more dangerous than ever—but the characters need to brave it nonetheless.

SETTING THE STAGE

Once the lighthouse beacon disappears, read the following text aloud:

The light goes out, but you still feel as if it's on you—as if whatever was behind the light not only can still see you, but is coming for you.

It isn't long before the wind begins to pick up, and the next time the lightning flashes, you see that the lagoon's surface has begun to ripple. Without warning, rain suddenly begins coming down in a great slashing curtain, and thunder booms relentlessly all around you. The trees and brush at the lagoon's edge no longer offer much safety from the storm. In just a matter of minutes, the lagoon's waters begin to rise, sending rivulets into the weeds and shrubs along its edges. As far as you can tell, a flood is coming.

Use your discretion regarding whether or not the characters get time to rest here. If they need it, read the text above in two parts: the first paragraph once the beacon goes dark, and the second paragraph after they've had time to finish a short rest. Otherwise, read both together and apply the added pressure of the storm to keep the characters moving and the tension high.

If the characters seem uncertain what to do next, you have a handful of options to get them going in the direction of the Slough village and the Orgoth hold it's built upon:

If Arah or any members of the Slough tribe are present and friendly toward the characters, they encourage the characters to accompany them back to the safety of their village.

If Rogan and his crew are present and friendly toward the characters, they suggest the Slough village should give up its secrets now, and they push the characters to accompany them to raid the village for shelter, treasure, and a means of reaching the lighthouse.

If Nahn is still present and friendly toward the characters, she encourages them to seek safety in the Slough village with the caveat that, without Arah's blessing, the sentinels along the perimeter will need to be convinced of the characters'

trustworthiness. The best way to do that, she suggests, is to bring them a pirate they've killed—or perhaps an already dead one they can pass off as a recent kill.

The pirates that were turned into the wretched by the island's magic left tracks that lead into the jungle in the general direction of the village. Although the wretched themselves never made it to the village before turning back to confront the characters in the lagoon, their trail is enough to get the characters headed in the right direction.

RUN THROUGH THE JUNGLE

Regardless of whichever party the characters are traveling with and whether they have a guide or have to find their own way, the journey between the lagoon and the edge of the Slough village should be chaotic. Once the characters leave the lagoon behind and enter the jungle, read the following text aloud:

The rain finds its way through the jungle canopy, and the ground is soon muddy and difficult to traverse. Without much natural light, it's difficult to determine your direction or even the time of day. Slippery vines press upon you almost as if they're alive and can sense your presence. The occasional roll of thunder and flash of lightning make the scene feel like a fevered dream. You pick your way through the overgrowth, around bushes with protruding thorns and past twisted shapes that might be fallen trees or possibly things long dead . . . or just sleeping. You can't hear much except your own breathing and the rustling of your companions as you make your way through the wilds.

The trek through the jungle culminates with a trio of Slough guards at the edge of their village, but along the way, the characters should experience some of the danger that surrounds them. To that end, each of the following encounters should occur once before the characters come upon the guards, although they can happen in any order:

A mudslide threatens to drag characters down a steep slope to a quicksand-like pool below. In this particular instance, the characters can see a semiskeletal hand on the surface of the muddy pool, its fingers sticking straight up through the muck. A gold ring worth 50 gp adorns one finger, but the hand itself is undead and not willing to give up its treasure easily.

Aggressive vines with thorns reach out for the characters to entangle them. Each character must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 1 piercing damage and 2d6 poison damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

An **undead boar** stumbles through the rain and directly into the characters before launching into a mindless attack.

A stroke of lightning sets a nearby tree afire and drops it

into the characters' path, potentially hitting them as it does so. Each creature must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage and 11 (2d10) fire damage on a failed saving throw, or half as much damage on a successful one. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the creature is knocked prone and pinned beneath the fallen tree. A creature pinned beneath the tree or in contact with it takes 5 (1d10) fire damage at the start of each of its turns. A creature can use its action to make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check, freeing itself or another creature within its reach on a success.

ON NATIVE SOIL

By the time the characters reach the unmarked perimeter of the Slough village, the storm has begun to die down, leaving sizable puddles and thick, muddy terrain that makes it impossible to move silently or stealthily. The reaction of the three sentries hiding in the trees at the edge of the village depends not only on which party (if any) the characters arrive with, but also the current state of the characters' relations with the Slough. If Nahn gave the characters directions to the cave near the village burial ground and the characters are trying to enter the village undetected, have them make a DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) group check. If the group check succeeds, the characters manage to stay out of the sentries' sight and reach the village.

ARRIVING WITH ARAH

If the characters arrive with Arah or any other members of the Slough tribe, the sentries make their presence known and acknowledge the group's arrival, with one of them descending to briefly confer with Arah or another member of the tribe. The characters can then proceed into the Slough village, albeit under the watchful glare of the guards.

ARRIVING ALONE

If the characters arrive alone and have had neutral or positive interactions with the Slough tribe since reaching the island, the sentries allow them to continue on to the village, but not without first sounding the alarm with a chorus of shouts and cries that echo through the trees. They then follow the characters from above, herding them in the direction of the village's gate and away from traps along the route.

ENEMIES OF THE SLOUGH

If the characters arrive alone and have had negative interactions (or no interactions at all) with the Slough, the sentries assume they are hostile and part of the pirates' group. The sentries don't descend to engage in hand-to-hand combat; instead, they throw spears or fire arrows at the characters and use their ranged weapons to herd the characters into numerous traps littered throughout the jungle around the village.

You can confront the characters with whatever number of traps you deem appropriate. Any character who searches the area for traps and succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check detects a trap. The Slough have prepared the traps

described below.

Pit Trap. This 20-foot-deep hole is covered by underbrush, and its bottom is lined with carved wooden spikes. A character who detects the trap discerns an absence of foot traffic over the area that forms the pit's cover. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check confirms that the trapped area is actually the cover of a pit. The cover collapses if a creature steps on it, causing the creature to fall into the pit and onto the spikes below.

A creature that falls into the pit takes 11 (2d10) piercing damage from the spikes, in addition to any falling damage. The Slough have coated the spikes with a tarry black poison. A creature that takes piercing damage from the spikes must also make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Log Pendulum. This trap uses a trip wire made of braided vine to release a 15-foot-long log suspended high above the ground between two trees. The trip wire is 3 inches off the ground, and the log is hidden by foliage. A successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools breaks the trip wire harmlessly. A character without thieves' tools can attempt this check with disadvantage using any edged weapon or edged tool. On a failed check, the trap triggers.

When the trap is triggered, the log is set free to swing along the path. The log sweeps across a 15-foot-wide, 30-foot-long line 2 feet above the ground. Each creature in the line must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 11 (2d10) piercing damage and 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage, is pushed to the end of the line, and is knocked prone. On a successful save, it takes half as much damage, isn't pushed, and isn't knocked prone.

Spike Trap. This trap uses a trip wire made of braided vine to release a trio of spring-loaded spikes set 3 feet off the ground. The trip wire is 3 inches off the ground and stretches between two trees. A successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools breaks the trip wire harmlessly. A character without thieves' tools can attempt this check with disadvantage using any edged weapon or edged tool. On a failed check, the trap triggers.

When the trap is triggered, the spikes are released. Each creature standing in the same space as the trip wire must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to leap clear of the trap or take 22 (4d10) piercing damage.

ACCOMPANIED BY PIRATES

If the characters arrive in the company of any pirates, the sentries fire arrows at the group's leader. (If the leader isn't clear, determine the target randomly.) The sentries then quickly retreat to inform Arah and the rest of the tribe of the pirates' approach so that the village's warriors will be ready for them.

Under these circumstances, the pirates retreat and encourage the characters to approach the village on their own. Although the pirates claim that this is the characters' only chance of being welcomed into the village, they're secretly looking for an opportunity to attack while the village is distracted by the newcomers.



PART 5: IT TAKES A VILLAGE

In this part of the adventure, the storm has passed, but a different one still looms: a confrontation in the Slough village. Whether as friends or foes of the tribe, the characters must enter the home of the natives and make their way to the caverns and tunnels that will lead them to the lighthouse at the top of the mountain—and, with any luck, to some means of leaving the island. But the characters must first deal with the Slough natives, one way or another.

THE WELCOME/ UNWELCOME MAT

The jungle thins out as the characters enter the Slough village. As cobblestones appear underfoot and a stone wall comes into view, read the following text aloud:

The Slough village is surrounded by a ten-foot-high stone wall—no surprise, given the presence of the walking dead on the island. Despite being made of stone, the wall blends in well with the dark greens of the jungle. The cobblestones beneath your feet are slick with rain but much easier to cross than the mud-soaked jungle floor. The smell of something cooking hangs in the air, and the warmth of the morning begins to burn off the storm of the night, creating a muggy mist that hangs over everything. You can't see a gate yet, but at least a few figures seem to stand guard along the stone wall's edge.

The island's lone mountain looms over the village, and the lighthouse stands atop it like a savage finger pointed at the sky, hazy and barely discernible in the morning mist.

How the characters find their way into the village depends in part on whether they arrive as friends, as enemies, or in secret.

If the Characters Arrive as Friends. The characters are free to approach the first of the village's two gates, which is flanked by two guards. The gate consists of bound wooden slats and is as tall as the wall. When the characters approach the gate, the two guards shout to others behind the gate, who unbar it, after which the guards push it open and allow the characters to enter.

If the Characters Arrive as Enemies. The characters' arrival is cause for immediate alarm. The guards outside the gate shout a warning and assume combat stances, and stones are removed from various spots along the wall so that the villagers within can aim arrows at the approaching enemies. If the characters arrive without any pirates, the guards offer the characters a chance to negotiate a truce. In that case, Arah emerges from the village to demand that the characters explain their presence and their intentions (see the "Roleplaying Arah" section in stage 3). If the characters arrive with any pirates, there's no room for negotiations: the

presence of the pirates clearly indicates that the characters are allied with the outsiders and must not be allowed on the island any longer. Without the element of surprise, the pirates will retreat and encourage the characters to either approach without them or find another way inside, perhaps by going over the walls in secret.

If the Characters Arrive in Secret. If the characters intend to avoid any contact with the Slough unless confronted, they must cross the cobblestones without being spotted and then find a way to climb the wall and enter the village. The mist lightly obscures the entire village, increasing the characters' chances of traveling unnoticed long enough to reach the wall. The characters must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) group check to reach the village without being noticed. (Each character has advantage on the check due to the obscuring mist.) The rocks that fit together to form the wall offer enough handholds that climbing is relatively simple and can be done without a check.

WITHIN THESE WALLS

If the characters are welcome in the village, they are treated as honored guests, which the villagers will indicate by adding *-ah* (roughly "trusted one") to the end of each character's name. Under these circumstances, the characters are free to wander the village within reason but will be discouraged from entering the caves on the very edge of the village, where it butts up against the steep incline that forms the side of the mountain upon which the lighthouse stands. If the characters insist on journeying to the lighthouse and have come to the village with Arah, they will be allowed to enter the caverns but will be warned that it is home to a demon that recently brought catastrophes to their island. If the characters didn't come to the village with Arah, were welcomed in anyway, and insist on exploring the caverns, they are informed that they will not be welcomed back into the village after they enter the caverns.

The village is a mishmash of wood and stone homes—some made of adobe, all of them roofed with thatch. It is primarily a self-contained community with individual gardens, boars and chickens raised as livestock, covered wells, and various industries vital to its members, such as construction materials, garment creation, farming needs, and tool manufacturing. Except for the parts of the village that incorporate Orgoth relics, none of it is overly sophisticated, but the relic at the center of the village portends what's to come.

ORGOATH ARCHITECTURE: THE MASK

The remnants of those the Slough call the "Before People" dot the village. Ancient altars mark the edges of the village and what was presumably once the edges of the Orgoth hold. Crumbling walls with myriad faces carved into them are scattered among the homes and barns, though most of them are now used for practical purposes—penning in animals, providing shade, or serving as walls in buildings. The altars are also marked with twisted faces, although the

THE ORGOATH SIGNAL

The light in the lighthouse, which originates with the skull Yssandra brought with her, triggers magic in the mask whenever the light shines at night. The mask then senses whether ships are approaching the island and issues its declaration in the Orgoth language ("They come" or "None come") before falling silent again. Once upon a time, the Orgoth used these two items to guide their allies and prepare for their enemies.

Slough now use them as nothing more than elaborate tables or workbenches. No particular reverence is paid to any of these ruins.

Only one Orgoth relic in the village receives any noteworthy treatment. A giant mask of a face, six feet across and twelve feet long, is carved into the wall whose gate leads to the burial grounds. Its visage is aimed skyward, and its chiseled eyes would seem to stare directly at the top of the lighthouse far above if they weren't shielded by a tarp made of thatch atop poles. The face's features are taut as if it were in pain, and its teeth jut from a carven mouth framed by curled stone lips. The area where the mask's nose should be, which is crafted to resemble a skull's nasal cavity, is the only part that doesn't seem to protrude in a grotesque manner.

Two of the mask's teeth are made of large gold stones, both dead center in the lower jaw. A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence check determines that each stone is worth 5,000 gp. Any attempt to remove the stones prompts an aggressive response from the Slough.

If pressed about the relic, the natives wave off any discussion about it, although Arah is willing to concede that it has always been unpleasant to see but has also become unpleasant to hear since the demon came. If asked about this, she explains that each night at midnight, when the beacon from the lantern room atop the lighthouse illuminates the night sky, the eyes of the giant Orgoth mask scan the horizon, and the mask utters a pronouncement in an unintelligible language the moment the beacon disappears. This is a recent phenomenon; the mask didn't show signs of life before the demon came to the island and lit the beacon. Believing the mask was seeing the light and reacting to it, the natives covered its eyes with a tarp last night, hoping to blind it and therefore silence it, but this didn't work, as it spoke again immediately after the light appeared.

ORGOATH TREASURE: THE ALTAR OF LIFE AFTER UNLIFE

Over time, the Slough learned that most of what the Orgoth (the "Before People") left behind wasn't terribly useful. But one artifact in an outbuilding, now decaying not far from the gate that leads to the burial ground, proved to be both valuable and terrifying: an altar that the natives call the Altar of Life after Unlife.

Although the Slough don't know what the Orgoth used this relic for, they have, over the course of many years, learned

how to keep their own alive by “sacrificing” their tribe members on it. If a Slough native dies of something other than disease or old age and comes back as a wretched, the Slough do all they can to capture the individual and bring the person to this altar. They then “kill” the individual in a way that minimizes damage to the body and wait with the body. At the next dawn, the twice-dead corpse may return to life once again, but if not, the Slough bury the body in the burial grounds. In this way, one of their own—Gorah the Seer—has lived for over eighty years.

Aside from Arah and Gorah, none of the Slough know why Nahn, who was warped by the “demon” in the lighthouse, wasn’t given the opportunity to rise from the altar. The general consensus among the villagers is that no one could ascertain if she’d died and come back from the dead or if she was just adversely affected by the demon.

GORAH THE SEER

The oldest member of the Slough village, **Gorah** (see appendix B) was recently dubbed “the Seer” after her prediction that the mask, which the tribe has never moved or interacted with, would suddenly “return from its long death.” Long honored as both the village elder and the only tribal member to have been returned from death twice by the Altar of Life after Unlife, Gorah is currently vying for greater control of the Slough tribe. She has made multiple recent attempts to remove Arah from her position of leadership, including recently having the Shrine of the Skull (see below) relocated from Arah’s home to Gorah’s personal residence.

In truth, Gorah’s proclamation about the mask was no prediction: she heard it speak the first night at midnight in reaction to the light coming from the lighthouse. Nahn was with her at the time but said nothing when Gorah told the rest of the tribe the mask would “return from its long death,” and Gorah was proven right when the mask spoke again the next night. After being granted the title of seer and finding support for her leadership among some tribe members, Gorah became concerned that Nahn would reveal her secret.

Gorah’s efforts to usurp Arah’s leadership of the tribe stem from jealousy. She was once the leader of the Slough, but Arah’s solo venture off the island and to the islands beyond, from which she returned with martial skills, a new language, and seemingly greater wisdom and worldliness, led the Slough to become more reliant on Arah’s leadership. Of all the Slough, Nahn—Gorah’s granddaughter—was the most enamored with Arah. Infuriated by Nahn’s lack of familial loyalty and fearful that her granddaughter would expose the truth of Gorah’s “prediction,” Gorah pushed Arah to exile Nahn when she emerged from the caverns having been altered by the “demon” in the lighthouse.

Gorah now believes that Arah’s only motivation is to retain her role as leader of the tribe, so if Arah welcomes the characters to the village, Gorah will denounce them regardless of whether they come with Arah from the lagoon or negotiate their way inside after they meet Arah at the village gate.

Gorah emerges from her quarters once the characters have been in the village long enough to get their bearings. When

WELCOME BACK TO THE JUNGLE

The Slough are very proud of their Altar of Life after Unlife, and if the characters are on good terms with the Slough, it will be at their disposal if they need it. Resurrection on the altar follows the rules of the *resurrection* spell with the caveats that the character must have been killed by something unnatural (which precludes any disease) while on the island *and* was brought back from the dead by the island’s magic. This resurrection bypasses the negative effects of resurrection common in the Iron Kingdoms.

she does, read the following text aloud:

An old woman emerges from one of the buildings, carrying herself with a dignity that borders on arrogance. Upon spotting you, she begins to shake her head. In a broken series of sentences in the Common tongue, she declares, “I have seen! They are with the ones who invade! They come to steal the skull, and that is our death if they do. It protects us. They must leave without it or say they mean no harm to us, that they may die if they lie. Arah is no longer wise about the world. She brings danger to us!”

The other tribe members around you stare at you with deep, restless suspicion.

To further complicate matters, Gorah will encourage the characters to pay respect to her by pledging their loyalty in a private meeting held at the location of the giant mask, where no one could approach without being spotted. Once she has the characters alone, read the following text aloud:

“I see a peaceful future,” she manages to say through words and gestures. “When you finally leave this island, Arah must go with you to live with her new tribe, the Outsiders. If you take her, it does not matter if she wants to go. I will calm my people and tell them you are good if you say you will do this thing.”

If the characters agree with this plan, Gorah reassures the village that the characters have changed their allegiance from the pirates to the tribe; if they don’t, she announces that the characters refuse to turn against their invading allies and must be exiled from the village—forcibly, if necessary.

If the characters try to pit Arah against Gorah by telling Arah that the seer has encouraged them to take the chieftain with them when they leave the island, Gorah will not only deny she ever said this but also claim she has had a vision of the characters kidnapping Arah as they leave the island. She will then encourage Arah to sic the tribe on the characters and drive them from the village or even from the island altogether, killing them if needed and monitoring their corpses in case the island brings them back as undead.

THE SHRINE OF THE SKULL

Located in Gorah the Seer’s personal cabin, the Shrine of the Skull is little more than a carved stone from the Orgoth era that the Slough uprooted from its original location and moved about the village. Covered in chiseled faces in various

states of pain and anger, it's roughly two feet wide, three feet long, and two feet tall. A notched groove in its center accommodates the shrine's only treasure: the skull of an Orgoth from hundreds of years ago. Its eye sockets have been covered with a cloth blindfold. Most notably, it contains two gold teeth, both in the same place as the gold stones on the giant mask at the village's edge (see the "Orgoth Architecture: The Mask" section). The shrine has been part of the Slough community for as long as anyone can recall, and the reasons for its value are mostly unknown to the natives. What it represents, however, is authority in the tribe, and that's why it now rests in Gorah's quarters.

The skull has historical value to any museum or Orgoth scholar, and the gold teeth are worth 200 gp each, assuming the characters are bold enough to attempt to steal it.

THE ENTRANCE TO THE CAVERNS

The entrance to the caverns is hidden behind a sizable tarp painted a dark gray and green to match the grassy mountain terrain it burrows into. The tarp is tied down to rocks and stakes in the ground and around the entrance. It is isolated from the rest of the village, and a semicircle of stones in front of it mark a "prohibited" clearing.

If the characters don't care about leaving a trail, getting into the caverns is easy: simply cutting the securing vines opens the way. If they want to slip in unnoticed, however, they must come up with a plan for displacing and replacing the stones and stakes to create the impression no one has tampered with the tarp. If the characters were welcomed into the village and granted permission to enter the caverns, the Slough simply untie the tarp for the characters and then tie it back in place after the characters enter.

The caverns themselves prove to be a disappointment: Yssandra and her servants collapsed the ceiling only a hundred yards in, blocking anyone else from coming or going through the tunnels carved beyond the natural caverns. If the characters persist in taking this route, it requires 6 hours of continuous manual labor by no less than three characters to dig a gap big enough for the characters to pass through. Ogrun or Large-sized creatures such as steamjacks count as two characters for the purpose of this labor.

