

# ZEITGEIST™

THE GEARS OF REVOLUTION

PART  
**II**

# THE ISLAND AT THE AXIS OF THE WORLD

FROM THE PEN OF RYAN NOCK



A FANTASY ADVENTURE FOR  
VENTURESOME HEROES OF LEVEL 1

COMPLETELY COMPATIBLE WITH THE  
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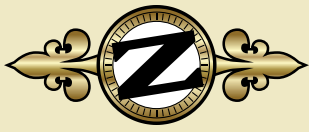
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## EXPERIENCE AND LEVELS

As the first adventure of the ZEITGEIST adventure path, *The Island at the Axis of the World* assumes the party is made up of four to five 1st-level PCs. Unlike many other adventure paths, the ZEITGEIST adventure path does not assume GMs will track individual experience points, but instead it assumes the GM will level the PCs at appropriate times. For GMs interested in using these modules outside of the full adventure path, experience point information is included in combat encounters.

This adventure and all subsequent modules in the series assume that PCs will level up at pre-determined points, with such points being explicitly mentioned in the adventure. In the case of this adventure, the PCs will not advance to 2nd level until the end of the adventure, in preparation for Adventure Two: *The Dying Skyseer*.





# INTRODUCTION

## Wherein It Begins.

**W**ELCOME TO THE FIRST ADVENTURE IN THE ZEITGEIST adventure path. In this adventure the party will save Risur's king from an assassination attempt, track down the traitor responsible, and play a key role in the conflict between Risur's old allies the fey Unseen Court, and its traditional enemy, the industrial nation of Danor.

By the adventure's end, the PCs will have earned the respect of their king, which will place them in a position to tackle ever-greater threats to Risur. They'll also have stumbled upon the slightest hints of the grander conspiracy that drives the events of the campaign.

Before you run this adventure you'll want to be familiar with all the material herein, but especially the Introduction. Additionally, we've provided a *Dramatis Personae* hand-out, which you can give to the players at the start of the adventure. The players' hand-out presents illustrations and brief descriptions of NPCs the party would already know about at the start of the adventure. We intend to include updated versions of the *Dramatis Personae* with each further adventure, to provide the players an easy visual reminder of whom they've met. You'll need to update this list based on your players' actions, or if you make changes of your own to the NPCs.

## BACKGROUND

Risur and Danor have been at war on-and-off for two centuries for control of the lush Yerasol Archipelago that lies between them. The current ruler of Risur, **King Aodhan**, was just a common soldier during in the Third Yerasol War, which ended forty years ago. He captured territory for Risur, earned the respect of the military and the adulation of the common people, and even seized control of Danor's first steam-powered warship. People of Flint still talk about the day when he single-handedly steered the ship into Flint's harbor as a spoil of war.

The king of the time chose Aodhan as his successor, and in the four decades since Risur has gone from owning a single captured steam engine to having an industrial revolution of its own. Today it prepares to launch its first armored warship to solely use steam propulsion: the *R.N.S. Coaltongue*, named after a mythic warlord said to breathe smoke and fire.

King Aodhan has come to Flint from Risur's capitol to witness the ship's launch. However the king's own sister, **Duchess Ethelyn of Shale**, plots to kill her brother during the maiden voyage of the *Coaltongue* so she can lay claim to the throne, abandon industry, and restore Risur to its traditional values.

### The Duchess

During the Fourth Yerasol War, which ended seven years ago, Duchess Ethelyn governed the city of Shale, Risur's bulwark against Danor. But the king insisted the duchess force her military, that consisted of traditional druid- and shaman-backed units to start using firearms and cannons. Burdened with the unfamiliar new technology, the duchess lost nearly every battle for control of the archipelago.

Bitter for years over the defeat, the duchess recently learned that the king plans to press for peace with Danor. Fearing what could happen, she consulted a skyseer—one of Risur's folk prophets—for guidance, and he told her of a vision:

*A globe spins on its axis, and a steel ship sets off to war on a sail of shadows. The world passes into night, and blackness grips all of Risur as the stars fall from the sky. The king's eyes turn a soulless white, and he moves as a puppet, his strings pulled by a man who has already died a thousand times.*

## ADAPTING THE ADVENTURE.

This adventure assumes the PCs are agents of the Royal Homeland Constabulary. If your players are free agents, however, they might be attending the launch of the *Coaltongue* as guests of Captain Rutger Smith, or bodyguards of the tiefling engineer Mr. Massarde. One of the PCs might even be a minor noble. If a PC is a Yerasol Veteran, the party might have been invited to help sell the idea of the warship to the public.

Compared to modern Earth, the concept of security is slightly different in Risur, where the king is able to defend himself even in his seventies, so PCs will be allowed to carry weapons, though they'll get thoroughly checked by the *actual* constables before they're allowed on the pier.



The duchess tried to warn her brother of the danger, to convince him to return to the old ways. She tried to remind him of when they both were just commoners, so he would pay more heed to the suffering of workers in the industrial warrens of Flint. But the king was too intent on achieving peace in his life, and did not listen.

Desperate, the duchess spoke with the liaison of the Unseen Court, a powerful high elf warrior named **Asrabey Varal**. He told her the Court would view Risur as an enemy if it made an alliance with Danor. The duchess decided she would rather betray her brother than her nation's history, and so she began to plan his downfall.

### Axis Island.

A year ago, some of the duchess's spies contacted one **Nathan Jierre**. Nathan works as an astronomer on Danor-controlled Axis Island, the eastern-most point in the Yerasol Archipelago. Nathan saw that the island's factories and shipyards were producing weapons and warships, and so he began leaking information to the duchess. He expected she would use the information to encourage Risur to keep pace with Danor's military, and thus ensure neither side would be in a position to start a new war.

The duchess plans to assassinate her brother during the launch of the *Coaltongue*, lay the blame on Danor, then attack Axis Island and reclaim it as Risuri territory. She believes that once she shows proof to her people that Danor was building new weapons of war, she'll be able to secure her claim to the throne and steer Risur in the right direction.

## ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

The party is assigned to work security at the launching of the *Coaltongue*. The adventure starts after they have already done all the boring work of preparation and canvassing, so now their mission is to ensure the dignitaries' safety during the ship's brief maiden voyage.

As the sun sets the ship weighs anchor, and the PCs are sent to make sure Duchess Ethelyn attends a speech by the king. When they check on her, they find she has fled, and that her handmaiden is leading a plot to sabotage the engine. Right as a naval band starts to play Risur's national anthem and launch fireworks, a desperate chase and fight develops belowdecks. The PCs have to stop the assassins before they cause the steam engine boiler to explode, annihilating anything nearby with fire and a hail of shrapnel.

In the aftermath, the party receives accolades for saving the king. Hundreds of miles away armies prepare for a potential civil war. Then a week later the party is called to meet with tiefling **Lya Jierre**, the Danoran "Minister of Outsiders."

She explains that the duchess has attacked Danoran territory—Axis Island—and has kidnapped her cousin Nathan Jierre. She has agreed to let Risur handle the task of removing the duchess, and she quickly briefs the PCs on the oddities and dangers of the island.

The PCs are just supposed to accompany and assist more experienced infiltrators, who will create an opening for the Risuri assault fleet. But when an accident kills the infiltration team, the PCs are the only ones in position to finish the mission. Their ultimate goal is a sea gate which protects the entrance to the fortress's harbor. By stealth, trickery, or open assault, the PCs reach the lighthouse that houses the sea gate controls, open the gate, and signal the fleet to attack.