Unbeknownst to Yssandra, the entrance in the village isn't the only way to the lighthouse. A second series of tunnels leads from the burial grounds to the lighthouse, and she overlooked it when she created the cave-in. If the characters are aware of the existence of the other entrance, they can make a DC 10 Intelligence check. A success reveals that the second series of tunnels is likely part of a larger network that connects to this one at some point past the cave-in. If the characters are on friendly terms with the Slough and return to the village rather than dig their way past the cave-in, they are informed of the other entrance, and Arah directs them to it with the following warning: "Do not disturb our dead, or they will disturb you."

WHILE THE TRIBE'S AWAY . . .

At some point while the characters are on their way to the burial grounds, Rogan and his crew attack the village in the hopes of finding a way to the lighthouse (and treasure, of course). When you're ready for the pirates to launch their assault, see stage 6, "The Pirates Attack."

THE BURIAL GROUNDS

The burial grounds lie just outside a second gate on the far side of the village, at the foot of the mountain itself. Because this area is lower than the base of the village wall, it quickly flooded overnight during the storm, leaving the graves under roughly four feet of water. The mountainside's rocky surface is covered with a tangle of vegetation that hides the cave entrance. If the characters already know that the entrance is here, they can find it simply by standing in the floodwaters and searching for it. If they haven't been told about the entrance, however, a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the hanging vines and ivy that cover the opening.

Crossing the floodwaters of the burial grounds is risky. The ground dips in several spots and contains at least one pitfall: the open grave that Nahn dug for herself when she was exiled from the village.

It takes 5 minutes to pull down the overgrowth that covers the cave entrance. Wind drafts from the cave rustle the vines and ivy, suggesting that something inside the cave might be approaching, so the characters should be surprised when the boneswarm rises out of the water to attack.

ENCOUNTER: THE SLOUGH BONESWARM

A **boneswarm** lurks in the shallow waters that have flooded the burial grounds. If the characters attempt to pull down the overgrowth that covers the cave entrance, read the following text aloud:

The sinuous shape of a boneswarm rises from the shallow waters that have flooded the burial grounds. Its form consists of a mix of long-dead corpses and the recently deceased. Among the skulls and other skeletal remains that make up the monster is the immediately recognizable face of the exile Nahn, who apparently returned to the village to seek redemption or to lie down in her own grave and die.

Between the surprise of the boneswarm's appearance, the presence of Nahn's head among its parts, and the difficulty of fighting while standing in water, each character that sees the boneswarm for the first time must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. A frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the frightened condition on itself on a success.

The boneswarm will not follow the characters if they flee into the caverns, preferring instead to remain near the graves where its parts were buried.



PART 6: THE PIRATES ATTACK

In this part of the adventure, Rogan and his crew attack the village in the hope of gaining entrance to the caverns. The crew are after treasure in the village and subsequently in the caves, but the captain has another goal in mind: he intends to find and somehow rescue his wife, Yssandra.

SETTING THE STAGE

Unable to find a way into the caverns, Rogan brings the fight to the natives, although the rest of his crew is focused

on finding treasure in the village first. At some point as the characters travel through the village on their way to the burial grounds, read the following text aloud:

The crack of a pistol shot rings out in the morning mist, and the sounds of panic echo across the village as the natives scramble in response. You hear a sudden barrage of gunshots and battle cries as the main gate is battered open. Shouts in multiple languages lead you to one conclusion: the pirates have invaded the village and begun attacking the Slough.

The rank-and-file members of Rogan's crew—Grim, Vellik, and Waylor—move through the village with unbridled brutality, shooting any native who gets too close. The more notable members, Isaak and Freya, focus more on searching the village than killing its inhabitants. Rogan himself is very eager to find the cavern entrance, going so far as to spare any native he can corner in favor of asking where he can find it.

Given that the characters are either on their way to the cavern entrance or already dealing with the boneswarm, they may choose not to participate in the chaos in the village. If they snuck into the burial grounds, they might not want to reveal their presence. If they proceed into the cave in search of the tunnels that lead up to the lighthouse, skip to stage 7, "The Tunnels."

If the characters are still in the village when the pirates attack, or if they decide to return from the burial grounds in response to the attack, read the following aloud:

Though the Slough outnumber the pirates by a wide margin, the pirates' pistols strike fear among the natives, who scatter to escape and hide. The pirates take advantage, quickly storming the buildings in search of treasure. Only Captain Dain stands apart, scanning the area where the village butts up against the mountainside. He approaches any villagers he can, questioning them and gesturing around him, but the language barrier only appears to frustrate him and terrify the natives he interrogates.

The madness of the attack creates numerous moments that the characters can either witness or become involved in. Present them in chronological order if possible, as listed below:

Isaak moves deliberately through the village. As he passes the characters, he notes, "No treasure, I'd wager. And nobody gets out alive, you know. Nobody."

A wounded village guard, bleeding from a bullet wound to his stomach, determines the characters are with the pirates and charges, crying out in Slough as he attacks one of them with his spear. If any character strikes back in any manner, a second village guard joins his comrade in battle.

Freya, two pistols in hand and covered in sweat, ducks for cover in the shadow of a hut near the characters and braces her back against the wall. "Too hot," she says to the characters. "It's too hot. We'd better find whatever treasure the captain's after before I melt. And when we get off this island, I don't want to sail southern seas no more."

Grim, one of the three most violent pirates, discovers the mask and its gigantic gold teeth. Ignoring the natives, he holsters his pistol, draws his dagger, and sets about chipping the first tooth loose. If no character moves to intercede or otherwise engage him, Arah suddenly appears behind him, pistols in hand, and shoots him in the back of the head, killing him instantly.

Rogan finds the tarp that covers the cavern entrance and disappears within. If the characters observe the area long enough, they see him emerge again, presumably having found the cave-in that keeps him from ascending into the tunnels. If any character confronts him, he says, "By my blight, I'll find her now. It ends with us together again, right? They got

theirs"—he gestures at the battle raging all around him—"so it's time I got mine, don't you think?"

Vellik, another of the three most violent pirates, emerges from Gorah the Seer's hut, the relic skull the village considers its primary treasure held triumphantly above his head. He howls about his success, his back to the hut's entrance, as Gorah emerges behind him and attacks him with a small knife. Slightly wounded but enraged, Vellik turns, shoves Gorah down, draws his pistol, and shoots her point-blank in the face. If the characters don't respond to Gorah's murder in a vengeful manner, Arah confronts Vellik and shoots him dead with her pistols before he even has a chance to aim his weapon at her.

Whether Arah or the characters deal with Vellik for murdering Gorah, Freya and Isaak move to intercept Arah and attack. If the characters don't intercede on Arah's behalf, Freya and Isaak easily take Arah prisoner, bind her, and comment to each other that she's the real problem here: after all, the only casualties the pirates have suffered during the attack have come from her.

Make sure Rogan survives the attack, but let the fate of the other pirates depend on how the battle plays out. If necessary, have Rogan slip away during a chaotic moment to search the burial grounds for another way into the caves.

CONCLUDING THE STAGE

The attack on the village ends with Gorah's death and Arah's capture. Stunned by the death of their eldest and the defeat of their chief, the village guards lay down their weapons, albeit with great reluctance and barely restrained fury. The characters should have an overall sense that the Slough are still considering battling the pirates and that this moment is only a temporary lull in the conflict.

The three remaining pirates—Isaak, Freya, and Waylor—are no match for the enraged natives. With Rogan missing, treasure in the village almost nonexistent, and the odds now against them, the pirates quickly decide to retreat from the village, return to the lagoon, and come up with another plan. In an effort to placate the natives, they back away from Arah, keeping their pistols trained on the villagers as they slowly retreat through the main gate. Regardless of the characters' involvement (or lack thereof) in the brief raid, the pirates show no enthusiasm whatsoever for having the characters join them.

If the characters don't head for the cave entrance in the burial grounds, the Slough free Arah, who immediately sends the characters in the direction of the burial grounds, either as allies in pursuit of Rogan and the demon in the lighthouse or as enemies banished from the village and sent in the opposite direction of the pirates they might be working with.

PART 7: TUNNEL VISION

In this part of the adventure, the characters work their way through the caverns and tunnels beneath the mountain as they wind their way up the mountain toward the lighthouse, the warwitch siren Yssandra, and the possibility of escaping the island. But like the siren she is, Yssandra seems to have summoned others to her lair as well. Rogan Dain is closing in on his wife, bent on rescuing her from whatever curse afflicts her, and Arah and a handful of her guards are not far behind. Gorah's death has convinced the Slough that the time has come to rid their home of these dangerous invaders: the pirates, the "demon," and perhaps even the characters themselves.

THE LAIR

As the characters proceed into the unmapped caverns and the tunnels beyond them, read the following text aloud:

Although the dark and winding tunnel occasionally takes a sharp turn, there are no dead-end branches, and even its narrowest passages are relatively passable. It smells earthy and damp even though the floor is dry and clear. Darkness presses in all around you, and the daylight that once streamed through the entrance is long gone by the time you come upon a crude series of handholds, slick with black mold, carved into the wall. They ascend up into blackness at the edge of what appears to be a vast cavern.

Beyond the makeshift ladder in the wall, the natural cave continues for about forty feet before ending in another cave-in. An earthy smell in the air should warn the characters that a nest of something wild lies ahead, but if that alone is not a sufficient deterrent, any amount of light will reveal a mound of dried guano on the cavern floor, myriad corpses of bats lying scattered about, and a host of undead eyes staring at them from the cavern ceiling. If the characters have no light or venture on despite what they see, a **swarm of undead bats** drops from above and attacks the characters in an attempt to drive them from the lair. The bats fight until half of their number have been slain, at which point the rest flee the length of the cave and presumably escape into the mist over the burial grounds.

If the characters are suspicious that the cave-in might be man-made, a few minutes spent clearing the rocks are enough to reveal that the debris goes back much farther than they can dig, leaving the ladder as the only means forward.

The ladder is 60 feet high and spattered with dry guano, and its handholds are very shallow. Any character who climbs it while wearing heavy armor or carrying heavy gear must make a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check for each round spent climbing the ladder. The first time a character fails a check, the character's footing slips, and the character doesn't make any progress. Each subsequent failure causes the character to fall back to the cave floor, taking falling damage on impact. If a character falls, each character who is climbing the ladder but lower than the falling character must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or be hit by the falling

character. A character who is hit by a falling character must make a Strength saving throw with a DC of 5 + 10 for every 10 feet the falling character has already fallen. Each character must continue making these checks unless a character already at the top of the ladder uses a rope, a harness, or some other form of assistance to help the climber.

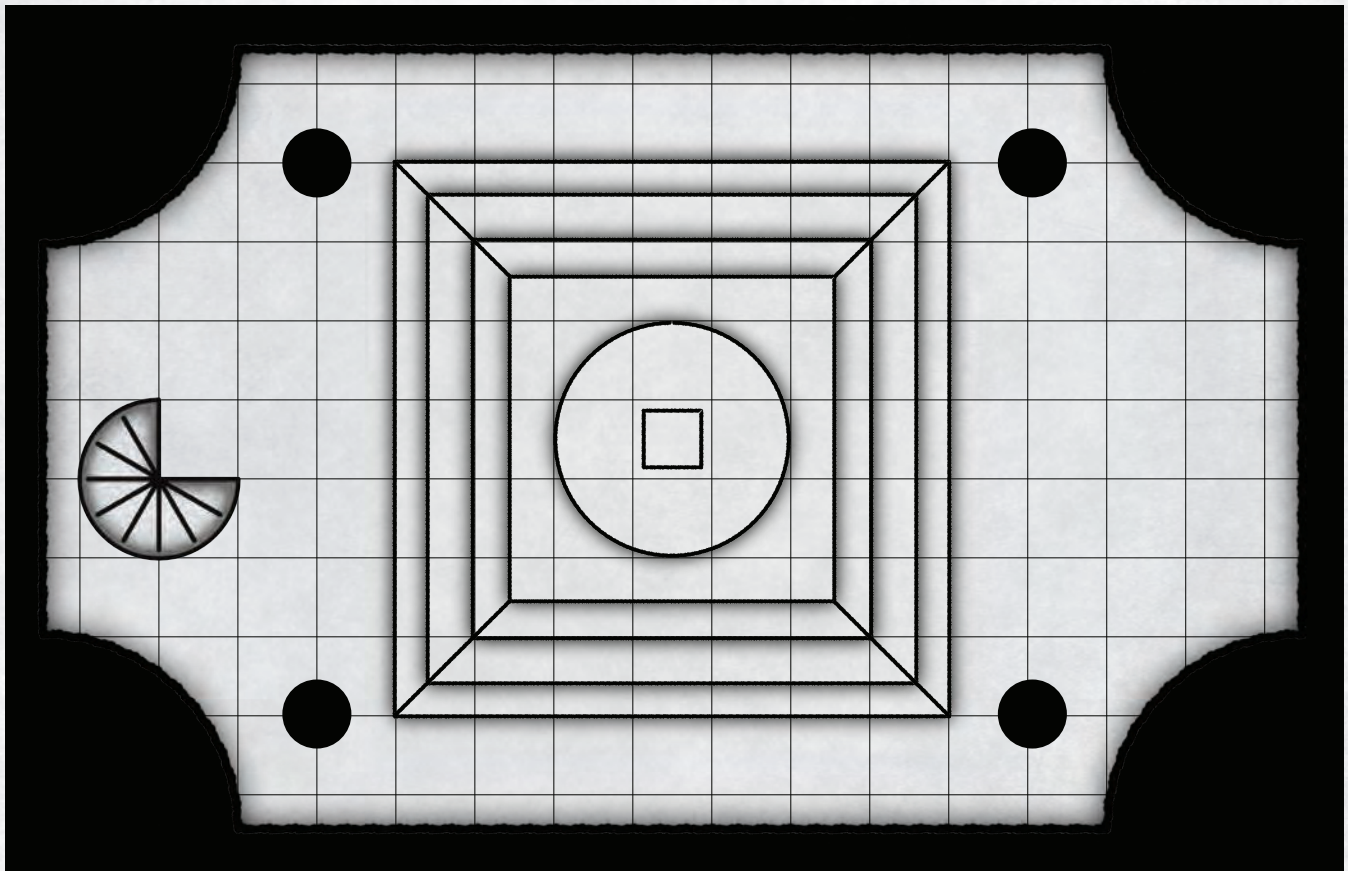
The top of the makeshift ladder leads to a hole in the tunnel wall above, hidden from view in a small, easily overlooked alcove where the tunnel wall collapsed at some point.

THE TUNNELS

The tunnel at the top of the ladder is part of a series of tunnels the Orgoth constructed to connect the lighthouse to the series of natural caves and tunnels at the base of the mountain. Because the tunnel is level and empty, the characters will not initially know which way the lighthouse lies. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check can figure out which way to go, and any character with an ability that detects direction automatically succeeds on this check. Otherwise, the characters have to find their way by venturing in a random direction until the tunnel begins to descend (toward the cave-in outside the cavern opening into the Slough village) or ascend (toward the lighthouse).

The tunnels are a massive spiderweb of overlapping passageways and chambers, too complex and chaotic to have been fully explored or mapped.





NAVIGATING THE TUNNELS

The characters should choose a member of the party or NPC to serve as the lead navigator through the tunnels. At the start of each hour of travel through the tunnels, the navigator must make a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check to determine if they become lost. If the check succeeds, the party navigates closer to their destination. If the check fails, they become lost and must spend an hour retracing their steps. If the party moves at a slow pace, the lead navigator has a +5 bonus to this check.

There is a possibility of encountering **guardian wretched** serving Yssandra. These wretched are scattered throughout the tunnels to keep the villagers from approaching the lighthouse. For every hour the characters spend in the tunnels, roll a d20. On a roll of 16 or higher, they encounter one of these guardians.

Each one wears a small green stone that turns black when the wretched is destroyed, thereby letting Yssandra know that she has lost a guard. If a character pockets a wretched's stone in the first 10 minutes after destroying the wretched, the stone doesn't change colors and doesn't alert Yssandra.

If Yssandra is alerted via the stones that something is amiss with any of her guards, the characters' odds of encountering more wretched sent to investigate goes up at each of eight junctures in the tunnels as they make their ascent. If they go in the wrong direction at a juncture, they'll figure out they need to return to the juncture when they sense the descent in the tunnel's grade, but they'll have to make another check when they come back to the juncture again, as shown in the table below.

At juncture 3, the characters find a dead wretched that has been tossed into the darkness of the tunnel's edge. Its missing stone should serve as a clue as to how to proceed undetected, but it also indicates that Rogan has already beaten them to this path to the lighthouse. If they fail to make the leap intuitively, however, they simply don't think of it, and their ascent continues.

THE LIGHTHOUSE FLOOR

The tunnel ends at a solid stone door (AC 17, 25 hp, damage threshold 10, immunity to poison and psychic damage), with a small carved face that resembles those in the village: painted eyes that seem to follow anyone who stands before it, jutting teeth with two gold-painted ones in the center of the lower

jaw, and a skeletal nose cavity with a small hole in its center. In addition, a stone similar to those carried by the wretched in the tunnels is set in the face's left eye socket. The door itself has no handle, no discernible hinges, and not even a small crack at its base. Careful exploration reveals that a small seam lines the top of it, suggesting that the door slides up into the ceiling overhead, but there's no way to grip the door and lift it.

In fact, the only way to open the door short of destroying it is to insert a stone from one of the myriad wretched in the tunnels into the right eye socket of the face on the door. (A similar face with the same setup decorates the other side of the door.) Doing so triggers the door's magic and lifts the door up into the ceiling. If the characters failed to recover a stone from a wretched, their only choice is to backtrack and retrieve one from the last point of contact they had with a wretched—and if that is any farther back than juncture 8, they must roll again on the previous chart to encounter random wretched patrolling the tunnels, using the percentage for the juncture where they retrieve the stone.

If the characters don't recover any stones from junctures 7 and 8, Yssandra determines that someone or something is closing in on the lighthouse and fortifies the ground floor of the lighthouse with a substantial number of wretched. These are the last of her minions, as she has sent all her forces to stop any intruders from reaching her.

ENCOUNTER: THE SHIPWRETCH'D

If Yssandra was alerted to their approach, the characters find themselves confronted by a dark, dusty room filled with **guardian wretched**. Make sure there are enough wretched to ensure an exciting battle with a slight advantage to the wretched. (Two wretched for each character should be sufficient.) The wretched aren't surprised when the door rises, can't be negotiated with, and don't retreat, regardless of their losses. Because the newly formed wretched don't yet have enough forethought to strategize, they can be easily evaded if you feel the characters are not up for the fight. Unless the characters have a steady source of light, the battle with the wretched takes place in almost complete darkness.

If the characters reached this room without warning Yssandra of their presence, they find an empty chamber with a dead wretched at the bottom of the steps that lead up into the lighthouse proper. This is yet another indicator that Rogan has come this way, though the characters still might not realize it (or might not care even if they do).

PIRATE'S CHOICE

As the battle rages, Rogan hides in the shadows at the base of the steps. Although he desperately wants to reach his wife, Yssandra, at the top of the lighthouse, he won't abandon the characters in this fateful battle. If the characters are losing the confrontation, read the following text aloud:

Rogan Dain emerges from the shadows, sword in one hand and pistol in the other, and wades into the fray, though his eyes dart frequently to the stairs. His attention is sufficiently pulled away that some of his blows fall short, and a wretched survives his attacks. As the battle continues, he shouts, "Doesn't look like you can do this without me now, eh?"

If Rogan joins the battle, he takes the first target by surprise and remains with the characters until they seem likely to emerge victorious. Once the characters seem to be winning the fight with the wretched, read the following text aloud:

Rogan spits and looks around as the tide turns against the wretched.

"This lot is yours now," he cries out, "win or lose!" He barrels up the stairs, his weapons lowered. "It's up to me to save her!"

GRAVE PLOT POINT: IF A CHARACTER DIES

This encounter features the adventure's biggest battle. Because the characters might not have had time to heal from earlier wounds, the odds of a character dying are likely higher here than at any other point in the adventure. Although it can be tempting to go easy on a character who is in grave danger, the GM should remember that death is not necessarily permanent on the Island of Eternal Faces. As mentioned earlier, should a character fall in this or any other circumstance, the GM can consider allowing the dead character to return as an undead via the island's magic. If this happens, the Altar of Life after Unlife can bring the character back to life (per the rules of the *resurrection* spell, but bypassing the normal restrictions for the spell in the Iron Kingdoms) if the characters are on positive terms with the Slough natives.

Or the character can stay dead. After all, the permanent death of a character lends weight to an adventure.





PART 8: THE LIGHTHOUSE, THE WARWITCH, AND THE REUNION

In this part of the adventure, the characters reach the lantern room of the lighthouse and find themselves in the middle of a confrontation between the key forces of the island, seemingly summoned together: the warwitch siren Yssandra; her husband, the blighted pirate Rogan Dain; and Arah, the chief of the Slough tribe. And to paraphrase Isaak, not everyone gets out alive.

SETTING THE STAGE

As the characters climb the stairs to reach the lantern room at the top of the lighthouse, read the following text aloud:

You climb the stairs and head for the top of the lighthouse. Each landing is brighter than the one before it, illuminated by a light source somewhere up above. As the floors go from pitch black to gray to pale, faces painted and carved on the walls begin to become clearer. They stare at you as if anticipating the fate you're approaching. Just as the faces come into total focus and you reach the final landing, the light above you goes dark, the faces disappear, and the familiar sounds of combat penetrate the blackness.

A few short steps up from the final landing is the floor of the lantern room, the uppermost chamber in the lighthouse. When you arrive, every wooden blind is down, keeping all but narrow blades of daylight out. The light that previously illuminated the chamber is temporarily shielded, leaving only one small standard lantern hanging from the ceiling as a source of light.

Yssandra Dain (see appendix B) stands at the top of a tight spiral staircase that rises 15 feet to the roof. One hand clutches the *skull of Kilan*, its eyes covered by eyepatches, and the other grips the latch to the trapdoor overhead.

Rogan stands at the very top of the stairs, blocking entry to the room as he battles four **guardian wretched**, Yssandra's personal guards from her crew aboard *Moon Shadow*. The characters can't enter the lantern room without engaging the wretched; if they appear to be waiting for Rogan to fall instead of joining in, he entreats them to help him ("I can't do this alone, but you know you can't either, right?"), and after 2 rounds of combat, three wretched move to intercept the characters while one continues to attack the pirate captain.

THE END IS NIGH

When the first wretched falls, or if any character maneuvers around the wretched to confront Yssandra, the warwitch siren attacks, using the *skull of Kilan* before falling back on her own spells and weapons. Yssandra fights in a near-maniac state, muttering and periodically shrieking in the ancient Orgoth tongue. Any character who pays attention to her ramblings hears her rage about "the slaves that traitor Barlo never brought" (a reference to the *Forerunner*, which the characters likely arrived on), repeatedly declare that "someone will come at midnight," and scream about how "it's time to take those villagers."

The *skull of Kilan* is a relic capable of emitting a blinding radiance. A raised pedestal with a dial-like plate atop it sits in the center of the lantern room. When the skull is placed there and its eyepatches are removed, the plate turns, sending piercing light out from the skull's eyes, nose, and mouth to cast its features into the night sky, but Yssandra can also use it as a weapon.

Yssandra and the guardian wretched are immune to the effects of the skull, so if she's losing the fight, she tears the eyepatches off the skull, aims it at the characters, and then leaves it on the spiral staircase to blast the room with blinding light. The only way to prevent the skull's devastating radiance is to cover the skull's eyes or destroy the skull itself. The skull is AC 16, has 35 hit points, is immune to poison and psychic damage, and is resistant to all other types of damage.

As the battle finally reaches Yssandra herself, Arah arrives in the lantern room, charging in to join the battle. If the characters have been on positive terms with her previously, Arah targets the guardian wretched fighting the character in most danger of being defeated. If the characters were on neutral or negative terms with Arah, she targets Yssandra instead. Like the characters, Arah must make saving throws against the skull's *sunbeam* spell.

Rogan won't attack Yssandra, and he will beg the characters and Arah not to attack her, either. He first tries to convince Yssandra to stand down, reminding her of who he is and their past relationship. Unfortunately for Rogan, these entreaties don't work; Yssandra either no longer recognizes her husband or refuses to surrender to emotion.

When the characters seem to have the advantage over Yssandra (but before they might defeat her), read the following text aloud:

The warwitch siren is clearly prepared to fight to the death, but Rogan seems to feel he can stop her without losing her. He calls to her: "Yssandra! Remember Grace!"

Her response is cold and even. "Grace is dead and buried at Henge Hold."

Even as the battle goes on, the pirate openly hopes to avert the inevitable.

"Leave with me!" he shouts to her.

"No!" she shouts back.

"Then let me stay with you! We belong together, husband and wife!"

"All of us already belong to the Orgoth!" she cries. "You just don't know it!"

THE SKULL OF KILAN

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

This deformed skull belonged to an Orgoth warlord and occultist. The skull's powers are nullified if its eyes are covered, such as with an eyepatch. The skull has 6 charges and regains 1d6 expended charges each day at midnight.

While you are wielding the skull and attuned to it, you gain the following benefits:

Eyes of the Dead. You can use a bonus action and expend 1 charge to gain blindsight to a range of 60 feet for 10 minutes.

Gaze of Kilan. You can use an action and expend 1 charge to cast the *sunbeam* spell (save DC 15) from the skull.

THE BEST-LAID PLANS

Rogan Dain has chased his wife across land and sea with virtually no plan for saving her; driven by his affection for her, he believes that simply being in Yssandra's presence will trigger something in her that will return her to a more reasonable state. "The power of love" is his fantasy, and learning that he is wrong shatters him. Yssandra's final declaration regarding the Orgoth causes Rogan to lower his weapons and remove himself from the battle, bracing himself against a wall and watching whatever happens next. When Yssandra is reduced to less than half of her hit points, Rogan revives from his catatonic state and shouts for the attackers to spare her. Even if the characters are inclined to do so, however, Arah is not. When the warwitch siren falls, preferably at the hands of a character instead of Arah, Rogan wails in emotional agony and turns away, burying his face in the wall.

DEATH AFTER DEATH

If the guardian wretched are still fighting when Yssandra is struck down, the battle continues until they're defeated. Arah participates in this stage of the fight, but Rogan remains facing one of the wooden blinds over the windows.

When the battle ends and the *skull of Kilan* has been covered or otherwise neutralized, read the following text aloud:

The silence in the room is thunderous, punctuated only by Rogan's heavy breathing as he struggles to prevent himself from sobbing. Arah stands over Yssandra's corpse for a few moments before finally turning to the group. "You must burn the body before the island brings her back."

This gets Rogan's attention. He turns to Arah with a flash of hope in his features, but the Slough leader shakes her head and shuts him down instantly.

"I know your pain, invader, but this madness must end. I will have my people bring your ship back from the lagoon and repair it so that you may leave, or you can have the small boat I sailed among the islands. But either way, the demon woman must not be allowed to return from the dead."

As this exchange occurs, each character hears a whisper from the *skull of Kilan* (or its shattered pieces, if it was destroyed) inside the character's mind. In a thick accent, the skull urges each of them to take over Yssandra's role, promising slaves in abundance if only the character will "light the face at midnight" so that the Orgoth can find their way ashore. Each character that hears the alluring telepathic message must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or fall under the skull's influence. Affected characters must repeat the saving throw again each day at midnight if they are still on the island, and the saving throw DC increases by 1 each day. On a successful save, a character is no longer affected by the skull, but characters who fail three consecutive saving throws lose control and turn on their companions. Such characters must continue making saving throws each day at midnight, as described above, ending the effect on themselves on a success but falling deeper under the spell's influence if they fail: they remain enemies of their current

allies, long to repair the skull (if necessary), and do whatever they can to shine its light at midnight as a beacon to the Orgoth conquerors.

When each character's moment with the skull is over, read the following text aloud:

Rogan seems less like a pirate now and more like a broken man. He can hardly lift his head, and his hands are trembling. Whatever misery he is feeling, though, his face does not reveal it as he turns to the group. He clears his throat, and resolution comes to his eyes.

"By Grace," he says, "you won't allow my blight to come back, will you, now?"

Before anyone can stop him, he turns, draws his pistol, blasts open the window blind, and leaps from the top of the lighthouse onto the rocks below.

PART 9: RESCUE?

With Yssandra defeated, the characters have some decisions to make.

CHOICE, NO CHOICE

Arah extends the same offer to the characters that she made to Rogan: her people will try to salvage the pirate ship in the lagoon and repair it enough for the characters to leave. (In doing so, they will be able to reach *Moon Shadow*, which might prove easier to make seaworthy again.) If they were on good terms with her previously, she also suggests they can stay on the island if they prefer, but the lighthouse must remain forbidden territory. In addition, the characters must live on the other side of the lagoon, away from both the village and the lighthouse.

Arah bluntly tells the characters that no one is coming to rescue them. Until recently, few people ever arrived on their shores—and none that she can recall in her lifetime. Whatever Yssandra thought she was doing, it was failing. Arah also tells the characters that their welcome on the island comes with a condition: to prove their devotion to the Slough and their willingness to protect the island from intruders, the characters must hunt down the last three pirates—Isaak, Freya, and Waylor, who escaped the carnage when the pirates raided the village—and return them to the village as prisoners.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

The characters now find themselves with a chance to leave the island (or, for characters seduced by the skull, to remain behind and await the Orgoth). This may result in clashes between the characters themselves or between the characters and the Slough.

As the GM, you have many options for continuing the story while the characters are on the Island of Eternal Faces. Isaak, Freya, and Waylor remain on the island, and the characters might interact with them again, either allying with them or hunting them. (All three pirates will certainly have some thoughts on *that* possibility.) Additionally, Takkor the Nail, *Moon Shadow's* former ship's mate, remains at the bottom of the lagoon and might provide information about other pirate ventures he knows about beyond the island. The characters might even convince Arah to travel the wider world with them and leave the island behind—which might seem more urgent should Gorah the Seer return from the dead (or from the undead via the Altar of Life after Unlife).

Furthermore, if the Island of Eternal Faces raises Rogan Dain from the dead, perhaps he returns looking for vengeance for his late wife. He may even find Isaak, Freya, and Waylor and ally with them in exchange for promising to help them escape the island. And if he can be negotiated with, he might be willing to forgive the characters for any actions they took (or didn't take) against him if they take him to Henge Hold and the mysterious "Grace."

Ultimately, another ship might approach the island—perhaps an Orgoth scout vessel investigating the island's suitability as a foothold, or even the *Forerunner* returning from beneath the waves as a ghost ship. After all, Cassie, the ship's mate whose corpse washed ashore alongside the characters, seemingly dragged herself back to sea. She may yet return, legless and one-armed, guiding a nightmare ship ashore to deliver whatever Captain Barlo failed to bring to Yssandra in the first place . . .

"SHIPWRETCH'D" NPC & BESTIARY

TAKKOR THE NAIL

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	7 (-2)

Skills Stealth +5

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Scharde Tongue

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Dusk Prowler. Takkor has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks while in dim light.

Actions

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

Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead, it must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

SWARM OF BLIGHTED CRABS

Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 20 ft., burrow 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)	7 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Amphibious. The swarm can breathe air and water.

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

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny crab. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) bludgeoning damage, or 5 (2d4) bludgeoning damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.



SWARM OF CARRION BIRDS

Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 24 (7d8 - 7)

Speed 10 ft., fly 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	3 (-4)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +5

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages —

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

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

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny bird. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Beaks. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) piercing damage, or 3 (1d6) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

SWARM OF UNDEAD BATS

Medium swarm of Tiny undead, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
5 (-3)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	4 (-3)

Damage Immunities poison

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Echolocation. The swarm can't use its blindsight while deafened.

Keen Hearing. The swarm has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny bat. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage, or 5 (2d4) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. A creature reduced to 0 hit points by a swarm of undead bats is stable but poisoned for 1 hour, even after regaining hit points, and paralyzed while poisoned in this way.

A large, brown, undead boar with a thick mane of hair and a metallic, spiked collar stands in a dark, rocky cave. The boar is covered in dark, jagged armor. In the background, other creatures are visible, including a large, horned creature and a smaller, insect-like creature. The lighting is dramatic, with warm orange and red tones from a fire source on the left, and cooler purple and blue tones from the cave's interior.

UNDEAD BOAR

Large undead, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 57 (6d10 + 24)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	2 (-4)	7 (-2)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Con +6

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Charge. If the boar moves at least 20 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a tusk attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 10 (3d6) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Relentless (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). If the boar takes 10 damage or less that would reduce it to 0 hit points, it is reduced to 1 hit point instead.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the boar to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the boar drops to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

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

Hit: 15 (3d6 + 5) slashing damage.



WRETCHED

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	9 (-1)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Con +5
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Sure-Footed. The wretched has advantage on Strength and Dexterity saving throws made against effects that would knock it prone.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the wretched to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the wretched drops to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The wretched makes two slam attacks.
Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and the target must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw, taking 5 (1d10) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

REACTIONS

Undead Frenzy. When the wretched takes damage from a creature that is within 5 feet of it, the wretched can use its reaction to make an unarmed strike attack against that creature.

GUARDIAN WRETCHED

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)	6 (-2)	9 (-1)	10 (+0)

Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages Scharde Tongue
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Shadow Regeneration. If the wretched is in darkness, it regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If it takes radiant damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of its next turn. The wretched dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Turn Resistance. The wretched has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the wretched to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the wretched drops to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The wretched makes two attacks with its longsword.
Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage if used with two hands.

SLOUGH SCOUT

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 15 (hide armor)

Hit Points 52 (7d8 + 21)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	11 (+0)	8 (-1)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Slough

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the scout hits with it (included in the attack).

Mask of the Jungle. The scout can attempt to hide even when it is only lightly obscured by foliage and other natural phenomena.

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

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The scout makes two melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage, or 11 (2d8 + 2) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, ranged 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) poison damage.



ARAH

Medium humanoid (Scharde human), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 14 (hide armor)

Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +6, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances poison

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Scharde Tongue, Slough

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Arah hits with it (included in the attack).

Mask of the Jungle. Arah can attempt to hide even when she is only lightly obscured by foliage and other natural phenomena.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Arah makes two attacks with her dagger and two with her pistols.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Pistol. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 40/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Parry. Arah adds 3 to her AC against one melee attack that would hit her. To do so, she must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.



REQUIRE PIRATE

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)

Hit Points 30 (4d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)

Skills Athletics +5, Intimidation +3

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Five Cant)

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Sure-Footed. The pirate has advantage on Strength and Dexterity saving throws made against effects that would knock it prone.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The pirate makes two attacks with its cutlass or one attack with its cutlass and one with its pistol.

Cutlass. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 14 (2d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Pistol. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 40/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage.

GORAH THE SEER

Medium humanoid (Scharde human), lawful evil

Armor Class 11 (16 with barkskin)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Skills Nature +4, Perception +4

Damage Resistances poison

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Slough

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Mask of the Jungle. Gorah can attempt to hide even when she is only lightly obscured by foliage and other natural phenomena.

Spellcasting. Gorah is a 4th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks).

She has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft*, *produce flame*, *shillelagh*

1st level (4 slots): *entangle*, *fog cloud*, *longstrider*, *thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *barkskin*, *spike growth*

ACTIONS

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit (+4 to hit with *shillelagh*), reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage, 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage if wielded with two hands, or 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage with *shillelagh*.

NAHN

Medium humanoid (Scharde human), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 15 (hide armor)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +5

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances poison

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Slough

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Brave. Nahn has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Mask of the Jungle. Nahn can attempt to hide even when she is only lightly obscured by foliage and other natural phenomena.

Reckless. At the start of her turn, Nahn can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls she makes during that turn, but attack rolls against her have advantage until the start of her next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Nahn makes two attacks with her dagger.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 feet, one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

REACTIONS

Uncanny Dodge. When an attacker Nahn can see hits her with an attack, she can halve the damage against her.

ROGAN DAIN

Medium humanoid (Cygnaran human), chaotic good

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)

Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)

Skills Athletics +5, Intimidation +5, Perception +6, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances poison

Senses passive Perception 16

Languages Cygnaran, Five Cant, Scharde Tongue

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Action Surge (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). On his turn, Rogan can take one additional action.

Sure-Footed. Rogan has advantage on Strength and Dexterity saving throws made against effects that would knock him prone.

Second Wind (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). Rogan can use a bonus action to regain 15 hit points.

Special Equipment. Rogan carries a heavy rifle powered by an alchemical capacitor (10 charges). The weapon's runeplate is inscribed with the Corruption rune, which Rogan can activate as part of a rifle attack by expending 2 charges before making the attack roll. Rogan's rifle attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Rogan makes two melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

Pistol Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Hand Cannon. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 80/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Rifle. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 100/300 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage, plus 9 (2d8) acid damage if Rogan activated the Corruption rune as part of the attack.

REACTIONS

Sidestep. Rogan adds 2 to his AC against one melee or ranged attack that would hit him. To do so, Rogan must see the attacker.





YSSANDRA DAIN

Medium humanoid (Cygnaran human), chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (warwitch armor)

Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Arcana +4, Deception +6, Perception +5, Stealth +7

Condition Immunities frightened

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Cygnaran, Scharde Tongue

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of her turns, Yssandra can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Evasion. If Yssandra is subjected to an effect that allows her to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, she instead takes no damage if she succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if she fails. She can't use this trait if she's incapacitated.

Innate Spellcasting. Yssandra's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *acid splash*, *minor illusion*, *shocking grasp*, *true strike*
3/day each: *charm person*, *dark waves*, *false life*, *whipping winds*
1/day each: *curse of shadows*, *scything touch*, *spider climb*

Sneak Attack. Once per turn, Yssandra deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Yssandra that isn't incapacitated and Yssandra doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Special Equipment. Yssandra carries the *skull of Kilan*.

Witch Barbs. A creature that touches Yssandra or hits her with a melee attack while within 5 feet of her takes 2 (1d4) slashing damage.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Yssandra makes three attacks with her witch glaive.

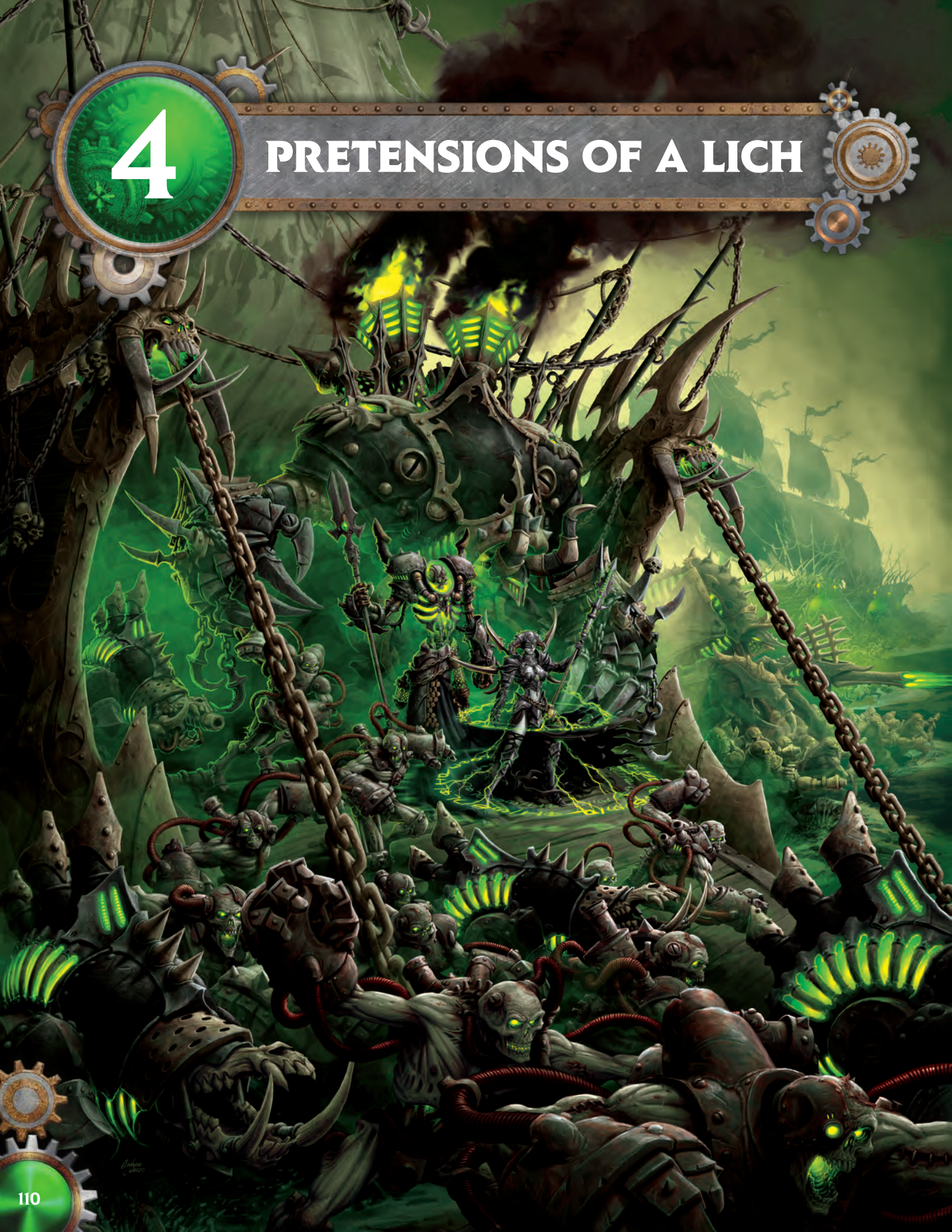
Witch Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit*: 10 (1d12 + 4) slashing damage.