## NPC ROSTER.

Because of the large number of NPCs the party will meet, we've compiled two hand-outs to help you keep track of their various statuses, mannerisms, and role in the adventure. A GM handout lists keywords and traits to help you portray the NPCs, while a player handout will help the players keep track of whom they've met. More detailed entries are included throughout the adventure close to the characters' first appearances.

NPC Entry	Page
Thames Grimsley	5
Assistant Chief Inspector Stover Delft	9
Principal Minister Harkover Lee	9
Duchess Ethelyn of Shale	10
Sokana Rell	10
Geoff Masarde	11
Captain Rutger Smith	11
City Governor Roland Stanfield	11
King Aodhan	11
Minister of Outsiders Lya Jierre	18
Nicolas Dupiers	25
Asrabey Varal	34
Lieutenant Hessar Marseine	36
Nathan Jierre	39

**Recurring Characters.** Stover Delft, Harkover Lee, Rutger Smith, Governor Stanfield, King Aodhan, Lya Jierre, and Asrabey Varal all play prominent roles in later adventures. All other NPCs that appear in this adventure might recur in minor roles, but feel free to do with them as you wish. If anyone important dies, you can replace them with someone thematically similar.

At this point they may think they're out of harm's way, content to let the military take control of the fortress and capture the duchess. But the high elf liaison of the Unseen Court, Asrabey Varal, has stowed away on a Risuri ship, and the PCs spot him as he heads for the duchess, killing anyone on either side who gets in his way.

Asrabey has come under orders from the Unseen Court to execute the duchess. In their fey logic, that will prove that they did not endorse the duchess's assassination attempt, and it doesn't matter how many rank and file soldiers they had to slaughter in the process. The PCs have a chance to intercede, and they can decide the duchess's fate, as well as whether Asrabey takes Nathan Jierre as a hostage. The party's actions here will have rippling consequences throughout the rest of the campaign.

Once Asrabey is dealt with, the PCs have only a few hours before Risur has to hand control back over to Danor. They can collect a few enigmatic clues to what Danor was up to, but then, as the highest-ranking representatives of the RHC, they are responsible for the official hand-off. Lya Jierre arrives, thanks the party for their help, and casually mentions that she'd like to invite them to her wedding next year, since she is the Danoran woman the king plans to marry for his peace treaty.

The PCs leave the island, but they have met many powerful individuals who will be enemies or allies later on, and they have the first clues toward a mystery that will forever change the world.



## ADVENTURE LAYOUT

In each act we present a quick overview of the situation and the party's goals. Then we detail individual scenes that are likely to occur. Each scene is presented in a format of Title, tag-line, and keywords. Keywords include:

**Scene Type:** Action, Exploration, Exposition, Puzzle, Social, or Hybrid.

**Duration:** Montage (a few hours or days), Real-time (a few minutes), or Tactical (round-by-round).

The actions of your players may take things in unusual directions, so don't feel constrained to only using these scenes. Change or drop them as necessary, or add new ones if you think it will add to your group's enjoyment.

## REWARDS

At the end of this adventure, the PCs should be 2nd level. Their Prestige should remain at 1 for all groups (or drop to 0 with Risur if they screw up). See the *Player's Guide* for details of the Prestige system, and how the PCs can use it to request items.

After the PCs receive their orders to go to Axis Island, they each

receive 1,000 gp that they can use to buy equipment and magic items. Remember, PCs who are part of the RHC do not get to keep anything they recover on their missions. They get a salary, and anything they "looted" they can keep if they pay for it from their salary.

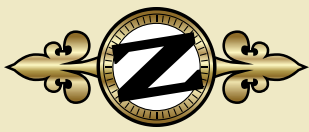
If the PCs are free agents instead of members of the RHC, instead have the Constabulary offer to pay them 300 gp apiece to undertake the mission to Axis Island. The RHC asks the PCs to hand over Asrabey Varal's sword, shield, and cloak because they have diplomatic value—plus his more mundane armor, amulet, and belt, because they are well above the party's pay grade. But the party can keep other items they find, such as the three *Golden Icons* in the Genius Loci encounter, or Asrabey's *slippers of spider climbing*.

## AND A FINAL WORD, BEFORE WE START...

Everything in this adventure and the whole campaign is just a suggestion. Only you and your players know what's fun for your group, so feel free to change characters, settings, events, and tone if you think it will lead to a better gaming experience. You don't have to think the same way we do (at least not until the Obscurati complete their grand plan).







# ACT ONE: THE R.N.S. COALTONGUE

## ASSASSINATION PLOT.

**B**ARRING PC INTERFERENCE, THE DUCHESS'S PLAN WOULD START AROUND EIGHT in the evening, after the *Coaltongue* is launched and has set out for a party on the open water. The duchess and her handmaiden Sokana would retire to an aft room on the ship's gundeck, supposedly for the duchess to nap. There they'd link up with three other saboteurs on the ship—a halfling assassin posing as a cook and two human engineers who came to the launch ceremony as servants of other nobles unaware of the plot.

At sunset, as the ship weighs anchor, the duchess will use all her magical power to call upon an archfey of the sea: Beshela, servant of the fey titan known as She Who Writhes. The archfey will subtly inhibit teleportation so that the king cannot teleport to safety. Then the duchess will use a scroll of *water breathing* on herself and her allies. Meanwhile, Sokana is given an *elemental gem* by duchess for use in the boiler room.

Shortly after sunset, nearly all the crew will assemble on deck with musical instruments, forming a military band to play Risur's national anthem. With only a skeleton crew below decks, the assassin and two engineers will head to the magazine and engine room, where they will kill the guards and crew. The assassin will return to the duchess to report that the lower decks are clear, at which point the duchess will exit out the window, calling upon Beshela to carry her to safety.

The engineers begin to sabotage the boiler. The halfling will head down to the magazine to remove fire wards while Sokana goes to the engine room. She'll place the *elemental gem* in the engine's furnace, summoning a fire elemental to heat up the boiler. After summoning the elemental, Sokana will rust the door shut, while the engineers empty the fuel bin and pile the firegems around the furnace, causing it to rapidly heat up. The group then heads back to the duchess's room and dive out the window.

By timing the sabotage to coincide with the blaring music of the national anthem, the duchess hopes people on deck won't notice that steam has stopped coming out of the ship's stacks. The engineers' sabotage will ensure that no warnings alert the crew on the bridge.

As the three-minute anthem reaches its final crescendo, the build-up of pressure will cause a boiler explosion. The shockwave of the steam blast will shatter and ignite the firegem fuel, which will send forth waves of fire through the ship's lower decks. These will in turn detonate the fire dust in the ship's magazine, and the resultant explosion will tear the ship apart and kill anyone within a hundred feet with concussion, shrapnel, and inferno.

In this act, the party handles security during the launch of Risur's newest warship, and thwarts an explosive assassination plot.

## SET-UP

Before launching the first scene of the campaign, give the players a chance to familiarize themselves with each other's characters, since they're part of the same unit in the Constabulary and have likely been working together at least a few weeks. You may want to give the players a copy of the *Dramatis Personae* hand-out, to help them keep track of the characters they'll be dealing with, and have a copy of the Ship Layout hand-out (page 14) to show them once they board.

## LAUNCH PARTY

### Exposition.

*The PCs keep an eye out for trouble before dignitaries arrive for the launch of Risur's new warship.*

Read or paraphrase the following to your players.