REACTIONS

Uncanny Dodge. When an attacker Yssandra can see hits her with an attack, she can halve the damage against her.

4

PRETENSIONS OF A LICH



IN THE CAPITAL CITY OF THE NIGHTMARE EMPIRE, THE ancient undead are unquestioned rulers, second only to the Dragonfather Toruk himself in their absolute power. But with their long lives comes a kind of malaise cured only through games of politics, manipulation, and toying with the “lesser” inhabitants of the dead city.

A few who aspire to greatness become caught up in these webs of intrigue, not realizing that the black iron hand guiding them does so only for personal amusement. However, some ambitious souls might seek to rise above the games of the immortal lich lords.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE & SYNOPSIS

Pretensions of a Lich is designed for a party of four to six 17th–20th level characters and assumes they all can reasonably call the Scharde Islands or the archipelago of the Nightmare Empire of Cryx their home.

In the aftermath of the Claiming and the events surrounding the climactic Battle of Henge Hold, every nation of Immoren is weakened, including the realm of the Dragonfather. Cryx lost one of its most talented lich lords and military commanders, while Lord Toruk continues his convalescence to recover from injuries suffered in his latest skirmish against his wayward progeny led by Blighterghast. But the ambitions of the iron liches and lich lords remain limitless, and their designs stop for neither living nor undead, least of all in the capital, the dread city of Skell.

In this realm, filled with necromancers, liches, and masters of the undead, the characters must navigate their way past the ruthless ambitions of those who wish to rule and those who truly do rule in the Nightmare Empire. This adventure starts after they respond to a request to act as enforcers and bailiffs for an iron lich whose sights are set on promotion. Given the characters’ high level, their backgrounds should grant them sufficient fame (and infamy) to come under the notice of the Lich Lords of Cryx, but not so much as to invite their attention.

The adventure is divided into six scenes, set across the city of Skell. It spans the course of a single adventuring day, meaning there will be no real opportunity to take any rest, with pairs of scenes taking place in the morning, afternoon, and evening. The characters should level up once after the fourth scene, with the option to level up again at the adventure’s conclusion at the GM’s discretion.

The first scene introduces Iron Lich Tiberia and her faction within the political atmosphere of Skell. She has commissioned and oversees the construction of the most powerful warship Immoren has ever seen, a monument for her lich lord master. However, the project has run into several infuriating delays, and the iron lich is quickly losing patience with others in Skell who are supposedly contributing to the ship’s construction.

Set their task of chasing down uncooperative contractors to make good on their services, in the second scene the characters must investigate these other parties and find out why they are being obstructive. While doing so, the

characters discover they could be involved in something much more significant than a simple errand.

In scene three, some detective work further muddies the water, and the characters receive information that might not be entirely welcome. The uncertainty of matters is made worse by a series of lethal encounters that make little sense up until this point.

More bad developments come in the fourth scene, when the characters are caught in the crossfire of factional struggles and now find themselves deep in the perilous underbelly of Cryxian politics. With no certain direction but with breadcrumbs that apparently lead to the culprit, the truth is far from clear.

A solution presents itself in the fifth scene, but the characters are forced into a dangerous undertaking. By now they should be aware, and presumably not pleased, that they are effectively the playthings of a lich lord of Cryx. If they quickly extricate themselves from their predicament, they will be in the crosshairs of some of the most significant figures in Skell, just as the rival factions’ conflict runs the risk of getting out of even the lich lords’ control.

In the sixth and final scene, all becomes clear as the true orchestrator of the characters’ woes is made known. But a lich lord’s fun is not necessarily limited to just the characters, and what remains is a test of mettle for both them and the ambitious iron lich. If they succeed, the characters might even end the day with some measure of standing among the lich lords.

Because of the more investigative nature of certain parts of the adventure, GMs are encouraged to adjust the hints and guiding of conversation and activity during scenes 2, 3, and 5 (particularly the earlier two), following the characters’ progress.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Skell is where Lord Toruk issues his commandments to his servitors and attendants if he is not at rest at the Dragon’s Roost. In his shadow stand the twelve lich lords who plot and scheme, though what they plan is often not always in accord with Toruk’s goal of defeating the other dragons of Immoren and absorbing their athancs to restore his full power. However, he views their politicking and endless machinations with amusement, for the lich lords know their master is capricious and are careful not to let their agendas blind them to the goals of the Nightmare Empire and its living god.

Though there is no formal military presence in the city—for no one would be so foolish as to attack the seat of power of the greatest dragon of Caen—that does not necessarily mean there is no peril for the unsuspecting. There is not a single noble of Skell without a small army to call on if needed to cut their rivals down to size or to forestall such action against themselves. They play a dangerous game, which Lord Toruk finds most entertaining much of the time, for life is very cheap indeed when both one’s body and soul can be called back again and again to fight endlessly. But even the Dragonfather has limits, and sometimes things can go too far.



THE LICH LORDS: PEERS AND RIVALS

The lich lords keep ambiguous from all those who are of consequence, even among themselves, how they view one another. Nominally they are colleagues who serve a common master and work toward a common goal. Just as nominally, however, they are rivals, always seeking to gain favor with Lord Toruk. The reality is more complicated and just as murky, for their motivations for cooperation or competition can change with the tide.

Even the closeness observed between Fulmenus and Tenebrous must be questioned at times, and only they know whether it is in earnest or designed to fool the others. But these two are unlike the rest, unable to take physical form and rendered shadows of their former selves by the scourge at Drer Drakkerung when the Orgoth were driven away from Immoren, and their apparent brotherhood is different from anything shared by the other lich lords.

Few of the original twelve remain from when Toruk established the Nightmare Empire, which is apparent with two recent promotions: Deneghra and Mortenebra. Both of them are aware of their peers' silent disdain and of the schemes they must enact to ensure their longevity in the offices they occupy. Deneghra has the benefit of her years as the protégé of Asphyxious, perhaps the most devious lich lord Cryx has seen in recent centuries, while Mortenebra relies on her industry and diligence to keep her away from the attentions of the others.

As for the longer-serving lich lords, the two with overseas military portfolios, Terminus and Venethrax, are the most open with their rivalry, loudly ranking at any perceived lack of resources when they march to war. This open animosity must be regarded with the same suspicion as the apparent friendship of Fulmenus and Tenebrous, though, for these two freely cooperate when matters seemingly do not suit them.

Corripio and Angorus, in charge of the Archive and Treasury of Skell, respectively, attempt to hold themselves above such petty squabbling, but invariably reasons arise for them to find profit in any dealings. Divinitus, though, is able to remain aloof and apart from the normal politicking as chief of the Cryxian priesthood, attending Toruk more directly than any other.

Scopulous and Thalassina, who respectively lead the Nightmare Empire's military reserves and handle its foreign undertakings, are almost unknown quantities, especially to their counterparts among the Iron Kingdoms. Their portfolios can lead one to believe they are junior to their fellows, but such a word does not exist in the world of cutthroat Cryxian politics. They gladly use this veneer of insignificance to exercise power subtly but are terrifying to those who underestimate them.

Among them there is no greater enigma than Malathrax, master of the Cryxian intelligence network, and even more cunning than Asphyxious. For him, a trail of hundreds or even thousands of corpses is but a trifle if it produces information of benefit, even if he would prefer to avoid the mess.

PART 1: THE NEW PROJECT

The adventure begins as the characters approach the main drydock in Skell, where the beginnings of a ship's hull are forming. Timbers of accursed black wood lie piled, thralls lumber from area to area obeying the orders of their necromancer masters, while other figures scurry about on various errands.

One figure in particular can be seen coordinating efforts from within the hull itself, visible among the gargantuan exposed ribs of the ship. It is obviously an iron lich, with a distinctive black iron body, glowing soul cages, and skull-plate—more canine than is common among iron liches—though where he figures in this task is as yet unknown.

Once the characters are close enough, the iron lich, one of Tiberia's senior subordinates called Shakkal, notices them and intercepts them. Read or paraphrase the following:

"What you see before you is the brainchild of Iron Lich Tiberia. Destined to become the most heavily armed and armored warship to sail the Meredius, this ship will rule the waves. The grandest possible testament to Tiberia's master, Lich Lord Scopulous, it will be his flagship, one to rival those of his fellow Lich Lords, boasting a hundred cannon, facilities for a necrofactorium, and workshops for necrotechs and necrosurgeons. The project is also intended to demonstrate the esteem with which Scopulous holds Tiberia. However, it has fallen far behind schedule and Tiberia is most displeased. She cannot risk dispatching her own force of thralls for fear of attracting the ire of the lich lords and the Dragonfather, so the quiet comings and goings of private mercenaries are a convenient alternative.

"Here is a list of contractors who have thus far failed to forward their services and products contributing to the construction of the ship. Ask your questions and be about it quickly; time is being wasted and we will not allow any further obstacles to its completion."

Shakkal hands over a piece of paper with four names, corresponding addresses, prices in varying "currencies," and the services requested.

The characters could certainly just head off to all these addresses and browbeat the contractors, but Shakkal's offer of information is genuine, albeit terse. The iron lich can provide knowledge on any contractors about whom the characters might want to know more. Use the following details to guide the conversation with Shakkal.

Something to note, though, is the sense of urgency Shakkal expresses—or rather, a lack thereof. On a successful DC 25 Wisdom (Insight) check, a character realizes that, despite his insistence on haste, something about his tone of voice, his countenance, choice of words, and body language implies otherwise.

MAUSOLUS, THE NECROMANCER

Mausolus was originally meant to complete only part of this contract. Seeing himself as an "artisanal" raiser of the dead, he specializes in acquiring laborers from the Immorese mainland and converting them into thralls best suited to intricately directed work of surprising complexity. Mausolus was to raise two hundred brute thralls and send them with a handful of skarlocks to keep them under control. His counterpart has already fulfilled their portion, and Tiberia and Shakkal await his contribution.



On a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Shakkal also tells the characters Mausolus is often reprimanded for “unsavory” experiments on his creations, mostly because they never result in anything productive and could be a possible explanation for his work being late.

With a bit of additional prying, the characters learn this necromancer has done commissions for Tiberia before, for which Shakkal respects his work ethic if not his handiwork, though Tiberia does not care. More pertinently, a subsequent successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check indicates that Shakkal appears inwardly pleased Mausolus has not fulfilled his contract, giving the impression he believes it belongs with someone better suited to the task.

KATHARTIRIA, THE MASTER NECROTECH

More eccentric than is typical for the necrotechs of the Nightmare Empire, Kathartiria is a necromechanical genius, credited with numerous modifications to the Seether cortex—and surviving to see the results. She was contracted to construct and install the warship’s intended necrofatorium. Provisionally, she was to forward plans for it to the naval architects several days ago so the shipwrights could allocate the appropriate compartments of the hull for crew quarters, combat stations, necrotite and ammunition magazines, and so on. Shakkal is a bit confused as to why this delivery has been delayed but is aware Tiberia is plainly angry with it, as with all the other delays.

A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals Shakkal refers to Kathartiria almost as a friend but understands business is business. He does not seem put out by any potential disagreements, however.

ANNIKILUS, THE IRON LICH OVERSEER

Annikilus is an ambitious overseer known for profiting from the downfall of Lich Lord Morbus and came to some prominence with the rise of Lich Lord Asphyxious. He is a practiced artilleryist whose weapons have been refined for the better part of a decade to equal the breech-loading rifles of the Cygnarans and Khadorans. Annikilus was contracted to cast two prototype 68-pounder cannons for shipboard testing with another eighty to be ordered if deemed satisfactory, along with a few dozen cannons of smaller caliber.

A character who makes a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check gets Shakkal to admit Annikilus used his own direct influence with Lich Lord Scopulous to secure this contract, and Tiberia’s preferred choice of gun foundry was given another contract to keep them busy. With a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check a character can discern that, despite his efforts to hide it, Shakkal absolutely detests Annikilus and seems worried about the iron lich overseer’s involvement at all.

LIVORA, THE SATYXIS CAPTAIN

The warship’s intended size means it cannot be completed in Skell, so an expert pilot was requested to help transfer the constructed hull to a more suitable berth in Dreggsmouth, guided by the agile Satyxis *dhoze*. Not much is known about Livora other than her skills as a sailor and raider, as well as her reputation. She occasionally sails under Admiral Axiara’s banner, but more often she works in Dreggsmouth coordinating the comings and goings of the Nightmare Empire’s war-fleets and raiding flotillas from various harbors and berths around the archipelago.

On a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, the characters also find out Livora was contracted on the recommendation of another Satyxis captain seconded from Lich Lord Venethrax and that Shakkal trusts neither her nor Livora. More importantly, he doesn’t appear to care about his lack of trust or an apparent lack of alternate means to cover this part of the work.

INVESTIGATING THE SHIPYARD

After the characters have asked questions about all four contractors or are satisfied with the information they have, Shakkal is distracted by a scuffle in another area of the dockyard. He scurries away to see what the problem is. The characters are free to explore the area or follow the iron lich in investigating the disturbance—there are advantages to either course.

If the characters investigate the area they can note the following. For the drydock, Shakkal’s marquee, other working areas around the construction of the ship, accommodation for the thralls, dedicated areas for loading or unloading materials and so on, see Map 1: The Dockyard of Skell (obscuring the warehouse unless the characters venture there).

- A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence check, or any character proficient with vehicles (water), knows it is unusual that a deep-sea ship was laid down so far inland, even if the Scalesflow River is unnaturally deep and better suited to such work than, say, Merin in Ord. A bit of searching around the iron lich’s marquee turns up some correspondence that suggests there was some argument beforehand about where the ship’s keel was to be laid. One iron lich, Velenus, suggested Skell to establish a perception of prestige for the ship.
- The thralls currently working in and around the hull do not hinder the characters from studying the ship itself. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence check notices the ship so far doesn’t seem to match its intended purpose. The beam is on the narrow side and between the perpendiculars it looks quite long. The ship as a whole appears more like an upsized sloop, not a ship of the line, even if the currently installed timbers seem wholly suited to battleship construction.

- Around the drydock, the labor thralls don't seem to be particularly many or industrious, and from what can be seen, work appears to be quite slow. Some groups of thralls are even standing idle. With a quick look around, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals there is only one rather harried necromancer and a couple of idle-looking skarlocks coordinating the thralls, when this number should require several. It almost seems as though the slow pace of work is deliberate.
- Once the characters are finished looking around or have spent enough time doing so, a troubled Shakkal returns and briefly mentions Tiberia's displeasure with some underlings along with business matters that he states doesn't concern the characters. They can't find out anything further from conversation with him. He is, however, suspicious of their loitering around his workplace and dismisses them to get on with chasing up the contractors.

FOLLOWING SHAKKAL

If the characters follow Shakkal, he ignores them in his rush and thus leads them to a warehouse close to the dockside, where a figure is violently detaining what appears to be a skarlock commander. Apparently female, she has a mass of spiderlike legs and two pairs of arms, holding a spear with one hand behind her back while another is lifting a skarlock by the scruff of its neck; her last two hands are gesticulating theatrically at the unfortunate thrall. She's shouting at it about the shoddy state of affairs.

After tossing the skarlock aside, this iron lich spies Shakkal with the characters and scuttles up to them. Beckoned by the intimidating and irksome looking figure, Shakkal accompanies her to an office in a secluded corner of the warehouse where they converse in an animated fashion, though with enough restraint that the characters must venture close to overhear them.

The characters can explore the warehouse and the area immediately surrounding it. Stacks of timbers, a rack of inactive thralls, a storage room for necrotite, an open portable necrotech's workshop, and an armory are scattered throughout the expanse of the warehouse. A staircase leads up, but it is guarded by a pair of **bane knights** that snarl at any characters who approach. The stairs lead to the offices and primary workplace for Iron Lich Shakkal.

After a short while, the two iron liches emerge from the office, with Shakkal making for the stairs. The other one looks at the characters suspiciously, demanding to know who they are. Shakkal duly introduces the characters to **Iron Lich Tiberia**, his superior and the executor of the new warship's construction. Tiberia impatiently dismisses the characters to get on with it before departing herself, and Shakkal disappears up to his office, leaving the characters to plan their next step.

If they wait for a short while before they leave, they will not be chased out but irritably told to leave again when Shakkal descends from his office some time later. With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check they can observe Tiberia leave the dockyard area with her guards, a



squad of **dragon knights**. The knights' iconography is not the same as hers, but it does share certain similarities.

AN INTRODUCTION

After the characters leave the dockyard, they are approached by a hooded figure as they make their way along the road.

It does not take much to realize this individual is yet another iron lich; however, its armor and skull plate are concealed by a large black robe. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check notices the lich is trying to be furtive but isn't going out of his way to be secretive.

This iron lich introduces himself simply as "a mere contact." Read or paraphrase the following:

"My, how quaint that an esteemed company such as you go about the bidding of... that particular lich. She thinks quite highly of herself, that one. It will be quite amusing to watch you scurry back and forth in your efforts to make her happy. How long will it take for you to... make the connection? And I wonder how you will react to the revelation. Ah, such potential I see in you. And yet, such an opportunity for my entertainment!"

The iron lich is quite jovial as he speaks and, though mocking in his conduct toward you, makes no threatening gesture, using a friendly if patronizing tone. He sweeps an arm out, indicating you each in a parody of deference.

"I can see you wish to know more and that I might be a thorn or a catalyst as you go about your endeavors. Curiosity will be good for all. There is no need for me to divulge any more for now—where would be the fun in that? If you'll excuse me, I have appointments with those of greater consequence than you!"

This last he utters deliberately, looking meaningfully at each of the characters. He saunters away with a delighted cackle, waving his hand over his shoulder as he disappears into the shadows of an alleyway.

If the characters wish to pursue the mysterious Contact, they find no trace of his presence upon searching the back streets by the docks (iron liches typically have nondetection magic worked into their bodies). The only denizens of Skell they find here are decrepit thralls, tightlipped sorcerers of the dead, and fresh corpses ready for a necromancer's ministrations.

However, a character who makes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, after some careful snooping around, discovers faint tracks left by the Contact's sweeping robes and gains a general direction of where the iron lich went. His tracks, though very faint, can still be followed briefly through the detritus-ridden alleys until they finally become too faint to make out when the characters reach the military government district of Skell where everyone knows the lich lords dwell (at least, those who choose to stay in the capital). Those with formal permanent residences in Skell—as opposed to merely symbolic, since all the lich lords officially reside here—are Venethrax, Scopulous, Thalassina, Malathrax, Divinitus, Angorus, and Corripio. It is general knowledge that Venethrax is abroad, though no one knows exactly where he is.

If the characters inquire of those in the area, most are reticent, but a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check picks up some idle chatter about the absence of Lich Lords Angorus and Corripio. The former is on a tour of the Nightmare Empire to take stock of the state of Cryxian internal affairs in the aftermath of the Claiming, while the latter has ventured to Drer Drakkerung for a conference with his peers, Lich Lords Fulmenus and Tenebrous.

Following the characters' unusual meeting with the mysterious iron lich, they are free to pursue the tardy contractors.





PART 2: THE CONTRACTORS

The morning continues and time waits for none. The characters can visit the contractors in any order, though the optimal route through Skell to visit them all in the shortest time depends on where the group is after the events of the first scene. They don't need to call on all four of the contractors, but they should speak with at least three before triggering the next stage of the adventure.

Skell is the capital of the Nightmare Empire but is only the nominal center of government, though it is dominated by Cryx's lords of the undead, a group who vaguely pass as the nation's nobility. Nevertheless, the city is subordinate to Blackwater in overall size and population, second to the fortress at the Dragon's Roost in intimidation and reputation, and behind Dreggsmouth in industry. It is symbolically powerful, hosting the headquarters of many of Cryx's most fearsome organizations, but the city proper is paradoxically quite small. If one is able to navigate the seemingly random "suburbs" of the restless undead and their just-as-restless masters, it is a short trip from one side of the city to the other, with only the Scalesflow River any obstacle to quick travel across all the populated areas.

After determining where the characters are after meeting the Contact, they may go about their appointments in any order they choose. Provide Map 2: The City of Skell to the players so they can plan their route.

SKELL FEATURES

Skell is a modest city filled with cyclopean black stone buildings. Unless otherwise noted, its features are as follows.

Streets. The streets are made of dark fitted stone. They are many centuries old and not frequently maintained, so uneven cobblestones wait to catch clumsy feet.

Light. A pervasive pall of shadow hangs over Skell. Even at midday little light penetrates the gloom of Toruk's blight. The city is dimly lit.

Blight and Ashes. Dark flecks of ash, tinged with Toruk's blight, fall from the sky like an ever-present snow.

Sounds. The city is eerily quiet. Most of its inhabitants are no longer living, and Skell lacks the background noise that would be normal in a city of its size.