It is spring of the year 500 A.O.V. (After Our Victory). Seven years after the end of the Fourth Yerasol War, the shipyards in Flint have completed the first Risuri warship powered solely by steam engine, not sail. Your monarch, King Aodhan, has come to Flint to witness the official launch of this mighty vessel. Wooden-hulled but with a heart and skin of iron, the Royal Naval Ship *Coaltongue* will act as a deterrent against future aggression from Risur's enemy across the sea, the nation of Danor.

The Royal Homeland Constabulary has been called upon to provide security, and you have spent the past several weeks working to make sure this event goes off without a hitch—canvassing the docks, performing background checks on the guest list, coordinating with the local police to set up a perimeter around the royal docks, and following various directives of your superiors.

Now, as a warm breeze off the sea mingles the scents of elaborate floral decorations with the pervasive coal soot that always hovers over Flint, you're at the first of two checkpoints, working with Flint police to let in a crowd of local citizens who just want to line the streets and cheer their king.

## SKYSEER VISION.

If any PC has the Skyseer theme feat, mention that last night he had a vision of a crowd, a purple ribbon, the Beran city Seobriga, an empty bed, a broken tin whistle, and a girl with a lisp singing the Risuri royal anthem.

The PC gets a +2 bonus on checks toward the third goal of this challenge, and if he shares his vision with the other PCs, so do they. When the PCs start looking for suspects, they find squat Coulton drinking from a flask near a tree with a purple ribbon wrapped around it. Lanky Mercliffe stands outside a mapmaker's shop reading a map of Ber in the window. Scummy Iscalio glowers at a young girl trying to sing the royal anthem. The rest of the vision pertains to other threats throughout the day.



## CROWD SECURITY

### Social. Real-Time.

*A crowd of hundreds wait at a security checkpoint. In half an hour they'll line up along streets to cheer the king's arrival, and you must make sure no one dangerous gets through.*

To set the tone for the campaign, the first encounter is a quick investigation. Thousands of visitors have poured into the city, hoping to see the king. They've gathered in Royal Square, on the mainland side of a bridge that leads to the Royal Shipyard. The police are counting off exactly seven hundred people who will be let onto the bridge and into Fleet Square on the shipyard island so that they can cheer as the carriages of the king and other dignitaries arrive.

Four dockers—Coulton, Mercliffe, Iscalio, and a war vet named Dafton—have come to the event, ready to cause some trouble. They're angry that the city police force has been cracking down on docker gatherings; indeed, all of them but Dafton still have bruises from a scuffle earlier in the week. Mostly they just intend to heckle and shout insults, but Dafton plans a more dramatic gesture: he wants to assault Governor Stanfield.

Meanwhile **Thames Grimsley**, a grizzled sailor who is trying to organize an official dockers' guild, has caught wind of the men's plan, and he's trying to get to them before they get themselves arrested or worse.

The four dockers are spread throughout Royal Square, waiting for the cops to finish their count before they link back up. Once the cops reach seven hundred, they'll let the whole crowd through the check point and onto the bridge. The PCs have about half an hour to survey the crowd for possible threats and spot the dockers. If they fail, Thames Grimsley arrives just after the parade crowd is let in. The police won't let him pass, but if the PCs investigate, Grimsley might be willing to help them.

## SKILLS AND NON-COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

The ZEITGEIST adventure path uses a broad mix of combat and non-combat encounters, with a heavy focus on investigation and exploration. While you can certainly just roleplay the scene and call for the occasional skill check, we try to provide a mechanical structure that gives the characters a reasonable challenge and helps them feel like they have control of their efforts, without slowing the game down and forcing the GM to roleplay dozens of insignificant NPCs as the party investigates suspects.

Normally these skill-based encounters let each PC make one skill check per "round," though a round could represent 6 seconds, ten minutes, or even a week of work, depending on the encounter. Successful checks will yield information, provide access to new options, and eventually accomplish goals. The party typically has some sort of time constraint, and if the party doesn't achieve their goal in time, they might fail or only get a partial victory.

These encounters can occasionally occur as a montage, and we will generally avoid springing ambushes on the party, since it will make sense to split up and deploy the characters best suited to various tasks. Most of these encounters call for a diverse skillset among the party, but parties who focus on certain skills will be rewarded with easy victories in some encounters, while parties who neglect their skills and focus only on raw combat prowess will have a harder time. Failing these encounters will never produce absolute dead-ends, but enough failures will leave the party in a tough spot.



A grizzled sailor, still with a full head of hair in his early 50s, Grimsley acts as head of a nascent dock workers guild in Flint. Though he only worked the docks in his youth, Grimsley spent decades sailing—primarily as captain of a ferry service in Flint's harbor, but with a stint in the navy during the last Yerasol War. He took a gash from a policeman's knife on the side of his face in the last big docker riot, and since then has tried to organize a unified front for the dockers' concerns. A couple of months working at a theater as a child gave him a very stylized public speaking voice, one full of unnecessary, melodramatic pauses.

If the PCs are lucky, they can pull the dockers aside early and avert a crisis, but once the crowd gets sent in, the four men will link up, making it much harder to deal with them without a brawl.

### Find the Dockers (CR 1 Skill Encounter).

**Key Skills:** Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, Knowledge (History or Local), Perception, Profession (Soldier) Sense Motive, Stealth

**Difficulty:** Unless otherwise noted, all skill checks are DC 15.

This encounter has four goals, requiring a total of eight successful skill checks to get a full victory, and six or seven for a partial victory. The party has half an hour to accomplish these goals, and they cannot progress to the next goal until they have succeeded the current goal.

**Goal One: Brief the Party and Police.** 1 success.

**Goal Two: Canvass the Crowd.** 4 successes (5 total).

**Goal Three: Find the Dockers.** 2 successes (7 total).

**Goal Four: Find the Fourth Man.** 1 success (8 total).

### Passage of Time.

Every ten minutes of the encounter is one "round," and each PC can make one skill check per round. All told, a five-person party will get to attempt fifteen skill checks during the half hour, and they need a total of eight successes.

In the first ten-minute round, the crowd waits idly and people chatter amicably. In the second round, half a dozen messengers hand out lyric sheets of the royal anthem, to make sure people get the later verses correct. In the third round, excitement builds as people press toward the ropes, and various unsynchronized groups start singing the anthem or other festive sounds.

After the third round, the impatient crowd will go through the checkpoint. If the PCs don't want to let them, the small contingent of police they have are insufficient to hold back so many. Only something drastic will get the crowd to stop, but since the whole point of the PC's assignment is to avoid ruining the event, doing so will lessen the PCs' clout. Later in the evening when real threats crop up, people might not believe the party at first.

### Accomplishing Goals.

Each goal requires one or more successful skill checks, and we suggest the skills best suited to each goal (as listed under "Key Skills"). If a player thinks of a clever way to achieve the goal, let them use another skill, or if it's sufficiently clever just grant them an automatic success.



Note that some things certainly won't help, like using Spellcraft to sense for magical threats, since there aren't any here. You might nudge the players in the right direction if they start wasting their actions like this. Failing a check doesn't have a penalty, but remember the party is on a clock.

### Goal One: Brief the Party and Police.

*You can't just question the whole crowd. You need a clear idea of what appearances or mannerisms might be clues that someone's a threat.*

In their preparation for today's event, the Royal Homeland Constabulary determined that four groups in particular are likely to cause trouble. The fastest way for the PCs to search for threats is to figure out who in this crowd of seven hundred people fit any of these profiles:

- ◆ Dockers, angry because of how the city treats them.
- ◆ Primalists—i.e., believers in the old druidic faith—angry at all the new industry.
- ◆ Agents of the fey terrorist known as "Gale," who might try to sabotage the ship.
- ◆ War veterans, who might target the ship's tiefling designer.

**Create a Threat Profile.** (Knowledge (History or Local) or Profession (Soldier), DC 13) To be able to brief the police and the rest of the party, a PC needs to have a clear sense of the different threats. A PC who attempts this check get a +2 bonus to this check if any member of the party has the Docker theme feat, and another +2 bonus if anyone has the Yerasol Veteran theme feat.

Once any PC makes a successful check, give the party the following information.

Dockers are usually burly working men with eclectic fashion. Primalists have particular hairstyles, wear sandals, and adorn themselves with druidic religious icons. Fey saboteurs are typically elves or half-elves with impeccable grooming from their rituals, though they often try to hide this by dressing in soot-stained clothes. War veterans will usually be either in the mid- to late-twenties, or late-fifties/early-sixties, usually in better fighting shape than common citizens.

### Goal Two: Canvass the Crowd.

*You have to look for possible threats out of hundreds of men, women, and scampering children. Work together and with the police to canvass the whole crowd.*

The crowd can be roughly divided into four quadrants. To search the whole thing for people matching the above profiles, the party has to succeed a total of four checks, but they can do that with any combination of the following methods (or creative ideas of their own). If you have four PCs skilled at Perception, they might all just hang back, but most likely the party will use a combination of skills.

**Mingle with the Crowd.** (Sense Motive) A PC could go into the crowd and look for people who match the profiles.

**Recruit the Cops.** (Diplomacy or Profession (Soldier)) A PC might coordinate a small group of cops to also scan the crowd.

**Recruit Some Rascals.** (Diplomacy or Knowledge (local)) A PC could try to convince a few kids to be his eyes and ears.

**Scan the Crowd.** (Perception) A PC can watch from afar to spot people who look like they match the profile.

### Goal Three: Find the Suspects.

*You've picked out about twenty people of interest, but you need to separate the innocent parade-goers from actual threats.*

Failed skill checks here probably result in the party pulling aside innocent people, and then wasting time questioning them before realizing they're not a threat.

The PCs need two successes here. The first success identifies Coulton. The second identifies both Mercliffe and Iscalio. If the PCs are smart, they can pull the three aside peacefully, but if they antagonize the men, the dockers might try to fight. If that happens, see Docker Brawl, below.

**Confrontation.** (Sense Motive) A PC could go to people of interest and ask questions.

**Deception.** (Bluff) A PC might feign camaraderie with the different people of interest in an effort to draw out an admission.







**Good Cop, Bad Cop.** (Diplomacy or Intimidate) This option is only available once the party identifies Coulton. Two PCs must both spend time on this action. One PC makes an Intimidate check, and another makes a Diplomacy check. They each gain a +2 bonus to their check. If they both succeed, the dockers also rat out Dafton, which counts as a success on Goal Four.

**Observation.** (Perception) A PC could watch the various people of interest to see how they react to all the law enforcement activity.

**Yank Them All.** (Stealth) A PC might just grab as many people of interest as he can, but he has to do so discreetly so that no actual threats get tipped off and try to hide in the crowd.

### Goal Four: Find the Fourth Man.

Once the PCs have the three dockers, drop some obvious clue that there's a fourth man, Dafton. The three dockers aren't too bright, and they let slip that someone else is with them, but they don't want to cooperate with the PCs. With likely little time left, the party needs to find the most dangerous member of the group. They just need one success.

**Various.** (Various skills, DC 15) The PCs can use any of the methods from the previous goal.

As with above, Dafton might go peacefully, but if the PCs anger him, he's ready for a fight.

### Development.

If a fight breaks out at any point, see Docker Brawl, below.

Right after the crowd goes through the checkpoint, Thames Grimsley arrives in Royal Square and tries to get onto the bridge. If the PCs didn't manage to achieve goal two, they might think there is no threat at all. They're scheduled to meet with their superior, so it might not be worth the hassle to listen to what the old sailor has to say.

If any of the dockers got past them, though, Grimsley can point them out to the party. By that point, though, the men will have linked up, and they're so close to their goal they feel overconfident. Almost any attempt to remove them will result in a fight.

## DOCKER BRAWL

### Action. Tactical.

*The gathered crowd panics as a street fight breaks out.*

The moment anyone draws a weapon, people scream and the crowd backs away in panic, giving the PCs and dockers the 30-ft. wide bridge to themselves. The thick crowds keep the police from getting there for 10 rounds. Of course, if the fight occurs elsewhere things will go differently.

If the PCs have treated him and his men well, Grimsley might stand aside and let the constables do their job. If they've been rude, he might side with his fellow dockers.

**3 Docker Longshoremen (Coulton, Mercliffe, and Iscalio)**

**1 Docker Veteran (Dafton)**

**Thames Grimsley**

### Docker Longshoreman (3)

CR ½ • XP 200 each

Male human warrior 1

CN Medium Humanoid (human)

**Init** +4; **Senses** Perception –1

#### Defense

**AC** 12, touch 10, flat-footed 12 (+2 armor)

**hp** 15 each (1d10+5)

**Fort** +3, **Ref** +0, **Will** –1

#### Offense

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** dagger +2 (1d4+1 / 19–20)

#### Statistics

**Str** 13, **Dex** 11, **Con** 12, **Int** 9, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 10

**Base Atk** +1; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 12

**Feats** Improved Initiative, Toughness

**Skills** Profession (Docker) +3, Swim +5

**Languages** Common

**Other Gear** leather armor, dagger

### Veteran Docker

CR 1 • XP 400

Male human fighter 2

CN Medium Humanoid (human)

**Init** +2; **Senses** Perception +1

#### Defense

**AC** 15, touch 13, flat-footed 12 (+2 armor, +2 Dex, +1 dodge)

**hp** 24 (2d10+9)

**Fort** +5, **Ref** +2, **Will** +1, +1 vs. fear

**Defensive Abilities** bravery +1

#### Offense

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** unarmed strike +4 (1d3+3)

#### Statistics

**Str** 15, **Dex** 15, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 8

**Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 17

**Feats** Dodge, Improved Unarmed Strike, Intimidating Prowess, Toughness

**Skills** Intimidate +5, Perform (Sing) +0, Profession (Docker) +6, Swim +7

**Languages** Common

**Other Gear** leather armor

### Thames Grimsley

CR 1 • XP 400

Male human expert 3

NG Medium Humanoid (human)

**Init** +0; **Senses** Perception +4

#### Defense

**AC** 12, touch 10, flat-footed 12 (+2 armor)

**hp** 17 (3d8)

**Fort** +0, **Ref** +1, **Will** +4

#### Offense

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** unarmed strike +2 (1d3)

#### Statistics

**Str** 11, **Dex** 10, **Con** 9, **Int** 12, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 16

**Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 12

**Feats** Endurance, Improved Grapple, Improved Unarmed Strike

**Skills** Diplomacy +6, Escape Artist +3, Intimidate +6, Knowledge (Local) +4, Perform (act) +6, Profession (Docker) +7, Sense Motive +4, Swim +3