THE CITY OF SKELL

This map includes many landmarks and places that are not featured in this adventure and can serve as a resource for other adventures that take groups into the heart of the Nightmare Empire.

SKELL ENCOUNTERS

d4 Encounter

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| 1 | Silent Procession |
| 2 | Dragon Knight Patrol |
| 3 | Mocking Birds |
| 4 | Good Tithings |

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

While the characters travel Skell, they have the opportunity to witness the unusual capital city of the Nightmare Empire. You determine when or if these encounters take place, as they are meant to give the players a sense of what it is like to live in the blighted capital of Cryx.

In addition, two planned encounters occur as the characters travel between contractors, whenever you decide they are appropriate: “The Man Who Would Be Lich” and “Eyes in the Dark.”

SILENT PROCESSION

A group of silent, robed undead priests of the Church of Toruk move in a long column on the road ahead. The lead priest swings a thurible that burns, not incense, but refined necrotite.

A character who observes the procession can make a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check. On a success, they notice a golden soul cage, an iron lich’s phylactery, carried by one of the senior priests. The procession moves through the streets toward the Black Temple. A character who makes a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check knows that the phylactery is destined to become one of the senior iron lich priests in the Dragonfather’s church.

DRAGON KNIGHT PATROL

The heavily armored **dragon knights** patrol the streets of Skell. Each time the characters experience this encounter, they meet a different group of 2d4 knights, who ask the characters about their business and if they have noticed any suspicious activity. If the characters try to evade the patrol or fail to answer questions, the knights attack them.

MOCKING BIRDS

A **Scylla flock** atop one of the nearby buildings starts croaking out a salty litany of insults at the characters as they pass. If a character disturbs the flock, it attacks that character but otherwise is content to fling hurtful insults at the group as they pass.

GOOD TITHINGS

The characters spot a wagon train moving through the streets hauled by teams of 4 **brute thralls** and driven by a **skarlock commander**. Each of the five wagons in the train is piled high with mixed coins, treasures, and loot destined for the Dragonfather’s vaults.

The skarlock and brute thralls attack anyone who gets too close to the tithe, but a character can attempt a DC 10

Wisdom (Perception) check as the train passes. On a success, the character notices 2d10 gp that have fallen from a wagon as it rumbles over the uneven road.

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE LICH

A little after the characters depart from their second visit—for narrative reasons, ideally either Annikilus’s foundry or Kathartiria’s necrofactorium—the characters are confronted by a crazed **aspiring lich** and a small mob of six **augmented brute thralls** (see the appendix for both creatures’ stats) led by a **skarlock commander**. The aspiring lich decries Iron Lich Tiberia’s ambitions, blabbering about how she aims far above what she truly deserves. The characters can try to speak with him, but the man’s mind is too far rotted by dragon blight to comprehend their words; he simply attacks, ignoring any calls for reasoned discussion.

Upon the conclusion of combat, a letter and a lich’s skull plate bearing the necromantic seal of Lich Lord Thalassina can be found on the aspiring lich’s body. A character studying the skull plate who succeeds on a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check observes the seal is a forgery. The letter is unsigned, though the distorted and ancient form of calligraphy can be recognized with a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check as a very old form of writing favored by particularly ancient iron liches and the lich lords. The letter commends the aspirant’s loyalties to Lich Lord Scopulous while showing awareness of his desire to become an iron lich. Notably, it offers ascendance to that status if the aspirant disposes of the characters, since they are doing Tiberia’s bidding.

EYES IN THE DARKNESS

In between trips from one contractor to another, one of the characters feels a strange presence watching them. That character can make a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check. On a success, the character notices a small shadow creeping along the rooftops nearby, something the size of a large cat, and notices the distinct aroma of rotting flesh and embalming fluid. The shape disappears into the shadows if any attempt is made to pursue, and divination magic cannot track it.

MAUSOLUS, THE NECROMANCER

Mausolus’s crypt is in a secluded corner of Skell fairly remote from the major districts. As the characters approach, read or paraphrase the following:

The stench of rotting flesh grows stronger as you draw near the riverside crypt of the necromancer Mausolus. The narrow alleyway leading to his abode is lined with corpses, body parts, mechanical limbs, and gore-spattered tools of the necromancer’s trade. At the end of the alley, bodies are piled high next to a nondescript iron door.

As they approach, the characters are greeted by a somewhat haughty individual, Mausolus’s attendant Seraphis. It is difficult to determine at first glance whether or not she is alive. A character who makes a successful DC 18 Intelligence

(Medicine) check realizes she is in fact undead, with subtle changes around her neck and other areas of exposed skin indicating very fine or hidden stitches, as well as faint thrall runes lightly tattooed in pale ink. She bids the characters wait in the crypt's atrium as she summons Mausolus, inviting them to sit on rough stone slabs that pass for benches—even though one is occupied by a fresh, if clean, corpse.

After a moment the necromancer enters the atrium. Read or paraphrase the following:

The necromancer steps into the room cleaning his hands, his attendant whispering into his ear. Well-kept and crisply dressed, he seems to ignore your presence, approaching the corpse on the slab and fussily picking lint from its burial shroud. After a moment, he turns his attention to you, face sagging with reluctance.

Upon being asked about the contract from Iron Lich Tiberia, he expresses confusion, replying he did not respond to the initial offer before ultimately declining it. He doesn't understand why Tiberia and Shakkal expect the thralls from him.

Mausolus does not divulge who has taken on the contract now, mentioning only that he takes an artisan's approach to raising and animating the dead. While capable of creating brute thralls to exacting specifications and renowned and respected for their craftsmanship, he considers the factory production-line approach beneath his dignity.

If the characters press him, he becomes cold and dismissive, instructing them to leave his home. Should they continue to provoke him, he summons 5 **brute thralls** and 10 **mechanithralls** to back him up.

However, if any of the characters plays to his pride in his work by complimenting what he has done with his attendant, he warms up to them a little. His ego thus massaged, with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check, Mausolus says he never wanted the contract in the first place but was forced to accept it, only to be relieved of it after he had already completed the first batch, about which he is now resentful for wasting his effort.

If asked who strong-armed him, Mausolus says it was by proxy, arranged by someone he believes is the naval architect of Tiberia's project. This is bewildering to him since he had never met this individual before, knowing only that the person does not live in Skell's city center—he'd know if they did. If pressed, Mausolus suggests a general area of the northern outskirts, the only place away from the city proper where the "more intelligent" of such residents in Skell might live.

KATHARTIRIA, THE MASTER NECROTECH

Based at the main necrofactorium of Skell, Kathartiria is difficult to find. When the characters enter the massive doors of the necrofactorium, read or paraphrase:

The main atrium leading to the production hall is lined with glistening black helljacks, filling the space with the tang of burning necrotite. Their glowing green eyes burn with ferocious inner light, though the deadly machines remain inert. Many of them are in various states of disassembly—some are missing whole limbs, or have armored plating removed to expose the chassis beneath. An active deathripper watches you from beneath the legs of a helljack suspended on a 'jack hoist.

The bonejack seems more curious than anything else, though a character who makes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check, or one proficient with steamjacks, can detect the characteristic bloodlust of Cryxian 'jacks is subdued in it. Instead, it seems more like a mainland laborjack.

The bonejack sidles more or less parallel with the characters as they make their way farther into the necrofactorium, with no intent to attack or do anything aside from watch. If approached, it runs away only to reemerge when the characters resume their path along the central walkway. If the characters stray or take too much time, however, the bonejack gets a little closer and screeches with an unbearable grinding sound until the characters return to the path.

Kathartiria is on the main production floor of the necrofactorium, past the atrium. She is a fairly stereotypical necrotech, albeit with the necromechanical upgrades befitting one of master status.

The necrotech is a mad genius, more so than most of her fellows. Her madness manifests itself in subtle ways, the only apparent one being a piercingly unsettling glare and a level rasping drawl, unlike the usual rapid-fire speech common to many necrotechs. She is somewhat amicable and quite amenable to conversation despite her demeanor. Still, after even the slightest bit of interaction with her, a character who makes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check realizes she is choosing her words with extreme care.

When asked about her contract, Kathartiria simply says she took it on as a favor to Shakkal, but events have transpired that compelled her to defer carrying out the job to a fellow necrotech, one of Lich Lord Mortenebra's subordinates. No amount of trying to persuade her reveals what these events are.

If at any point during the conversation, the characters ask after the bonejack that welcomed them, she opens up somewhat, comparing the bonejack to a dumb but enthusiastic puppy, which she views with a strange sense of fond amusement. She also provides the name of Ultaris, another master necrotech, as the one who has taken on the contract in her place.

However, Kathartiria offers the characters a word of warning: they did not hear that name from her. If asked why, the necrotech expresses concern about tensions brewing between the iron liches serving Lich Lords Scopulous and Mortenebra. Given her status as nominally in service to Scopulous, while Ultaris serves Mortenebra for the most part, Kathartiria is naturally a bit nervous and wishes to avoid the attention of iron liches on both sides who might want to run her out of the necrofactorium, or worse.



ANNIKILUS, THE IRON LICH OVERSEER

Of the four contractors, the master of the cannon foundry works closest to the drydock, if in the opposite direction from the rest.

When the characters arrive at the foundry, read or paraphrase:

Thralls and servitors scuttle about pushing carts piled high with necrotite, black iron, necromechanical parts, and other machined resources. A blighted human covered in scales and festering sores hacks into a stained handkerchief as he inspects a batch of freshly cast cannons.

The man glares at the characters as they approach, angrily summoning a skarlock. What appears to be a long-suffering thrall commander breaks away from a group of laborers and grovels before first the man and then the characters, chattering nonsensically while gesturing for them to follow it into the foundry.

Inside, the characters are led to Annikilus's place of work, which seems more an unregulated shooting range than an office, despite the stone slab that serves as a desk and some scattered papers strewn atop it and on the floor around it. Jabbing at the floor and idling from side to side are four restless **stalker** bonejacks, which react to the overseer's behavior as part of his battlegroup. When the characters try to interact with him, he brandishes a low-caliber naval artillery shell at them in disgust, then hurls it downrange at a sheet-metal target, where it explodes on contact. Annikilus shouts his dissatisfaction at a group of attending assistants, both alive and undead, who are feverishly taking notes. Exasperated, he finally takes notice of the characters,

demanding to know what they want. Once they inquire about the contract, the overseer's demeanor becomes guarded.

Annikilus gladly discusses what it is he is working on, a new rifled naval howitzer, in an effort to deflect the discussion and grows increasingly irritated if the characters press the matter of the contract for Tiberia. He informs them he has been paid off by a third party, though he is unaware of who it is, and his contract has been awarded to a rival, an iron lich foundry master who supplies Lich Lord Mortenebra with much of her military maintenance equipment.

While he has no particular quarrel with the lich lord, Annikilus is bitter about having lost the contract since he wanted to prove to Tiberia and Shakkal he is indeed good at what he does. More so because he was notified only a couple of days ago, after he had already built the sample cannons, although testing them was delayed. He cuts himself short after sharing this and will not discuss it any further. However, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals he knows more about the delay but is being careful about this detail.

LIVORA, THE SATYXIS CAPTAIN

The district where the Satyxis of Skell usually conduct their business, which includes Livora's quarters, is not particularly far but is more awkward to get to, as it is across the Scalesflow River and a little upstream from the drydock.

Owing to the proximity of the blighted priests of the Church of the Dragonfather and the high proportion of the undead and necromancers in the main districts of Skell, the living residents of the city tend to keep together, away from the worst of the blight. A ferry makes the crossing half a dozen times a day. There is a bridge to the northwest linking one of the undead districts with the living quarter, but if the characters take this route, they will not trigger the following encounter at the pier on the southern bank.

THE SOUTHERN BANK

As the ferry pulls up to the pier, the characters observe a band of Satyxis boarding a large raiding skiff. Read or paraphrase the following

On the southern bank of the river, a group of Satyxis warriors prepare to board a slender raiding vessel, like a dhoze in miniature. The commander exchanges words with a woman who remains dockside before shouting the order to shove off. The women staying ashore wait to see their fellows heading downriver before turning and heading back into the district of Skell's mortal populace.

As long as the characters are careful or subtle, they can attempt a group DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check. On a success, they can safely follow the Satyxis all the way to Livora's offices in the living district without being noticed.

If the group check fails, the women confront the characters about halfway to their destination. Their leader, a Satyxis lieutenant, is more easily angered than usual. The characters

must make a successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check to convince her that they mean no harm and to obtain answers about Livora's contract. If the check fails, the lieutenant gets agitated and demands the characters leave, yielding no further answers except to tell them to bother Livora's contact outside Skell. She gives them what passes for an address before returning to the Satyxis place of business, refusing the characters entrance of they follow.

LIVORA'S HEADQUARTERS

If the characters do not follow the Satyxis from the dock, or if they otherwise approach Livora's headquarters directly, read or paraphrase:

In the cramped streets of Skell's modest district inhabited by the living, a pack of a half-dozen Satyxis warriors gather in front of a small stone building. Each of them bears wicked-looking weapons, and they bark with laughter as they pass cups between one another.

When the Satyxis become aware of the characters, their friendly conversation dies down. Two **gunslingers**, a **blood witch**, and two **raiders**, all led by a **Satyxis sea witch**, subtly prepare for conflict.

The lieutenant greets (or faces down) the characters with a sneer and politely—for a Satyxis—asks their business. She

honestly, if with no little amusement, answers questions concerning Livora.

"If it's Livora you're after, you're too late. She just left on business in Dreggsmouth, on the raiding skiff Tidegutter."

Livora was, in fact, the commander who departed at the pier just a little earlier.

If the characters mention they need to speak with her about Iron Lich Tiberia's contract, the lieutenant becomes nervous and uncertain.

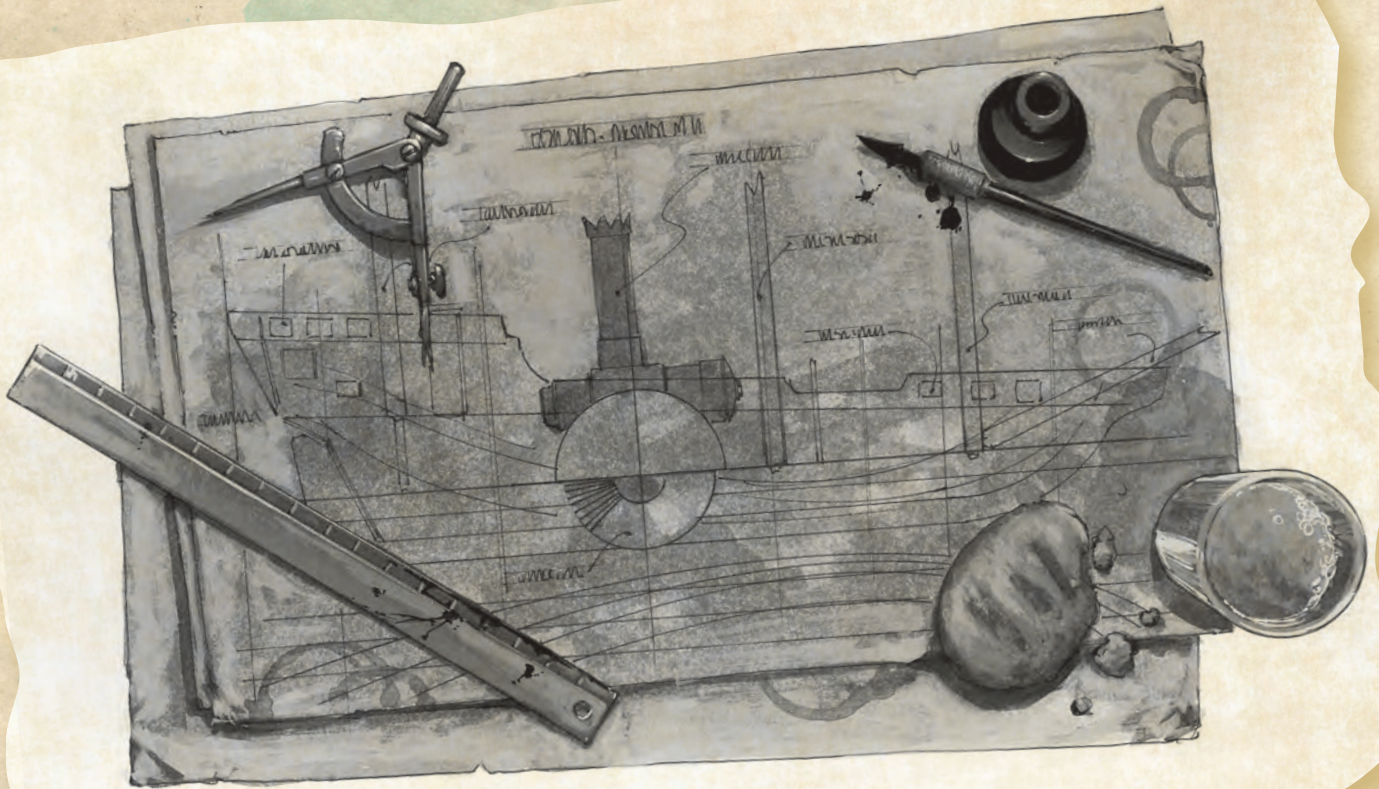
"You'll want to head north, out of the city. Livora talked with someone up there about the particulars of the contract. No sure why she'd want to meet there, of all places."

As to the contract, a character who makes a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces the lieutenant to divulge more information.

"Livora didn't know the specifics about this job until recently. Said she had reservations about it, up until she met with that person up north. When she came back, she told us there was no way she was going to fulfill the contract."

This is as much as the characters can learn from the lieutenant.





PART 3: THE NAVAL ARCHITECT

After departing from the last of their planned visits, the characters should have enough information to deduce where to go next: the naval architect's office north of Skell's outskirts. They can report back to Shakkal, though the iron lich might not be receptive to this lack of positive development. In the event the characters do so, he is dismissive and tells them to come back when they have some useful information.

Irrespective of which way the characters wish to go about this, when they set off for the naval architect's location, upon leaving the city center, they are accosted once again by the robed and hooded iron lich: "the Contact."

SECOND CONTACT

While the characters travel north through Skell, the Contact once again makes his presence known. Read or paraphrase:

A rasping but merry voice calls to you from a shadowed alley.

"My friends, how are you? Are you enjoying all this scurrying about Skell? Seeing the sights and meeting our capital's minor celebrities?"

The hooded figure of the self-described Contact emerges from the shadows, wiggling his metal fingers in an imitation of a running insect. Before he can continue his jibes, he halts his theatrical gesture and slowly, silently assumes a guarded stance. He points across the street asking, "Are you acquainted with this... creature?"

His finger points to a necromechanical cat, perched on a low wall.

The Contact studies the characters, concludes they are not acquainted with the cat, and, strangely, bids the creature:

"I wish you wouldn't observe the proceedings in such a fashion."

The cat is unresponsive for a few moments before arrogantly sashaying away, at which point the Contact resumes his prior levity. After the barest of pauses that might be considered polite, the Contact bids farewell and disappears again into the squalid backstreets of Skell, here even more dank and grimy than before.

Again, the characters can attempt to follow but very quickly lose any trace of him, ending up in a square elsewhere in the slums a little closer to the city proper than before.

With little else to do, they should continue to their destination, the home of the naval architect. This individual paradoxically works and lives in a hut a little upriver from Skell itself, just beyond a veritable swamp and shantytown inhabited by the undead.

HOME OF THE ARCHITECT

The remote location of the architect's home was not understated. A dirt track leads to a small hut and very little else beyond the hills north of Skell. The only sound is the trickling of a stream flowing to the Scalesflow River.

On approaching, a character with passive Perception of 15 or higher notices multiple sets of tracks on the track, and the shack's door doesn't seem to quite fit the opening.

When the characters enter, read or paraphrase the following:

On opening the door, it's easy to observe it was knocked off its hinges and replaced well, if hurriedly. Inside, the one-room dwelling has been ransacked, with documents, boxes, furniture, and all manner of stuff strewn about the floor and on the table in the middle. There was clearly a struggle here, proven by the presence of a body among the debris.

Murder is not an uncommon occurrence in the Nightmare Empire, even in Skell, and there is no real equivalent of a city watch to investigate crimes of this sort.

If the characters secure the area surrounding the shack, it is safe to search untroubled. Though it has just one room, the shack can be split into four rough sections: by the door; the table and the floor around it; the bed and sleeping area; and the body.

THE DOOR

Evidence of a struggle includes a shattered mug, the floorboards still damp from it, a broken chair, and a few bloodstains. The area near the doorway itself is oddly clear, though, with not much mess within a couple of steps.

Other items that normally belong on a dinner table or in kitchen cabinets are scattered around, and though such disarray would be expected in a scuffle, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals all such debris is isolated to this area and nowhere else. Virtually none of it is in the other parts of the hut, even around the table at the far wall. Several dishes and pieces of crockery lie smashed, having been thrown either against the wall or directly onto the floor, but again, mostly in this general area. It seems as if the attacker or attackers deliberately created as much of a mess as possible on their way out the door.