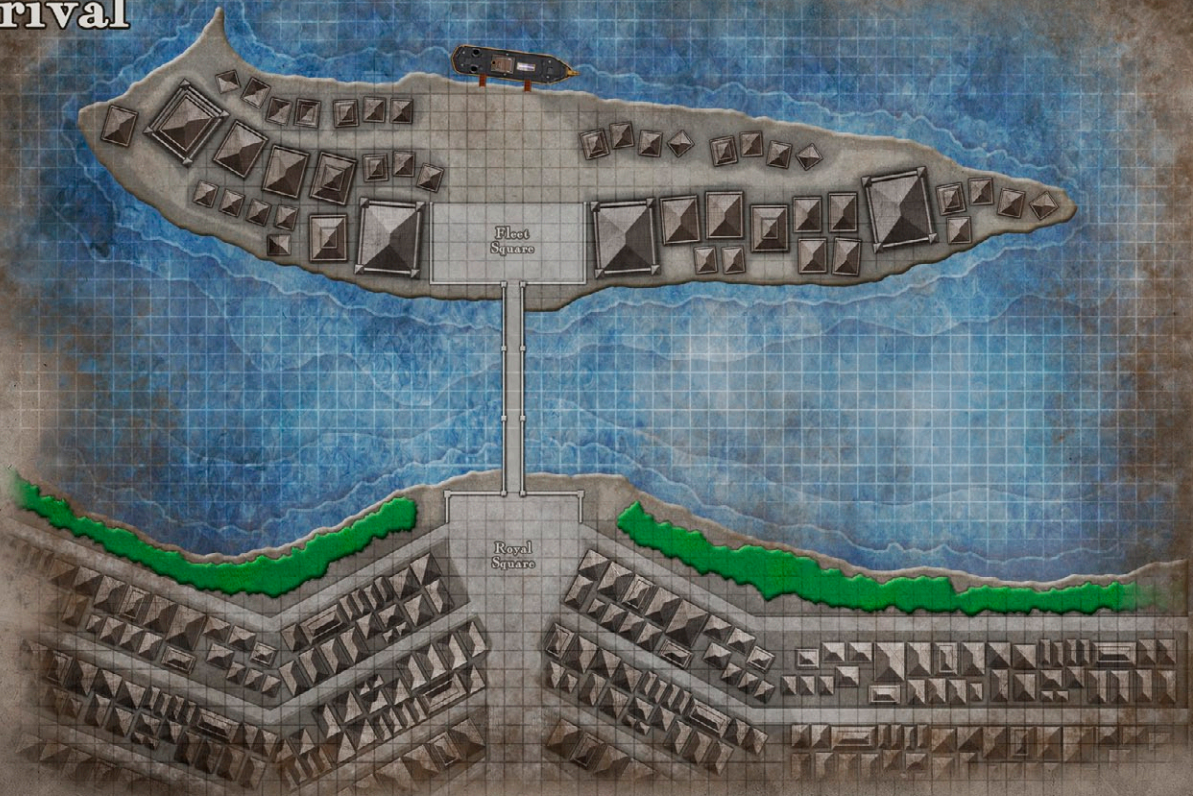
**Languages** Common, Elven

**Other Gear** leather armor





## King's Arrival



One square equals 30ft.

### Tactics.

The three longshoremen brawl wildly, then pull out knives when things are looking bad for them. Dafton stands back for a moment and claps a jaunty beat to mock the party despite his relatively useless singing ability. Then he goes after whichever PC has the most interesting melee weapon, trying to disarm him and then take on the rest of the party. If Grimsley gets into the fight, his goal is to grapple PCs so his men can dive off the bridge and flee to friendlier areas of the city.

### Terrain.

If the fight's on the bridge, it's a 20 ft. fall to water (dealing 1d6 damage) if anyone goes over the railing. You might add some difficult terrain in the form of an abandoned cart that holds flowers to be tossed and lyric sheets of the royal anthem. Innocent bystanders hang back, but block off the edges of the area.

A PC might be able to get some help from the crowd with a Diplomacy or Intimidate check (DC 12) as a move action. If successful, three people in the crowd come to their aid. They don't fight, but they can help flank or otherwise distract a docker so they count as being flanked.

### Aftermath.

The police eventually arrive and arrest the dockers. If any dockers manage to get away, it's ultimately a matter for the cops to handle. The crowd considers the fight a bonus bit of entertainment, and the event can continue with minimal disruption. The PCs will want to clean themselves up a little, then go report to their superior before the nobles start showing up.

Grimsley might ask (or demand) that the party pass a message to the governor for him in exchange for his help. He says his people are tired of the local police harassing them just because a few of the city's nobles don't like being made fun of in tavern songs. Worse, some dockers have been arrested in the past few weeks because they refused to work sixteen hour shifts loading and unloading industrial cargo.

Grimsley warns that his people are restless. They're raring for a riot, and he's trying to keep them calm. If Stanfield can't take some of the pressure off them, Grimsley fears there'll be blood in the streets. This isn't a concern in the course of this adventure, but the problem rears its

## TAKING PRISONERS.

As officers of the law, the PCs should generally take enemies alive unless they suspect the enemy can easily recuperate and escape or threaten others. The *PATHFINDER* ROLE-PLAYING GAME rules let characters make nonlethal attacks, and the PCs should be ready to do this in order to knock out opponents. We recommend that you allow PCs to subdue their enemies without requiring them to take any penalty to their attack rolls; when the enemy falls to  $-1$  hit points, it falls unconscious but is not dying. Consider it part of the party's special training as members of the RHC, where killing suspects is frowned on.

Additionally, PCs might try to make an Intimidate check to convince heavily wounded enemies to surrender, but it's a difficult thing to pull off (DC 19 for the brawlers, DC 23 for Dafton).



head again in Adventure Two, *The Dying Skyseer*.

If the PCs actually deliver the message to the governor, they'll earn the sailor's respect, perhaps even get an invite to a street party a few days hence in a dockside neighborhood. If the party wrongs Grimsley, they win admiration from the police, but for the rest of the campaign they'll have a hard time getting anywhere in the city in a hurry if they have to go by boat, as sailors carry their leader's grudge and do their best to obstruct the PCs.

## LONG NIGHT AHEAD

### Social. Real-Time.

*The PCs are invited to join this evening's party aboard the warship.*

Read or paraphrase the following to your players.

The first of the noble carriages have begun to approach the royal shipyard, and already the crowd on the bridge is doing its job: cheering, throwing flowers, and performing folk songs and dances to show their support.

Before things get too busy, your direct superior—Assistant Chief Inspector Stover Delft—asked you to come to a last-minute meeting to give you your marching orders. You find him chewing a bit of tobacco and eyeing a halfling chef who is carrying a tray of chocolate confections toward the docked *Coaltongue*.

His attention turns to you, and he smiles. "Only the finest for our king, right?"

"Now then," he says, "we're about to earn our pay. Lots of nobles about, so first, don't make a scene, and definitely don't talk to any of the nobility unless they address you first.

"Second, if something does go wrong, try to handle it yourselves, would you? I'm going to be busy applying my not-inconsiderable charms to very important people. The Constabulary doesn't get by with just good will and pretty faces, you know.

"And third, you did good work, so I've got a surprise for you."

He grabs his cane and leads you to the gangplank of the *Coaltongue*. But he's not pursuing the halfling chef. Rather, ahead of you waits Principal Minister Harkover Lee, the king's chief advisor and personal bodyguard.

**Inspector Delft** waves tiredly to **Minister Lee**, who has just finished checking the warship for magical threats. After introductions, in which Delft cheerily refers to Lee as "the old man," the Principal Minister says that he's confident the security is in order. Still, he would like some representatives of the RHC aboard this evening. After the fireworks and banquet, the king is planning a major announcement. Lee wants some constables present to be extra eyes and ears, so Lee can get a gauge of how various individuals in the crowd react.

Plus, he adds, there are a few recalcitrant guests who might need corraling. When he says this, he looks in the direction of one of the checkpoints, where a guest and her handmaiden are disembarking from a horse-drawn carriage.

Though this is likely the first time most PCs have seen her, from their briefings and preparation they easily recognize the person who has elicited such distaste from Minister Lee. This is the king's sister, **Duchess Ethelyn of Shale**, escorted by an elven handmaiden named **Sokana Rell**.

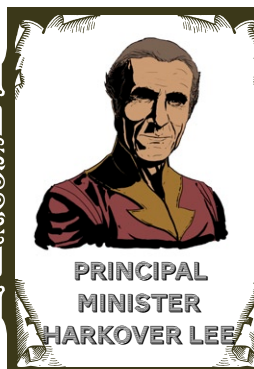
Minister Lee says he must prepare for the king's arrival. He encourages the PCs to direct any questions to their boss Delft. After Lee departs, Delft tells them to remember what he said about bothering him, and then he heads off to mingle.



ASSISTANT  
CHIEF  
INSPECTOR  
STOVER  
DELFT

A local flinter in his early 40s, Assistant Chief Inspector Stover Delft is generally good-natured to his subordinates, but has a penchant for grouching about people behind their backs. He gets squinty and condescending when his authority is questioned, but he can recognize talent and good work. A much better manager than investigator, Delft has advanced this far in the Constabulary by finding good agents, supporting them on difficult missions, and sharing the accolades from their successes.

Delft chews tobacco, and thinks he looks charming if he grins while sucking on tobacco juices. He walks with a cane because a mimic tore a chunk out of his leg fifteen years ago. He has a habit of poking inanimate objects with the cane before he gets too close to them and spitting on them when he wants to be extra sure.



PRINCIPAL  
MINISTER  
HARKOVER  
LEE

Perhaps the most powerful mage in Risur, Lee acts as King Aodhan's bodyguard and chief of staff. Straight-backed and virile despite being in his 60s, Lee has a slight Ber-tinged accent, and was said to be quite the ladykiller in his youth. He always dresses in reds and golds and carries a solid gold orb tucked into his robes.

He never eats or drinks in public.



## THE CROWD

### Social. Real-Time.

*The king's sister approaches the PCs with a request.*

Over the next half hour, more people arrive. All told, the hundred-person crowd consists of about one-quarter dignitaries (nobles, wealthy merchants, and prestigious military folks), one-half retainues and personal servants, and one-quarter local staff, some of whom are plains-clothes police. Try to work in the following interactions, but let the players take the lead.

**Tiefling Engineer.** The person who stands out the most is **Geoff Masarde**, the Danoran tiefling who helped Risur design the *Coaltongue*. A few industrialists and military officers hang near him, asking questions about how the ship will hold up under actual combat. Wine glass in hand, he'll gladly talk shop with interested PCs, but he's used to people acting belligerently to him here in Risur, so he has two burly bodyguards standing by him at all times.

**Captain Impossible.** Also in attendance is **Captain Rutger Smith**, commander of the distinguished R.N.S. *Impossible*, a swift clipper ship which occasionally assists the RHC on missions. He's discussing philosophy and political theory with a black-bearded dwarf. Smith endorses the post-Malice writings of the old monk William Miller, who said all conflicts could be avoided by sufficient understanding between opposing groups. The dwarf counters with standard Heid Eschatol theory that any ordered system will inevitably be ruined by some random accident, so a single misunderstanding would doom Millerite theories of peace. Both men smoke thick cigars.





## EARLY DISCOVERY

The duchess is an excellent diplomat and liar, so the PCs shouldn't get any sense that she's up to something nefarious (Sense Motive DC 25). On the other hand, Sokana the handmaiden might seem a little off to very canny PCs (Sense Motive DC 17). If they start asking questions, the duchess thanks them for their diligence, but vouches for Sokana. However, the bag Sokana is carrying, while it does hold some traveling supplies for the duchess, also has a secret compartment that functions as a *bag of holding* (Spellcraft or Perception DC 22 to detect if the bag is searched). The pocket holds spell components for the assassination attempt.

It's unlikely the PCs will figure out the duchess is up to something, but if they do she will stay around as long as she thinks there's a chance she can allay suspicions and go through with her plan. If the PCs bring in Harkover Lee, she flares with polite anger at the old man, refusing to let him "once again insult her in front of her brother."

Lee and the duchess have a long-standing rivalry, and he is wary of making a public scene at the wild claim that the duchess—who has been loyal to Risur her entire life—might be a threat.

If, though, the PCs somehow reveal the plot, the duchess uses magic to turn invisible and teleport a short distance away, then change her appearance to fade into the city crowds. Eventually she reaches her allies and teleports to her stronghold in Shale. She has prepared for this contingency, and can easily thwart anything the PCs might field. Sokana, on the other hand, will be left in the lurch. The *Coaltongue's* launch will certainly be postponed.

Finally, if the PCs manage to stop the duchess from escaping, the plot can still continue as one of her subordinates leads the attack on Axis Island.

This dark-skinned, distinguished woman in her 60s speaks with a poet's precision, always pausing to consider her words before speaking, which helps those she's speaking to feel like she's giving them her full attention. She dislikes industry and wears extravagant diamond cluster earrings—representing the stars of the night sky—to show her allegiance to the old ways. Accounts tell of her possessing many different types of magic, though many of these could be exaggerated.



Though in her 50s, this high elf woman looks to be in her 20s. In the Third Yerasol War, Sokana was rescued by the duchess—then just a sorceress in the Risuri military—from the island plantation of a rich Danoran, who had kept her as a trophy wife. Sokana settled with an elven family in Risur, hiding her true identity to avoid retaliation by the Danorans. The duchess helped her rediscover her fey roots, though Sokana only displayed a marginal talent with magic. Today she passes as a wood elf, but when she uses magic her eyes flare an unearthly azure, revealing her heritage.



**The Coaltongue.** No one is allowed aboard the ship now. A gangplank leads to main deck, guarded by sailors. Stairs lead up from a pier to a scaffolding beside the ship's bow; it is here that the king will smash a bottle of champagne on the ship's iron hull to officially name it and enter it into the Risuri navy.

## The Duchess

After a few minutes or if the PCs seek her out, Duchess Ethelyn asks the PCs for help. She introduces herself, then says, "It is my understanding that you have some sway over the arrangements of this event. If you could do an old lady a kindness, the air here is already leaving me winded, and the company is already giving me a headache. I know my brother's party is going to run late, so I need a room I can nap in. I'd be very grateful if you'd arrange this for me."

If the PCs strike up a conversation with the duchess, she might admit that she's unenthused about this metal monstrosity, and suspects the only thing keeping it from sinking is infernal tiefling magic. She'll encourage the PCs to remember the old ways of the skysceers and the fey, and not to be tricked into thinking Danor's industry is good for Risur just because her brother uses the word "progress" a lot.

**Handmaiden.** Sense Motive (DC 20) can let a PC tell that Sokana is actually a high elf, but this is not suspicious by itself. Many high elves—especially women—prefer to pose as wood elves to avoid hassle.

**Moving On.** Before the conversation goes on too long, horns blare, announcing the approach of the king.

## KING'S ARRIVAL

### Social. Real-Time.

*King Aodhan arrives and after brief pleasantries launches the Coaltongue.*

With great pomp and grandeur, trumpeters announce the arrival of the king's carriage. Elite guards line the thoroughfare and open the door, and the **city governor Roland Stanfield** emerges, followed by **King Aodhan** himself.