THE TABLE

On the table serving as the architect's desk are several sketches of ship designs. A character proficient with vehicles (water) recognizes in them what a sailor would consider sensible for a heavy battleship, but there are a few more

fantastical designs, along with ones resembling the ship being built at the dockyard. Oddly, the notes written on the designs are in multiple similar but distinct handwriting styles, which a character can notice with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check.

Comparing the designs to what the characters witnessed at the dockyard shows subtle stylistic differences; simply put, the designs for Tiberia's project are rougher, lacking details present in the others.

More sketches are scattered about on the floor near the table, though many are spoiled by smudges and large ink blotches from spilled bottles. Among them is a neatly folded letter in an unsealed envelope addressed to Iron Lich Velenus, but it's suspiciously clean, without any marks such as a footprint or ink stains. Reading it reveals the thoughts of the naval architect concerning Tiberia's evolving ship, all of them highly critical. The letter is unfinished, without a signature, and the creases in the paper are heavily frayed, showing signs of being repeatedly folded and unfolded.

THE BED

The sheets are tossed about, the pillow has been cut up and ruined, and the bed frame has been broken in several places.

Hidden Note. If the makeshift mattress is removed the characters find a scrunched-up note that, amid the ink-smearing writing, mentions indicates the location of something valuable to Iron Lich Tiberia, apparently at the warehouse.

Bedside Table. The bedside table has a small drawer containing a pouch of 10 oversized gold coins. The coins are grimy, but after some cleaning and looking closely at the details, a character can attempt a DC 10 Intelligence (History) check to discover as they are made of a special alloy of blighted gold used exclusively for work directly ordered by the lich lords. The coins are issued as proof the work has been commissioned and returned once it is completed to the satisfaction of the ordering lich lord in exchange for however much is agreed. Such coins have the insignia of the issuing lich lord's ministry on the reverse, accompanied by a dedication to the Dragonfather, but in this case, all have been thoroughly defaced.

From the few markings that can be observed, a character can attempt a DC 15 Intelligence check to make an educated guess as to which lich lord issued the coins. Based on the defaced scratches, there are three possible options: Thalassina, Mortenebra, or Malathrax.

THE BODY

What is presumably the naval architect has been killed unceremoniously.

If a character examines the body, a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Medicine) check reveals she was in life a middle-aged Scharde human, with moderate signs of the effects of blight common to all living creatures of the Nightmare Empire who live so close to the Dragonfather's capital. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, the character notices she possessed a physique that suggests being well-to-do—even if the hut suggests otherwise—a technical

tradesperson rather than a pirate or irregular soldier as most Schardefolk tend to be.

Upon closer study and a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, the cause of death is revealed as a single knife wound in the neck. There are multiple other knife wounds on her body, and the limbs have numerous scrapes and drag marks. Despite the numerous injuries, though, there is a suspiciously small amount of blood on the floor nearby.

Hidden Letter. On the body is a letter in a hidden pocket, which a character can readily discover, signed by a Master Necrotech Ultaris. The content of the letter suggests that this person, whoever she was, worked for Ultaris and Lich Lord Mortenebra. It details some of the changes to arrangements in the project that the characters have already discovered. No reasons are provided, and the change is merely stated, not explained.

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

The strange state of the shack and body provide evidence of the involvement of one of the lich lords in the architect's death, but it is also apparent the scene has been tampered with.

The evidence points the finger at Lich Lord Mortenebra and factions who declare loyalty to her, but it seems too neat, as though a trail of breadcrumbs were laid for the characters' benefit.

INSPECTION INTERRUPTUS

The characters don't have much time to think further about the implication of a staged crime scene before a gang of enforcers approaches the shack.

The gang doesn't announce its presence, but characters with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 13 or higher notice the sound of approaching footsteps crunching on the road.

The enforcers consist of an **aspiring lich** and two **necromancers**, supported by two **skarlocks** leading three **bloat thralls** and nine **brute thralls**. Angry the characters have interfered in matters that do not concern them, they demand the characters abandon their search and leave Skell or suffer the consequences, though the aspiring lich makes it clear he'd much rather they stayed for him to kill.

After the enforcers have been dealt with, the characters can search them to discover a total of 200 gp in mixed coins, their weapons and armor, a letter, and a medallion that identifies the aspiring lich as a subordinate of Lich Lord Mortenebra.

As with the crime scene, things are not exactly as they seem. A character can make a DC 15 Intelligence check to recognize the medallion is a forgery, made of the wrong metal, and the details of Mortenebra's crest are cruder and lack certain details. The letter contains orders to prevent anyone from investigating the naval architect's home, along with a scathing invective against the aforementioned Iron Lich Velenus.

LIVORA RETURNS

Before the characters can make sense of what they've found, a Satyxis captain appears unexpectedly with some of her companions, who pick over the remains of the characters' run-in with the gang. She introduces herself as Livora, the specialist pilot, and says her second-in-command directed the characters here, so she opted to follow. If asked about her business in Dreggsmouth, Livora says only that her Satyxis sense of trouble on the waters caused her to turn around, particularly since she saw the characters at the pier on the western bank when she was departing.

The captain outright states she smells something funny about the whole job, and when prompted about her meeting with the naval architect, she goes into the hut and does a bit of poking around of her own. After a short while, she says the body is indeed that of the person she met just the day before. After studying the evidence therein, Livora is convinced the naval architect was a fraud. The ship designs are clearly made by different hands; the lich lord's payment tokens would not be given to someone of the dead person's status who wasn't employed directly; and there is no way a competent architect would design what currently lies on the drydock in Skell's dockyard.

If the characters have come to a similar conclusion and share it with her, Livora wholeheartedly agrees. Alternatively, she might prompt this line of conversation and express doubt if the characters believe something different, without providing much detail. However, the whole affair is quite confusing to her, and Livora is unsure of who is behind the cloak-and-dagger trickery. Being a Satyxis, she's suspicious of almost everyone involved but expresses particular wariness toward Iron Lich Shakkal, who first approached her about the job some time ago but provided no update about it until only very recently.

Livora stays to answer any questions the characters might have, though she can tell them little of value. Before long she expresses relief that her suspicions are confirmed, intending to wash her hands of the matter entirely, and leaves with her Satyxis companions.

By now, the characters should realize someone is setting up Lich Lord Mortenebra as an aggressor against Lich Lord Scopulous, manipulating Iron Lich Tiberia's construction project to nudge matters along toward what could be a violent confrontation. However, they might still have questions. Who is Iron Lich Velenus, and how are they involved in this? Likewise, what of Master Necrotech Ultaris, beyond his association with Mortenebra? And what does Tiberia have to do with it all? At this time answers are not forthcoming, with no identifiable parties who might be able to cast light on the matter.

Still, Tiberia should be informed of the investigation's progress since there is a fair amount of evidence a conspiracy is forming against one or more of the lich lords. They do not give audiences to random adventurers, however renowned, so the best option is to relay the information via a senior lieutenant the characters are already in contact with.



SCENE 4: RIVALRY

This scene takes place upon the characters' return to Skell. Whether or not they plan to meet with Iron Lich Tiberia, strange things are afoot in the Dragonfather's city.

Sounds of fighting are audible as the characters draw near. On approaching a public square close to one of the outermost districts, they see a battle in full swing. Read or paraphrase:

A swarm of bodies, living and dead, clash in the street. A handful of iron liches and subordinate necromancers fill the air with the flare of green hellfire, while others scream for gangs of thralls and minions to enter the fray. Leading one of the two forces, Iron Lich Shakkal catches notice of you and hurries to your side.

Angrily, Shakkal informs the characters that factionalists of Lich Lord Mortenebra appear to be responsible for much of Tiberia's woes concerning the shipbuilding project. He claims

that, on hearing of the characters' investigations into the various people who apparently reneged on their contracts, partisans crawled out of the woodwork to make sure the matter remained out of Tiberia's control.

Before Shakkal can speak further, a group of reinforcements arrives to support the partisans and launches an all-out attack. Fighting alongside the characters are **Iron Lich Shakkal** and a squad of six **brute thralls** and a **skarlock commander**. Arrayed against them are three **aspiring liches**, two **necromancers**, a marshalled **Slayer warjack**, and ten **brute thralls**.

Just as the last thrall is destroyed and any remnants of the rival gang withdraw, a tall robed figure, blight emanating strongly from him, strides into the square to confront Shakkal. The iron lich sheathes his weapons and kneels in deference. Read aloud or paraphrase the following:

"My Lord Divinitus." Shakkal bows stiffly to the newly arrived lich lord.

A voice issues from beneath the hood, and it grates harshly on the ears of the living.

"As there is no representative from the other faction party to this... skirmish, you must suffice, servant of Scopulous. The minions of Mortenebra will hear what must be said, be assured, but you are not immune from the Dragonfather's chastisement."

Shakkal nervously keeps his gaze low.

"Competition and rivalry among the lower ranks is necessary for the maintained strength of the Empire; all know this, and we do not wear the notion of a peaceful existence well. However, this latest incident is more impediment than test of strength. If you are to enact violence, learn subtlety. I care not who instigated it, nor does the Dragonfather. This has a deleterious effect on Lord Scopulous just as it does Lord Mortenebra. As their favored subordinates, you must conduct and resolve such conflict with at least some ingenuity. Remember what your lords' ambitions are, and beware the divergences of your own agendas.

"This duty is normally beneath my notice, but with what is happening to Skell's industry, with lost productivity as work is canceled or transferred, this—" the Chief Priest of the Nightmare Empire waves his hand toward the thrall remains and other corpses— "has become too much to leave unregulated. The Dragonfather bids me do whatever is necessary for this argument to be ended without further disruption. The consequences of failure do not bear contemplating for those such as yourselves."

Artificial voice trembling, Shakkal responds, "Yes, my Lord."

The Lich Lord stalks away, his honor guard departing with him after casting withering glares at Shakkal and the characters.

Visibly relieved when Divinitus is gone from their sight, Shakkal turns to the characters and bids them follow him back to the dockyard. He leads them straight to Tiberia and conveys the lich lord's warning to her.

Tiberia is naturally unhappy with this state of affairs and demands to know what the characters have accomplished. She becomes furious upon learning all the contractors were either paid off or browbeaten into undermining her project, and takes at face value the evidence of Lich Lord Mortenebra's involvement, accusing the lately elevated master necrotech of operating beyond her ambitions. Tiberia also holds the lich lord's lackeys responsible for interfering with her work and sabotaging Scopulous's status in Skell as a result. A character who succeeds on a DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check realizes Tiberia is hiding something about Mortenebra's alleged involvement.

Tiberia offers the characters double the payment of the original job to hunt down the culprit—certain in her belief they are among Mortenebra's followers—who is sabotaging her efforts and present the guilty party before her. She is

aware it would not be the lich lord herself, as the ministers of the Nightmare Empire have better things to do than needle each other directly but do so by proxy via the liches and thralls under their command. She tells Shakkal to prepare separate arrangements to get the necessary work done and draw up a short list of, as she puts it, "competent" specialists as soon as possible. Declaring she must consult with Lich Lord Scopulous, Tiberia dismisses both him and the characters.

The characters might voice their doubts about the veracity of the evidence against the lich lord, but Tiberia will hear nothing of it, remaining insistent the conspiracy is leveled directly against her and Scopulous. If the characters press the matter, she fumes that she would have been better served by a band of Blackwater urchins. Should they instead keep their suspicions to themselves, the characters can pretend to agree to Tiberia's orders and then make themselves scarce to plan their next move, since it appears the iron lich's motives are less from any innocent grievance and more a plan to stoke tensions, as has been observed by Lich Lord Divinitus.

THIRD CONTACT

Shortly after leaving the dockyard district, the characters endure another mocking cameo from the Contact, who is awaiting them.

As you leave the dockyard, a now familiar figure awaits you at a street corner, sitting on a low wall. Blowing a kiss in your direction, the lich styling himself the Contact calls out to you.

"What a coincidence—wait. That's not the word. What a contrivance it is to see you again. Tell me, how is Master Tiberia faring? Such a stubborn lich. Her rivals make for much better conversation."

If the characters ask about Iron Lich Velenus, the Contact states this individual works for Lich Lord Malathrax, remarking he and his underlings are very difficult to get hold of and admitting he has no idea where to start on a search. Should the characters ask who the Contact works for, he chuckles and applauds their curiosity but provides only a coy answer.

"Oh, don't assume I work for anyone, or that anyone would have me. I merely help bring people together. I am the Contact, after all. Like Master Necrotech Ultaris. What good times we had in centuries past, when we both had bodies of flesh and blood. Before we went our separate ways. If someone wanted to meet with him, why, I dare say I could make the process much... smoother."

Attacking the Contact. The characters might tire of the Contact's continued games and attack him just to relieve a bit of stress. The Contact, sensing their intent, asks whether it is advisable.

"Are your hands creeping to your weapons? Do you really think that would be wise? I am a lich, after all. It might let you vent some steam, but I promise you that I will be back. Oh, and what enjoyment I would take in making your lives more difficult!"

If the characters insist on attacking, he shrugs, gets to his feet, and expresses his disappointment before unleashing an assault on the nearest character. The Contact has advantage on his initiative roll.

If his current body is destroyed, the characters find nothing on the lich that provides any information concerning his real identity, though the characters can loot him of his *Trickster's Bane Lance* (see the appendix under Iron Lich Velenus) and the **Ultaris medallion**.

Taking the Bait. If the characters make no move against the Contact, he finishes his diatribe by giving them a medallion with an elaborate design on it.

ULTARIS MEDALLION

This medallion bears the crest of Master Necrotech Ultaris. Depicted on it is an image of the Grand Necrofactorium of Skell.

It cannot be sold within Cryx since it bears a senior iron lich's iconography, and no merchant is willing to incur his wrath.

"Here, a token of our growing relationship. It might make things a bit more straightforward, if you want to meet with my dear friend Ultaris." Before handing it to you, the Contact's eyes burn with a bit of mischief. "Oh, no need to be suspicious of it—or me! What would troubling you be worth? All I've done so far has to pop in, say hello, and leave you lot scratching your skulls."

The Contact proffers the Ultaris medallion. "Use it or don't; the choice is yours. I have no more need of it."



After he has departed—with a theatrical bow—the characters can make their way to the workplace of Master Necrotech Ultaris, though they must be careful to avoid the roving bands of enforcers from the faction allegedly loyal to Mortenebra.

MORTENEBRA'S MASTER NECROTECH

When they reach Ultaris's workshop, there is no door and no one is there to challenge their presence, so the characters can enter straight away. They find a vertical maze of frames holding necromechanical parts of every sort imaginable. The necrotech is using his artificial limbs to clamber from frame to frame like a spider. He quickly notices the characters and descends to the floor to greet them. Unlike his counterpart, Kathartiria, Ultaris has no visible indication he was once a living creature. His movements are almost balletic as he grasps the bars of the frames along his descent, landing almost silently on the characters' level without any flourish, then smoothly rises to a full height comparable to that of the helljacks he has been working on. When he addresses the characters, his voice is metallic yet strangely smooth and even calming.

Ultaris's first utterance is a demand the characters leave for encroaching on his territory without invitation, though he's a little more accommodating if they first waited at the entrance and done something akin to calling out for permission to enter. If the characters present the medallion, he accepts and studies it, quickly finding it to his satisfaction and secreting it away in a compartment within his necromechanical body. This offering leaves him a little surprised, but he makes it clear he will cooperate. If they keep the medallion to themselves, the characters can still state what they believe is going on and recount their day's activities; Ultaris allows them to stay, his own suspicions raised, though he is wary during subsequent conversation.

What information Ultaris can provide doesn't at first seem useful. In response to questions about the contract initially taken on by Kathartiria, he nods and acknowledges having received it without much notice at all—less than a day, in fact. Still, work is work and Mortenebra permits him to take jobs from third parties. Although his underlings are discerning about what tasks they bring to him, in this case he signed on without giving it much thought. To the master necrotech, it is all merely a business transaction, but the circumstances are such that he corroborates Livora's suspicion as to what the job really entails. Upon learning the naval architect is dead, Ultaris turns very cautious, irrespective of his previous attitude. He insists the murder had nothing to do with him, but what he says only reinforces the information in the letter the characters found on the corpse.

Conversation soon turns towards Ultaris's potential knowledge of a faction under his lich lord undermining counterparts under Scopulous. He professes no enmity towards his opposite numbers among Scopulous's subordinates, even the ones who have tried to violently oust him or vice versa, something he views as part and parcel of business in Skell. He is also sure none of his colleagues do either—at least, not any more than normal for the oftentimes deadly Cryxian political scene. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check confirms the perplexity he expresses is genuine.

Ultaris refers to Kathartiria with respect and the closest a necromechanical construct can get to friendship. When asked if he knows of the recent skirmishes, he admits only to having heard rumors that made him suspicious of their circumstances, more so after listening to what the characters have to say. After some thought, he suggests a meeting with Lich Lord Thalassina or a senior iron lich in her service, since her apparent neutrality in the matter makes her a better mediator for any dispute between the forces under Mortenebra and Scopulous. As an occasional collaborator with iron liches who serve the Cryxian minister of foreign affairs, Ultaris has the influence to arrange an appointment.

Thalassina is known for her moderate stance in Cryxian politics over the centuries and has long maintained this reputation for keeping the lich lords, or rather, their underlings well aware of the Nightmare Empire's goals, and making sure they are unified when it matters most. Now, with Cryx weakened by the recent betrayal and abandonment by one of their lich lords, and another being indisposed, unity in the undead realm's senior ranks is paramount. Thus her portfolio, nominally "foreign affairs," has come to encompass domestic stability as well, in a way not taken to by her more combative peers. Consequently, it is a little odd that Divinitus conveyed the words of the Dragonfather, and not Thalassina acting as a keeper of the peace.





PART 5: PRETENSIONS

Before Lich Lord Thalassina's headquarters, the characters are received by a pair of **dragon knights** who challenge them, standing their ground but remaining patient (at least, for semi-autonomous undead entities). An iron lich emerges to see what the fuss is about but does not do anything until the characters produce the referral from Master Necrotech Ultaris. A little irritated, the iron lich ushers the characters in and tells them to wait in a grim chamber. A little more time than is comfortable later, the iron lich returns to announce Thalassina, who enters carrying the note of referral.

She bluntly asks why she should do anything about the matter, blithely dismissing anything the characters say, since squabbling among iron liches typically has no consequence for their lords and masters. If they point out Thalassina's reputation and informal function among the lich lords as related by Ultaris, she mocks the master necrotech's assessment, saying her intervention occurs only when doing so benefits her. The way she views the situation, she stands to gain irrespective of the result. If Tiberia gains what she wishes, Thalassina can leverage great influence over her by intimating the lich lord's noninvolvement led to the iron lich's elevation. And if Tiberia's ambitions lead to her fall, enough parties of consequence are invested in this affair for Thalassina to learn much about those who would be the Nightmare Empire's future commanders, as well as the mettle of her new colleague, Mortenebra, who should be measured before making any decision to outwardly help or hinder. And in any event, she would also learn more about Scopulous and

how to deal with him when other such disputes arise in the centuries to come.

Discussion continues in this vein, with Thalassina continuing to deflect the characters' arguments unless they raise the issue of Divinitus's appearance at the skirmish earlier that afternoon, suggesting Toruk himself takes a dim view of this particular dispute. At this, she shrugs and gestures for her attendant iron lich to go to the door. Even if the characters do not mention Divinitus, she takes a modicum of delight in messing with them for a while before waving away her attendant to put the characters out of their misery.

Thalassina's office suddenly seems smaller when two other imposing figures enter: Lich Lords Malathrax and Mortenebra. The newcomers take a dim view of any interruptions or unwelcome comments from the characters, considering them beneath their notice, and outright ignore them if given sufficient cause. All three undead lords have honor guards close by, twitchy at the characters' presence, so the characters should choose their words and actions with care. That said, these three are of a more moderate disposition than some of the other lich lords, but there is a limit to their patience and indulgence.