The king offers a one-sided smile to the crowd and is greeted by his Principal Minister and his sister. Children, gathered in advance by royal aides, cheer and sing the traditional crown anthem as the group makes its way to the docks.

**Docker Violence.** If the PCs failed to remove all the disgruntled dockers, heckling begins from the crowd at this point. The royals and their retinue maintain their composure, but the rest of the crowd murmurs in displeasure, and the PCs spot both Principal Minister Harkover Lee and their boss Delft glaring daggers at them.

Then the docker Dafton, if he's present, yells, "Stanfield! Look at me, Stanfield! You ain't human! You forgot what it feels like. Here, Stanfield. Let me remind you!" He breaks free from the crowd and advances on the royal retinue, cracking his knuckles. Royal guards intercede before he gets close, and though he tries to throw a few punches, he gets smashed to the ground by the haft of a polearm, then held down by three men until the king, governor, and the rest are safely out of the way.

This can have grave consequences later, because people will be less inclined to trust to the party after this screw up. If the PCs show up during the king's big speech later that evening, yelling that the duchess is trying to blow up the ship, it might take an extra 3 or 4 rounds for people to take the threat seriously.



**The Launch.** The ceremony goes without a hitch. The king takes a champagne bottle, announces that the ship shall be formally known as the Royal Naval Ship *Coaltongue*, then smashes the bottle across the bow. At that precise moment a steam whistle sounds, and black smoke begins to roil out of the ship's stacks.

The crowd begins to board the ship, and if the PCs dally, Assistant Chief Inspector Delft reminds them they've got a party to enjoy. Once everyone is aboard and enjoying light refreshments on the main deck, it sweeps toward the center of the harbor, where eight traditional four-masted ships enter formation with it. Against their white sails, the black clouds from the *Coaltongue's* smokestacks makes for a dramatic image, and though the PCs catch the duchess glowering at the sight, they can also see crowds along the shore cheering as the small fleet sets a course out of the harbor, toward open sea.

## ALL ABOARD

### Exposition. Montage.

*Over the next hour, people wine, dine, and take tours of the fantastic warship.*

The party has an hour before the *Coaltongue* reaches its destination, just beyond the Ayres islands north of Flint. Now's a good time to show them the layout of the ship, which can represent a mix of them having researched the location in advance and their taking a guided tour of the vessel.

If the players want to get into details, you can have them meet a few notable crewmembers, but these NPCs are just for flavor, and to tug the players' heartstrings if they turn up dead during the assassination plot.

**Divianne Athel.** A guard at the ship's magazine, she explains that fire wards hung in the three rooms of the magazine keep the ammunition from accidentally exploding in battle. She says she's stationed here through most of the party, and that she hopes some food will be left when her shift is done.

**Fitzcairn Luckshore.** A young technician in the engine room, he gets excited if any women show up, or if anyone asks him about the engine. He gets a little bubbly describing the intricate interactions of various valves and pipes. The other two men in the engine room give him a hard time because with his scrawny arms he never shovels an equal load of firegems.

**Elian Aughtbrook.** A petty officer, Elian has been assigned to keep the visitors happy. He'll interact with the PCs if they actually try to arrange a room for the duchess to rest in. Otherwise, Elian does it on his own. He has a small notebook where he wrote down notes he made in advance about the visitors, and he enthusiastically tries to make small talk based on badly-formed ideas of what nobles and industrialists care about.

## A SIMPLE FAVOR

### Social. Real-Time.

*The PCs stumble upon the duchess's accomplices in the middle of their plot.*

Near nine o'clock, the *Coaltongue* sits anchored just within sight of shore, surrounded by its eight-ship escort. The starry blanket of night hovers overhead, and a quarter moon peeks above the eastern horizon. The crew have set up an outdoor kitchen on the aft maindeck, and are



GEOFF  
MASARDE

A 40-something tiefling with an airy voice and a fondness for wine that outmatches his ability to handle his alcohol, Massarde is one of a handful of Danoran tieflings working for the Risuri military to help construct warships and other weapons. He has few kind words for his homeland. He is fascinated with ice, and carries a wand given him as a gift by a Drakran train engineer, which can chill small objects with a touch. Mostly he just uses it as a novelty to cool beverages.



CAPTAIN  
RUTGER SMITH

The bold and idealistic captain of the R.N.S. *Impossible*, Captain Smith earned his first command five years ago. Now 37, he has never led his ship into battle. That, combined with his fondness for the Malice-era philosophical writings of the monk William Miller, has made him the target of mockery by more established naval officers. Smith seems content to just drill his crew twice as hard, encouraging them with philosophical aphorisms between puffs on a cigar.



FLINT  
GOVERNOR  
ROLAND  
STANFIELD

Stanfield witnessed the fall of the high elf goddess Srasama five hundred years ago and died soon thereafter in the chaos of Elfaivar's fall. But he reincarnated, restored to life by a sliver of the divine power he absorbed when Srasama was slain. His memories vague and jumbled, he found his way back to his homeland of Risur and eventually settled in Flint, then just a modest coastal port.

In the centuries since he has died with irregular intervals, and with each rebirth he returned to the city he calls home. For most of that time he has served as Flint's governor, having constantly striven to improve himself with each life, from a simple warrior, to a humble leader, to an educated renaissance man nimbly handling the complex challenges of the fastest-growing city in the world. Stanfield wears a near-constant expression of contented optimism, but still occasionally complains of a war wound he took to his back in his first life.



KING  
AODHAN

Now in his 70s, the current king of Risur looks rather unassuming. He prefers to resolve disputes by being cool-headed and rationally persuading those who will listen to his side. For those who won't, he's shrewd enough to give them a sliver of what they want and then distract them with harmless endeavors while those worth dealing with get the job done. Despite all this, though, he trains regularly to keep his stamina and swordplay robust, and the rites of rulership grant him daunting magical powers.



using the interior of the capacitor as a banquet room. The ceiling occasionally flickers with silver arcs of magical energy, which the crowd delights in.

**The Band.** A whistle from the bridge sets off motion as nearly the entire crew starts to line up around the outer deck, carrying horns, drums, and woodwinds.

**Indigestion.** The king and his Principal Minister move for the front end of the capacitor/banquet hall, and a nearby PC overhears the king complaining about indigestion.

“One of the local archfey is upset I parked my ship here,” he guesses, laughing it off. “One of the burdens of kingship; the fey can really let me know when they’ve got an opinion. I always get burps that taste like fish when I sail these days.”

From now until they get back to land, the king cannot be teleported.

**Errand.** Stover Delft detaches himself from a trio of military veterans arguing about small-unit tactics and comes to the PCs. He points out that the duchess hasn’t gotten back yet from the nap she went to an hour ago. He suggests the PCs go to the observation room at the aft of the gundeck, where the duchess is napping, to check on her and make sure she’s not trying to embarrass the king by hiding during his big speech.

What happens next depends on where the PCs go. If they wait more than a few minutes to head belowdecks, their only warning of the imminent explosion is when steam stops coming out of the stacks, so you can skip to the combat section of the next encounter. If they wait a short while then head down, they might cross paths with Sokana and the halfling assassin. If they head straight for the engine room or magazine, they notice the guards are missing (Perception DC 12 to spot signs that the bodies have been hidden behind casks of firedust), and might interrogate the engineer saboteurs, who claim everything’s fine.