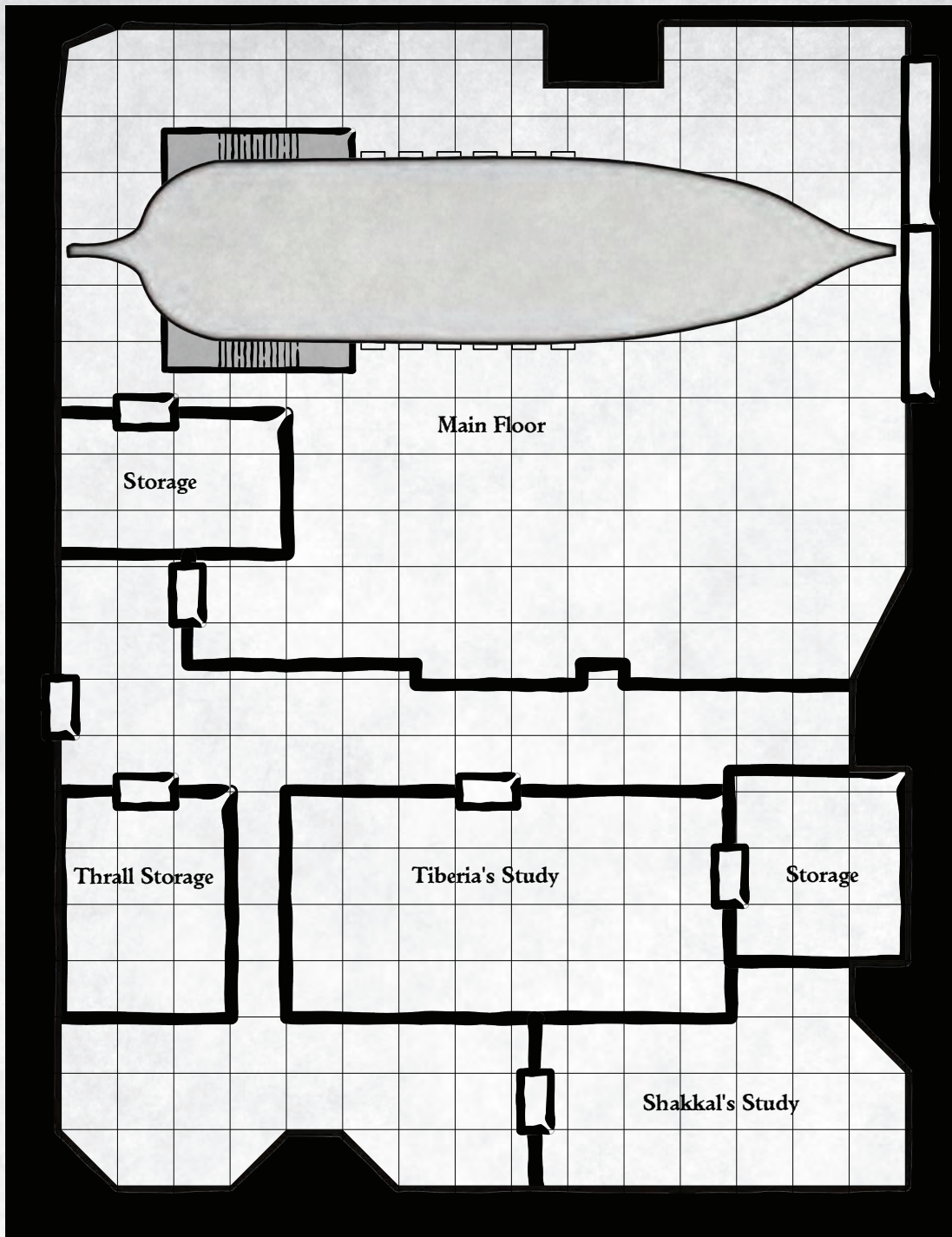
After the lich lords greet each other, Thalassina fills in Mortenebra as to what the characters have told her about their recent dealings with Iron Lich Tiberia. Despite mild discomfiture with her recently bestowed title, Mortenebra herself addresses the characters. Read or paraphrase the following:

"I can assure you, I have no such designs against Iron Lich Tiberia, and her alleged grievances against me are of her own making," Mortenebra states levelly.

"Call it ambitions beyond her station," Malathrax adds, the fluidly shifting leaves of his mask forming an elaborate lich's skullplate. "I... and the others, I'm sure, would have no problem in permitting Tiberia her schemes and seeing what becomes of them if she were genuinely worthy of the office of lich lord. Unfortunately for her, she is still at least a few hundred years from deserving that sort of aspiration."

"Then I am grateful for my innate abilities." Mortenebra makes light of her apparent youth.

"Indeed, in this business we value talent... and luck." The mask transforms into a blank visage. "You have both; Tiberia has a modicum of the former and precious little of the latter. And that makes her ill-suited to what our duties demand of us. Age is of little importance. Look at Deneghra: she is younger still than you by a fair margin and young even to be a lich at all, much less a lich lord, and yet fortune follows that disciple of Asphyxious closely. Tiberia will need many decades to acquire that sort of



Tiberia's Drydock

luck of place and time and to hone her talents further. As today has made clear, she is good in a few matters but has failed where it counts most."

"I almost pity Scopulous for his sponsorship of that one," Thalassina interjects with a chuckle.

"Yes... almost."

"That is beside the point," Mortenebra says severely, "for I have spent little time studying Lord Scopulous and even less in his presence conversing with him. Much less than Tiberia has, but even I understand his motivations more than her. Tiberia's adulation for Lord Scopulous disregards why he is satisfied with his position among the masters of Cryx. I have no doubt, having spoken with her, she perceives him to be a downtrodden commander of the Nightmare Empire's dregs compared to Lords Venethrax and Asphyxious, when he was still with us. Tiberia could not have misunderstood him more. Combined with her own personal agenda, this misguided zeal imperils the very individual who is the object of her admiration."

Seemingly frustrated rather than angry, Mortenebra defers to Malathrax and keeps any further thoughts to herself.

"And so to you." His voice is ominous as he addresses the adventurers, and a grim sneer can be sensed behind his mask; eyes glowing dangerously and his form now that of an exhumator.

In this way, the lich lords explain their awareness of Tiberia's plans and the detrimental effects they would have on the stability of the Nightmare Empire should she succeed. She is powerful, but they must not be seen to take a stance in the matter for fear of disrupting the balance that exists among the many iron liches who vie for power, all of whom have loyalties to their lords and masters spanning the spectrum from earnest to duplicitous. They will ultimately handle this discreetly, quietly, with someone to deflect the credit to in the event her fate becomes more than an open secret, thereby solving two problems with one action: deal with a troublesome subordinate and identify potential new ones, all at comparatively little expense to themselves.

If the characters raise the matter of the naval architect with Malathrax, he reacts blithely, observing it is not his underling's best work, though passable given how short notice it was.

The characters certainly have precedent for not trusting the information the lich lords provide them, but if they voice this concern at all, Thalassina reacts with disdain given her reputation and what she said but minutes earlier. Mortenebra maintains an outwardly neutral attitude since she is still new to her position and understands the characters' reservations even if she thinks them foolish for voicing them, and Malathrax is somewhat amused. Even so, both of them defer to Thalassina when she points out the characters do not have much of a choice in the matter. And despite his apparent lack of physical stature next to Thalassina and Mortenebra, the

two of them are rightly careful next to Malathrax, allowing him to be the one to ensure the characters' cooperation by snidely remarking the lich lords are merely making a request as opposed to giving orders.

(If the characters found the note in scene 3 that referred to something of value to Tiberia, Malathrax asks what an iron lich values most before providing the request in full.)

Read or paraphrase the following:

"Our request is a simple one. Bring the iron lich's phylactery to the Sanctum Necrofactorium for destruction, where an appropriately skilled individual, knowledgeable in the ways of making pretentious liches suffer, will await your arrival and report. And before you ask, I am well aware of a phylactery's value to its owner, but I have my ways of finding such information, even if it was a little easier on this occasion."

Malathrax produces a metal tube, which he gestures for Thalassina's attendant iron lich to convey.

"Inside you will find the locations of the necessary places to go and what needs to be done. As to how you get into those places, you are enterprising individuals. I'm sure you will find a way. Do not disappoint me."

Thalassina's eyes change ever so slightly at this last.

Having given the characters their "request," the lich lords take their leave.

Before even contemplating how to reach the Sanctum Necrofactorium, the characters have the tricky prospect of stealing an iron lich's phylactery. As it turns out, it's hidden at the dockyard warehouse. Tiberia's residence and nominal place of work are both elsewhere, and it is common knowledge liches' phylacteries might be hidden anywhere, so an apparently public location is often a viable option.

To infiltrate Shakkal's office, where there is supposedly a hidden chamber only Tiberia is aware of, the characters must navigate both the dockyard and the warehouse. Easily observed from a distance, both of these places are crawling with thralls, skarlocks, necromancers, and dragon knights, who come and go on an unpredictable patrol route. Presumably such security measures are in place against any perceived aggression by rival liches and necrotechs under Mortenebra. A little after arriving in the area, the characters see Shakkal ordering skarlocks and overseeing other servitors about their work in Tiberia's absence; she has left for her appointment with Lich Lord Scopulous, and if the characters are sufficiently observant, on a successful DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check, they realize she hasn't been gone for long.

There are four options available to gain entry: sneaking in; fighting their way in; persuading the guards to let them pass; or emptying the warehouse of its guards somehow. In total, there are six patrols outside in the dockyard and two inside the warehouse. Each of those in the dockyard is composed of five **brute thralls** and two **bile thralls** led by a **skarlock**, while two of them are accompanied by a **necromancer**. In the warehouse, the two patrols have four

of Tiberia's **augmented brute thralls** led by a **skarlock** and a **dragon knight**, and one of them also has a **necromancer** in attendance.

Sneaking. The stacks of supplies and raw materials make stealth feasible, though difficult with the number of patrols prowling around. The characters must negotiate their way past $1d3 + 1$ patrols from the dockyard entrance to the warehouse doors and another two patrols to reach the stairway to Shakkal's office. Those patrols composed only of the undead require only a successful DC 10 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to sneak past, but against those led by necromancers, who have more wits about them, the check DC increases to 15.

Fighting. The sheer quantity of potential enemies makes the second option tricky, but with the distance between each patrol and the cover available, the characters might be able to surprise and quietly neutralize a patrol before the alarm is raised. Their escape would be yet easier if they can dispose of any remains or at least remove them from sight. If the patrol is wiped out within two rounds of combat, the characters succeed in preventing the alarm from being raised, but otherwise, the remaining patrols converge on their position.

Openly Entering. If the characters simply walk in, the thrall guards are unresponsive and do not attack on sight, broadly aware of their employment under Tiberia. On the other hand, the patrol commanders (skarlocks, dragon knights, and necromancers as appropriate) are suspicious and ask why the characters are here with nothing to show for the last few hours.

The characters can try to talk their way through and are left to their own devices on a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check. On a failed check, the patrol aggressively demand the characters leave and cannot be persuaded otherwise. The guards will attack and sound the alarm if the characters do not leave after the third such demand.

Diversion. Lastly, the characters can try to draw the iron lich's forces away from the warehouse. They're free to cook up their own scheme, but given the importance of the ship at the center of this mess, causing it to violently disassemble should be a suitable distraction. Since the ship is still on the stocks, it can be easily sabotaged or destroyed by a straightforward explosion.

However the characters make their way up to Shakkal's offices, the information provided by Malathrax helps them locate the phylactery. In the meantime, they are free to search the rest of the place, and on a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, they find some correspondence between Shakkal, Tiberia, and one of their senior subordinates that confirms the conspiracy is of Tiberia's own design. She boasts about diverting or paying off the contractors herself, with smug comments about how easy it was to blackmail the naval architect and to play on the Satyxis's professional skill, the necromancer's artistic pride, the iron lich overseer's naïve loyalty, and so on.

Further proof of Tiberia's culpability can be confirmed by another successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check elsewhere in the office, with which the characters find more defaced lich lords' tokens of contract and a list of tasks for

"enforcers" who are stirring up trouble with those in Lich Lord Mortenebra's service.

The instructions from Malathrax point to a panel somewhere on the wall opposite the entrance. A character who studies the wall can make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to identify the panel in question, which has slightly thinner and more angular markings on it than all the others, difficult to make out in their uniformly dark wood. Knocking on it in search of a hollow space yields no result. The panel is warded by a magical trip mechanism to alert Tiberia to any tampering, which a character can detect and identify with a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check, revealing the faint outlines of runes ringing it. The instructions also describe how to disable the ward, though they are cryptic, and so disarming it safely requires a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check. With some effort the panel can be removed, revealing an ornate vessel resembling an over-decorated soul cage, a fair bit larger than is typical since the frame is a necromechanically enhanced enclosure denying access to the soul within. To destroy Tiberia's phylactery requires opening the outer cage, but it is necromechanically augmented and thus effectively immune to nearly all mundane weapons and most magical effects.

As the characters emerge from the office, despite any diversion that might have been arranged, Iron Lich Shakkal appears unexpectedly on returning from an errand. If they are not openly carrying Tiberia's phylactery, he is instantly suspicious of the characters' presence and asks what they are doing. The characters can attempt to trick him with a successful DC 18 Charisma (Deception) check, given they are ostensibly still carrying out Tiberia's orders. If the check fails, the characters displaced too much stuff when they were snooping around the office or Shakkal sees his superior's phylactery in their possession he turns on them and attacks in a frenzy, hissing that she will ascend to be a lich lord of the Nightmare Empire.

If the characters failed in all attempts to locate the panel hiding the phylactery, time runs out and they are caught by Shakkal; he attacks immediately, suspecting what they are here for.

In either case, upon his death or at least the destruction of his current shell, the sounds of combat make it obvious to the remaining patrols that things are amiss, so all hands descend on the warehouse interior, giving the characters no time to rest. With the phylactery and the lich lord's directions in hand, the characters can flee as the alarm is sounded and are only just spotted leaving the dockyard area. Coincidentally, Tiberia returns at about the same time and discovers the remains of Shakkal's iron body. If the characters failed to disarm the arcane ward around the phylactery, Tiberia senses the trespass and hastens her return, witnessing the characters as they are leaving.

In any event, she orders her forces to pursue the characters, demanding their destruction (and their heads in cages). If the characters loiter a little, on a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check, they can hear her desperation and frustration when she mentions to a subordinate that Scopulous unexpectedly refused to meet with her.



PART 6: GAME OF LICH LORDS

The characters should waste no time getting to their destination, the Sanctum Necrofactorium. Even if they failed to obtain the phylactery, they should be guided here by the letter of Malathrax's "request," though naturally, their failure has consequences.

Though the location is given to them in the instructions, its name is not, nor is there any reference to it in the document, insurance against the note falling into the wrong hands. This is a lesser used but nonetheless most infamous necrofactorium in central Skell, an open secret among the senior figures of the city. It is frequented by only the most psychotic of necrotechs, and its existence is acknowledged only with reluctance due to its reputation for necromechanical experimentation. As rumor has it, only the Dragonfather himself and the lich lords know its true purpose.

The Sanctum Necrofactorium appears abandoned, and the characters can freely wander in and around. It's a relatively small complex containing what appear to be helljack-producing facilities, but of a scale much smaller than one might expect. All of it lies inactive, though on a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character observes this appearance seems deliberate, a move by the lich lords to

empty the place for what is to happen.

If they search the main facility, the characters find a somewhat out-of-the-way entrance to an expansive circular chamber. In its center stands a cylindrical necromechanical device 5 feet in diameter, extending from the floor almost to the ceiling and with many cables and tubes running from it along the floor. Studying it and the phylactery, on a successful DC 20 Intelligence check, a character can conclude this is where the phylactery was made and thus, where it can be unmade. Indeed, a frame within the machine can be adjusted to accept the item, but the device can't be activated without channeling tremendous power into it. The characters can observe four consoles placed regularly against the wall, with cables running from them toward the device, and can spend a little time investigating.

However, before they can do very much, Tiberia and her forces arrive. Arrayed against the characters are the iron lich (see the appendix) and dozens of thralls, including her personal guard. They advance on the characters in three rough waves, with sixteen **augmented brute thralls** led by two **skarlocks** in the first, six **dragon knights** in the second, and Tiberia and her two **elite dragon guards** (see the appendix) in the last. Each wave enters the fray well

before the last of the previous has fallen.

But just as Tiberia makes her own martial presence known, she pauses when the atmosphere turns suddenly oppressive. The dragon knights with her also hesitate. At your discretion, Tiberia can “pull her punches” or leave the characters to her dragon knights and guards, depending on how they are faring, and might deal only one damaging attack before the scene advances.

From a separate, unseen doorway, six figures enter, commanding the attention of all (on a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check, characters realize there are actually seven). Leading them is a familiar figure who has been bothering the characters for most of the investigation: the Contact. They should recognize Lich Lord Divinitus from their encounter earlier that day, while accompanying him are four other lich lords. Three of them are Mortenebra, Thalassina, and Malathrax, while judging by Tiberia’s reaction, the fourth is Lich Lord Scopulous. The final figure makes itself known only after the lich lords take their positions: the necromechanical cat the characters might have noticed during the day and met in the Contact’s company later on.

“I’m sure you’re already aware of the present company, but as a reminder, you stand before your infinite betters.” You recognize the mocking voice of the Contact, though he seems to be addressing Tiberia more than anyone else.

One of the hooded lich lords laughs indulgently. His mask shifts beneath his cowl, flashing a rictus grin like some grotesque undead harlequin.

“No need to be so dramatic, Velenus,” he says, “Though I understand you to be well acquainted with each other thanks to certain events today.”

Thus you realize the Contact is Iron Lich Velenus, whose name has appeared in a few places over the course of this escape.

“My lord Malathrax.” Velenus nods deferentially. “If I may—” he continues upon receiving a gesture of assent— “Iron Lich Tiberia, your exalted rank and title are no longer yours to claim.”

“What is this ...?” she starts hotly.

Velenus is about to respond when Scopulous intercedes.

“This is exactly what it looks like.” He glides forward to confront her. “Do not think us unaware of your plans to destroy or defame Lich Lord Mortenebra. There is a standard to uphold when it comes to advancing oneself and among our number. The lords of Cryx have judged you incapable of keeping to that standard and demand a reckoning for your actions.”

“What I did was for your prestige and dignity!”

“Both of which I have in abundance. I am a lich lord of Cryx, am I not?”

“But to hold so wretched an office as—”

Scopulous is openly furious at last, wisps of green necromantic energy emanating from his eyes and the joints of his iron armor. “That is where you fail. My title is what is important. My office is but a convenience for those who have nothing better to do than to put us into categories because it amuses them and allows them to feel intelligent. You have served me for so long yet do not realize I care little for the letter of my nominal responsibilities.” He shakes his head disdainfully, waving an iron claw dismissively at her. “And to think I believed you to be among my most talented of protégés. How poorly I judged you. I see I must choose and nurture better next time, for you have clearly not understood the true duties of a lich lord in advancing the aims of the Dragonfather and the Cryxian Empire. It is too late for you to start understanding this.”

“Then I demand the satisfaction of—”

“You will demand nothing; this little plot of yours fell apart in less than a day. You have succeeded only in disgracing yourself. The spectral brothers have laid claim to your soul to serve as your punishment.”

If it is there to be taken, Lich Lord Scopulous retrieves Tiberia’s phylactery from the necromechanical construction device (or takes it from whichever character is carrying it) and holds it almost familiarly while he regards Tiberia sternly, if with disappointment. Iron Lich Velenus approaches the characters and asks if they found anything else of value along with the phylactery, and they can hand over the correspondence if they found and took it. (In case the characters failed to retrieve the phylactery, Velenus, and to a lesser extent Malathrax, are not as cold in their subsequent conversation on receiving this and any other additional evidence.)

It should be clear by this point that Iron Lich Tiberia has been sentenced to damnation, but she is not taking it silently. She begs the opportunity to prove her value to Scopulous. The lich lords glance at each other with calculating looks, except for Divinitus, who appears disgusted by the proceedings. Velenus looks on expectantly, waiting on what punishment or false path to redemption he is to communicate to his fellow and rival. After some discussion, Scopulous steps forward, but not before making a point of passing Tiberia’s phylactery to Mortenebra. The iron lich bristles but is well aware she can’t do anything about it.

Scopulous exchanges a few words with his fellow lich lord, whereupon he turns to those assembled in the chamber. He gives Tiberia a choice, though it is not much of one. She can attempt to redeem herself by defeating the unwitting lackeys who contributed to her downfall. Should she emerge victorious, Tiberia will be transferred to Malathrax’s service, no longer as a favored iron lich but instead as a low-ranking thrall commander, far below the status of her own dragon knights. Furthermore, Iron Lich Shakkal’s phylactery, whose location is known by Malathrax, will be conferred to Lich Lords Fulmenus and Tenebrous (“the spectral brothers”) for



their... experiments. Should Tiberia decline the offer, then both she and Shakkal will suffer such a fate.

The characters might object to this, but Divinitus cuts them off harshly, reminding them they are speaking to the rulers of the Dragonfather's realm. If they do not press their objections, Scopulous gives them an opportunity: should Tiberia accept this chance but the characters defeat her, one among them may enter Scopulous's service as a new iron lich. Whether or not the characters agree to this offer, they will need to ready themselves since Tiberia will not submit without a fight; even with much reduced influence within the Cryxian hierarchy, she has the ambition, the will, and most importantly, the immortality to claw her way back up the ranks again. When she states this, Malathrax and Velenus react with the equivalent of grim sneers, Mortenebra and Thalassina remain unmoved, Scopulous bears an expression akin to disappointment, and all of them concede the open area of the chamber for the impending battle.

Tiberia quickly fortifies herself by consuming a soul from one of the cages swinging from her waist. If the characters did not take the opportunity to heal after the first combat here, they can no longer do so as the iron lich attacks straight away. Ensuing combat occurs within the chamber, with only the large necromechanical device in the center serving as cover or obstruction. The lich lords stand aside near the wall but are unperturbed if the fight strays too close to them. They do not directly engage but will attack once as a reaction each time they take any damage, targeting the source of the damage immediately after that attack is resolved, even if it is in the middle of a character's or Tiberia's turn.

Assuming they defeat Tiberia, if the characters previously took his *Trickster's Bane Lance*, Velenus steps forward and congratulates them on their hard-fought victory before politely requesting they return the weapon. Velenus and Malathrax become very cold and address the characters with contempt if they refuse the request, attacking immediately if they refuse a second time. After one round of combat, Lich Lords Mortenebra and Thalassina also attack. In the unlikely event the characters emerge from this, Divinitus asks what they will do now, since the defeated liches will simply reconstruct themselves, and within hours, all of Skell will descend upon the characters. If permitted to do so, the Chief Priest of Cryx shrugs and saunters out. The necromechanical cat has already disappeared, leaving those of the characters still alive to contemplate what happens next.

Should the characters have failed to retrieve Tiberia's phylactery, any faint sense of triumph the iron lich might feel is shut down when Malathrax coldly states they know where it is, as does he, along with the backup hiding place should its location be compromised. She has no choice but to comply with the offer of trial by combat. In this case, Scopulous does not offer the characters elevation and Mortenebra expresses disappointment that the lich lords must go to further trouble to deal with the problems posed by Tiberia. After the final battle ends, Thalassina seems intrigued, clearly pondering what the others will do, though she says nothing to antagonize them, and Malathrax is irritated at having overestimated the characters' competence.

He treats them with harsh derision, though tersely reassuring them they will receive their just rewards for defeating Tiberia, even if it is just her current iron body. Both he and Velenus express frustration at having to resolve the matter themselves. Even so, the characters are free to go about their business, and Divinitus, reminding his peers of their status and conduct, hands them a pouch of lich lords' tokens, which he will redeem once they obtain Tiberia's phylactery for disposal. Anything further after Tiberia's defeat is considered none of the characters' business from this point onwards, the lich lords having made their varying levels of displeasure apparent.

CONCLUSION

If the characters successfully retrieved the phylactery and defeated Tiberia, read or paraphrase the following:

Tiberia's iron body falls to the floor, rent and destroyed. Lich Lord Scopulous picks up her weapon, the Serpentine Fell Spear, and collects her phylactery, solemnly installing it in the necromechanical machine. Around him, the other lich lords each move toward a console while he remains standing before the central device. The consoles flicker to life as the lich lords activate various mechanisms and necrotite-fueled generators somewhere in the building channel necrotic energy into the chamber. Amid a sickly green light rises a harsh metallic grinding and cracking as the frame of the phylactery is stripped apart and shattered. The light suddenly dies and the wisps of a soul try to escape from the phylactery's remains, only to be absorbed into a simple soul cage held by Lich Lord Scopulous. He leans down and attaches the soul cage to a small frame on the necromechanical cat, whose eyes glow with flashing runes as it turns to address the lich lord.

"My thanks, Scopulous, for the experimental subject. It has been a while since Tenebrous and I had so curious a soul as a disgraced iron lich's to study."

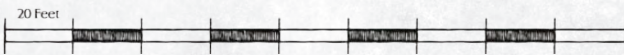
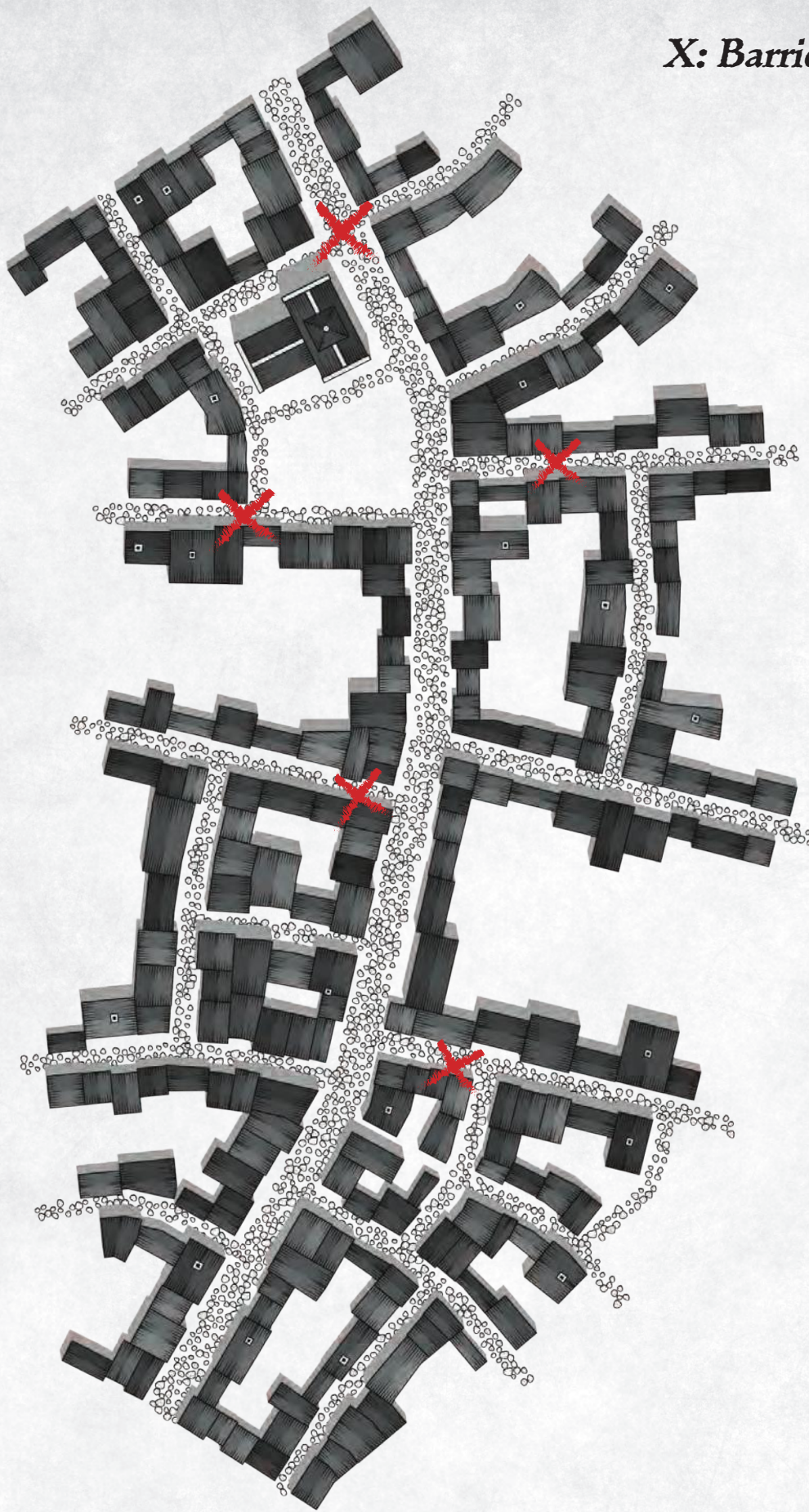
"I'm sure you had a fair share of amusement in observing the proceedings, Fulmenus."

The necromechanical cat opens its mouth and a ghostly cackle echoes around the chamber, which dies away only after the cat has scampered away into the shadows.

With Iron Lich Tiberia defeated, her soul consigned to a fate worse than anything the characters can imagine, and her allies doomed to similar punishments, the characters receive unwelcome renown in Skell. Cryxian politics necessitate putting targets on rivals' heads, and since they have been witnessed conversing and dealing with a few of the lich lords, the characters are sure to receive the attentions of many among the ambitious of Cryx. That attention might even extend to the lich lords themselves, especially those who disapprove of Malathrax's schemes.

But who knows, if one among them took Scopulous's offer to ascend as an iron lich in Tiberia's and Shakkal's place, that character might one day become a lich lord for the Nightmare Empire and Immoren to fear when their name is spoken.

X: Barricades



Streets of Skell



"PRETENSIONS OF A LICH" NPC & BESTIARY

IRON LICH SHAKKAL

Medium undead (necrotech), lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 71 (11d8 + 22)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +6, Int +8, Wis +6

Skills Arcana +12, History +8, Insight +6, Perception +6

Damage Resistances cold, lightning, necrotic

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

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Cygnaran, Molgur-Trul, Ordic, Scharde

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Firebox Vulnerability. Shakkal requires necrotite to function. He requires refueling (roughly 5 pounds of necrotite) after every 12 hours of normal activity or every 6 hours of strenuous activity. If not refueled, he suffers one level of exhaustion each hour, bypassing his normal immunity to exhaustion. Shakkal can't be killed as a result of exhaustion but becomes stunned at level 6 until her firebox is refilled and lit.

The firebox fails when completely submerged in water or any other liquid. Shakkal is stunned when its firebox is unlit.

Legendary Resistance (1/Day). If Shakkal fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Reconstruction. If it has a phylactery, a destroyed lich can have a new body built. Building a new body requires 5,000 gp in materials and 1d10 days. After gaining a new body, the lich regains all hit points and becomes active again.

Spellcasting. The lich is an 11th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting

ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). The lich has the following wizard spells prepared: Cantrips (at will): *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *magic missile*, *shield*, *thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*, *invisibility*, *Melf's acid arrow*, *mirror image*

3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead*, *counterspell*, *dispel magic*, *fireball*

4th level (3 slots): *blight*, *dimension door*

5th level (2 slots): *cloudkill*, *scrying*

6th level (1 slot): *disintegrate*, *globe of invulnerability*

Turn Resistance. Shakkal has advantage on saving throws

against any effect that turns undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Shakkal makes two attacks: one each with his bite, claws, and Dark Fire.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10ft., one creature.

Hit: 5 (1d8+1) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) poison damage.

The target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10ft., one creature. *Hit:* 19 (4d8+1) slashing damage plus 11 (2d10) necrotic damage.

Dark Fire. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, range 100 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) fire damage plus 18 (4d8) necrotic damage. If this damage reduces a living creature with a soul to 0 hit points, Tiberia can immediately capture the soul if it has an empty soul cage, regardless of the distance.

Strength from Death. As a bonus action, Shakkal can consume a soul he has captured in a soul cage. The soul is destroyed, and Shakkal can either make one additional attack during his turn or roll one of the creature's Hit Dice and regain an expended spell slot equal to or lower than the result.



IRON LICH TIBERIA

Medium undead (necrotech), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +8, Int +10, Wis +7

Skills Arcana +15, History +10, Insight +7, Perception +7

Damage Resistances cold, lightning, necrotic

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

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Cygnaran, Molgur-Trul, Ordric, Scharde

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Firebox Vulnerability. Tiberia requires necrotite to function. She requires refueling (roughly 5 pounds of necrotite) after every 12 hours of normal activity or every 6 hours of strenuous activity. If not refueled, she suffers one level of exhaustion each hour, bypassing her normal immunity to exhaustion. Tiberia can't be killed as a result of exhaustion but becomes stunned at level 6 until her firebox is refilled and lit.

The firebox fails when completely submerged in water or any other liquid. Tiberia is stunned when its firebox is unlit.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Tiberia fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Unbinding. Tiberia can't be affected or by spells of the necromancy school of 5th level or lower unless she wishes to be.

Reconstruction. If it has a phylactery, a destroyed lich can have a new body built. Building a new body requires 5,000 gp in materials and 1d10 days. After gaining a new body, the lich regains all hit points and becomes active again.

Special Equipment. Tiberia has 6 full soul cages and carries a serpentine fell spear.

Spellcasting. Tiberia is a 14th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 18, +9 to hit with spell attacks). Tiberia has the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand, prestidigitation, ray of frost*
 1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, false life, mage armor, shield*
 2nd level (3 slots): *acid arrow, detect thoughts, invisibility, ray of enfeeblement*

3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead, counterspell, fireball, vampiric touch*

4th level (3 slots): *black tentacles, blight*

5th level (2 slots): *cloudkill, dominate person*

6th level (1 slot): *create undead, disintegrate*

7th level (1 slot): *finger of death, force cage*

Turn Resistance. Tiberia has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Tiberia makes four attacks: three with her fell spear and two with Dark Fire.

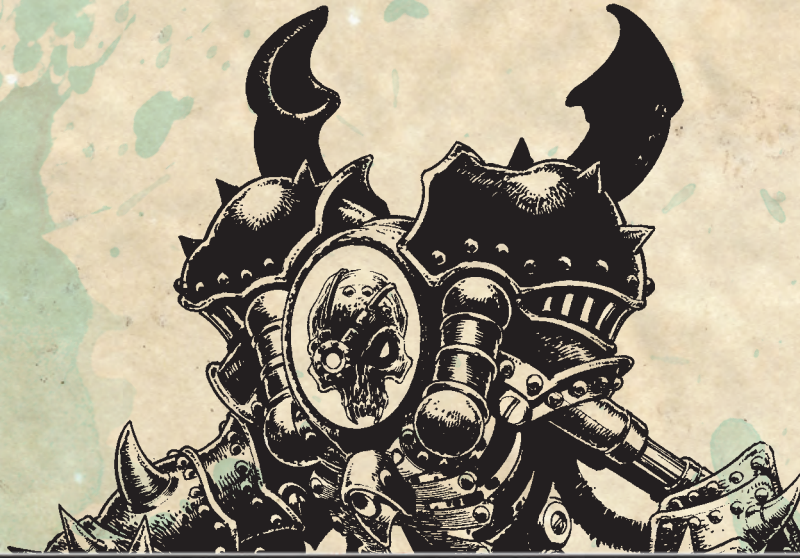
Serpentine Fell Spear. *Melee Weapon Attack* +7 to hit, reach 10ft., one creature. *Hit:* 29 (6d8+2) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) necrotic damage.

Dark Fire. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +9 to hit, range 100 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) fire damage plus 18 (4d8) necrotic damage. If this damage reduces a living creature with a soul to 0 hit points, Tiberia can immediately capture the soul if it has an empty soul cage, regardless of the distance.

Strength from Death. As a bonus action, Tiberia can consume a soul she has captured in a soul cage. The soul is destroyed, and Tiberia can either make one additional attack during her turn or roll one of the creature's Hit Dice and regain an expended spell slot equal to or lower than the result.

REACTIONS

Soul Cage. If a living creature with a soul dies while within 15 feet of Tiberia, she can use its reaction to capture the soul in one of her soul cages. Each soul cage can contain only a single soul.



IRON LICH VELENUS, THE CONTACT

Medium undead (necrotech), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 119 (14d8 + 56)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Con +8, Int +10, Wis +7

Skills Arcana +15, History +10, Insight +7, Perception +7

Damage Resistances cold, lightning, necrotic

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

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Cygnaran, Khadoran, Llaelese, Ordric, Molgur-Trul

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Disciple of Malathrax. No creature may gain advantage when rolling to attack Velenus.

Firebox Vulnerability. The lich requires necrotite to function. It requires refueling (roughly 5 pounds of necrotite) after every 12 hours of normal activity or every 6 hours of strenuous activity. If not refueled, it suffers one level of exhaustion each hour, bypassing its normal immunity to exhaustion. The lich can't be killed as a result of exhaustion but becomes stunned at level 6 until its firebox is refilled and lit.

The firebox fails when completely submerged in water or any other liquid. The lich is stunned when its firebox is unlit.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the lich fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Reconstruction. If it has a phylactery, a destroyed lich can have a new body built. Building a new body requires 5,000 gp in materials and 1d10 days. After gaining a new body, the lich regains all hit points and becomes active again.

Shadow-Tempered Iron. Any critical hit against Velenus becomes a normal hit.

Special Equipment. The lich has 1d4 empty soul cages.

Spellcasting. The lich is a 14th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 18, +9 to hit with spell

attacks). The lich has the following spells prepared: Cantrips (at will): *chill touch*, *prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*
 1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *false life*, *mage armor*, *shield*
 2nd level (3 slots): *acid arrow*, *detect thoughts*, *invisibility*, *ray of enfeeblement*
 3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead*, *counterspell*, *fireball*, *vampiric touch*
 4th level (3 slots): *black tentacles*, *blight*
 5th level (2 slots): *cloudkill*, *dominate person*
 6th level (1 slot): *create undead*, *disintegrate*
 7th level (1 slot): *finger of death*, *force cage*
 8th level (1 slot): *feeblemind*

Turn Resistance. The lich has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The lich makes three attacks: two with its lance and one with Dark Fire.

Trickster's Bane Lance. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10ft., one creature. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) necrotic damage. Large or smaller creatures hit that are not constructs or undead must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, gaining one level of exhaustion on a failed save. After resolving a successful attack with this weapon, this creature can move up to 10 feet including through solid inanimate objects and undead creatures, and may not be targeted by opportunity attacks during this movement.

Dark Fire. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +9 to hit, range 100 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) fire damage plus 18 (4d8) necrotic damage. If this damage reduces a living creature with a soul to 0 hit points, the lich can immediately capture the soul if it has an empty soul cage, regardless of the distance.

Strength from Death. As a bonus action, the lich can consume a soul it has captured in a soul cage. The soul is destroyed, and the lich can either make one additional attack during its turn or roll one of the creature's Hit Dice and regain an expended spell slot equal to or lower than the result.

REACTIONS

Soul Cage. If a living creature with a soul dies while within 15 feet of the lich, the lich can use its reaction to capture the soul in one of its soul cages. Each soul cage can contain only a single soul.

ASPIRING LICH

Medium Humanoid (Any Race), Any Evil Alignment

Armor Class 12 (15 with mage armor)

Hit Points 37 (15d8 - 30)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +6, History +6

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages any four languages

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Dark Devotion. The aspiring lich has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Indomitable (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The aspiring lich can reroll a saving throw that it fails. It must use the new roll.

Special Equipment. The aspiring lich carries a dagger with the vitriol necrotech rune. Its capacitor has 10 charges.

Spellcasting. The aspiring lich is a 10th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The aspiring lich has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *light*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*
1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step*, *suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *fireball*, *fly*

4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility*, *ice storm*

5th level (2 slots): *cone of cold*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The aspiring lich makes two melee attacks.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage, or 4 (1d4+2) piercing damage plus 9 (2d8) acid damage if the aspiring lich expends 2 charges from the weapon's capacitor as part of the attack.



AUGMENTED BRUTE THRALL

Large undead (necrotech), lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 105 (10d10 + 50)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	8 (-1)	20 (+5)	3 (-4)	8 (-1)	6 (-2)

Skills Athletics +8

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Arcane Force. As part of an attack, the brute thrall can spend 3 charges from its capacitor to activate the runes on its fists. The attack gains +2 to hit and damage rolls. On a critical hit, if the target is a Large or smaller creature, it is also pushed 10 feet.

Siege Monster. The brute thrall deals double damage to objects and structures.

Special Equipment. The brute thrall's fists are enhanced with the arcane force rune and have 10 charges.

Trampling Charge. If the brute thrall moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a slam attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the brute thrall can make one slam attack against it as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The brute thrall makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 11 (1d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Steamslam (Recharge 5–6). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 23 (2d10 + 12) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn.



ELITE DRAGON GUARD

Large humanoid (blighted), neutral evil

Armor Class 21 (necromechanical armor)

Hit Points 119 (14d10 + 42)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	8 (-1)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Constitution +6

Skills Intimidation +2

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Scharde-tongue

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Blight Conduit. Runes inscribed in the knight's armor allow it to channel the spells of Toruk's servants. The knight is a channeler for a friendly caster's spells from the necromancy school of magic.

Hellwrought. The knight's heavy necromechanical armor provides it with a damage threshold of 10. A single attack or effect that deals less than this amount does not damage the knight. The armor requires a load of 10 pounds of necrotite or 20 pounds of coal and 8 gallons of water for 5 hours of general use or 1 hour of combat. If the armor does not have power, the knight's base speed becomes 0.

Legendary Resistance (2/Day). If the knight fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Weapons. The knight's weapon attacks are magical.

Unholy Resilience. (Recharges after a long rest). If damage reduces the dragon knight to 0 hit points, it can make a Constitution saving throw with a DC equal to 5 + the damage taken. On a successful save, the dragon knight drops to 1 hit point instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The knight makes four blood cleaver attacks.

Blood Cleaver. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage plus 5 (1d10) necrotic damage.

Miasma of Desecration (3/day). The dragon knight releases a cloud of corruptive energy that fills a 10-foot-radius sphere centered on it. Other non-construct, non-undead creatures in the sphere must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute.



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