But most likely is that the PCs go to the quarters where the duchess is supposed to be napping. The door is locked, and Sokana stalls by saying that the duchess is sleeping, while she tries to hide the evidence of her actions. If the duchess hasn’t left already, she opens the aft window and dives out at this moment. Meanwhile the halfling assassin hides by the entrance, ready to attack if the PCs force their way in. If cornered, Sokana might climb out the aft window, clamber along the outside hull, and try to sneak back into the ship through one of the open gunports.

If combat breaks out, the instant the two sides roll initiative is when the military band on the main deck starts to play the national anthem. For the next three minutes, no one up there is going to hear anything belowdecks.

## RUSTING ANTENNA

The removed antenna of a rust monster, this item can only be used for a limited amount of time before its power fades entirely.

A *rusting antenna* can be used to make a melee touch attack that causes any non-magical metal object touched to swiftly rust and corrode. The object touched takes half its maximum hp in damage and gains the broken condition—a second hit destroys the item. Using the antenna does not provoke attacks of opportunity. Against creatures made of metal, a *rusting antenna* deals 3d6+5 points of damage. An attended object or a metal creature can attempt a DC 15 Reflex save to negate this effect.

A *rusting antenna* has only five charges and once expended the antenna withers to dust.

## THE DUCHESS AND BESHELA

Right as the band starts to play, the duchess dives into the ocean, where she is caught by the archfey Beshela, who appears as a sea nymph riding atop some massive submerged sea creature. The PCs might get a glimpse out the window of the duchess willingly heading underwater with the archfey.

If a PC tries something wild like leaping out after the duchess or attacking Beshela, be merciful. The duchess’s stats are presented in Act Three. Beshela is a high-level creature, and could easily knock out a PC with a glance, but neither of them wants to waste time fighting. They flee, and the sheer scale of the giant squid Beshela uses as a mount should hopefully cue the PCs in that this foe is beyond them.

## THE SABOTAGE

### Action/Puzzle. Tactical.

*Stop the duchess’s agents before they finish their assassination plot.*

**Sokana, High Elf Sorcerer**

**Ilton, Halfling Rogue**

**2 Engineer Saboteurs—Jenner and Ostman**

### Sokana

CR 2 - XP 600

Female elf sorcerer 3

CN Medium Humanoid (elf)

**Init** +6; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception –1

#### Defense

**AC** 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10 (+2 dex)

**hp** 19 (3d6+6)

**Fort** +2, **Ref** +3, **Will** +3; +2 vs. enchantments

#### Offense

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** dagger +0 (1d4–1 / 19–20)

**Bloodline Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 3rd; concentration +5)

5/day—*laughing touch*

**Sorcerer Spells Known** (CL 3rd; concentration +5)

**1st (6/day)**—*burning hands* (DC 14), *entangle* (DC 13), *flare burst\** (DC 14), *mage armor*

**0 (at will)** - *daze* (DC 12), *flare* (DC 13), *light*, *read magic*, *resistance*

**Bloodline** Fey

\*See *PATHFINDER ROLE-PLAYING GAME* Advanced Players Guide

#### Statistics

**Str** 8 **Dex** 14, **Con** 12, **Int** 15, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 15

**Base Atk** +1; **CMB** +0; **CMD** 12

**Feats** Eschew Materials, Improved Initiative, Spell Focus (Evocation)

**Skills** Acrobatics +4, Climb +1, Knowledge (nature) +7, Knowledge (planes) +4,

Perception +4, Spellcraft +7 (+9 identify magic item properties); **Racial Modifiers**

+2 Perception, +2 Spellcraft (identify magic item properties)

**Languages** Common, Elven, Ignan

**Combat Gear** *potion of cure moderate wounds*, *scroll of summon monster II*, *rusting antenna* (see sidebar); **Other Gear** robes, dagger



**Ilton**

CR 1 • XP 400

Male halfling rogue 2

NE Small Humanoid (halfling)

**Init** +7; **Senses** Perception +6**Defense****AC** 16, touch 14, flat-footed 13 (+2 armor, +3 Dex, -1 size)**hp** 18 each (2d8+6)**Fort** +3, **Ref** +7, **Will** +0; +2 vs. fear**Offense****Speed** 20 ft.**Melee** masterwork short sword +3 (1d4 / 19–20)**Special Attacks** sneak attack +1d6**Statistics****Str** 11, **Dex** 17, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 14**Base Atk** +1; **CMB** +0; **CMD** 13**Feats** Improved Initiative**Skills** Acrobatics +10, Bluff +7, Climb +7, Disable Device +8, Disguise +7, Knowledge (local) +5, Perception +6, Stealth +12; Racial Modifiers Acrobatics+2, +2 Climb+2 Perception**SQ** rogue talents (bleeding attack +1), trapfinding +1**Languages** Common**Combat Gear** *potion of cure light wounds (2)*, *potion of invisibility*; **Other Gear** leather armor, masterwork shortsword**Engineer Saboteurs (2)**

CR ½ • XP 200 each

Male human expert 2

NE Medium Humanoid (human)

**Init** +0; **Senses** Perception +2**Defense****AC** 13, touch 10, flat-footed 13 (+3 armor)**hp** 19 each (2d8+7)**Fort** +1, **Ref** +0, **Will** +3;**Offense****Speed** 30 ft.**Melee** wrench +2 (1d6+1)**Statistics****Str** 13, **Dex** 11, **Con** 12, **Int** 9, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 8**Base Atk** +1; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 12**Feats** Skill Focus (Knowledge [engineering]), Toughness**Skills** Bluff +1, Disable Device +1, Disguise +1, Knowledge (engineering) +4, Perception +2, Stealth +1**Languages** Common**Combat Gear** *rusting antenna*; **Other Gear** studded leather, wrench (treat as a club)**Tactics.**

For the saboteurs, making sure the boiler explodes takes precedence over their escape and safety. Only after the saboteurs manage to set the engine on a course for detonation do they turn their attentions to knocking out the PCs so they can escape.

Sokana's primary goal is to reach the engine room and throw her *elemental gem* into the boiler furnace. If the combat begins in the aft gundeck, she uses *flare burst* to try and get away from the PCs and move down to the lower decks as fast as possible. She will use her scroll of *summon monster II* to bring forth 3 fire sprites (treat as fire beetles with fire resistance 5, and all their damage converted to fire). Sokana orders her sprites to try to keep PCs from pursuing her, and if she has not already used her scroll when she reaches the magazine, she'll send the sprites into the magazine to remove the fire wards.

**CHASES AND SLOW PCS**

What if you have a party full of gnomes in plate armor? Chasing down Sokana before she gets to the engine room is meant to be tough, but there's a risk it might frustrate players with slow characters. If you want to give the PCs a chance to catch up, perhaps the security guards haven't been taken out yet, and they attack Sokana when she reaches the magazine, forcing her to spend a round or two to kill them.

Ilton the assassin tries to hobble and pounce on any PCs who are harassing Sokana, and once she's safely away he'll try to keep attention focused on him as long as possible. The halfling uses his *potion of invisibility* to disappear if things look bad, only to reappear and sneak attack a PC when their guard is down. The fire sprites are little more than distractions, though if they get loose in the magazine and succeed in taking out the fire wards, they grab casks of firedust and charge PCs, planning to explode when they get close enough.

In the engine room, Jenner and Osman first spend actions to finish their sabotage. Then they try to force enemies close to the dangerous heat of the furnace.

**Terrain.**

**Deck Access.** Multiple ladders lead between the levels of the ship.

**Grating.** Parts of each deck's floor are grating, which grants line of sight between decks, but not line of effect. Teleportation can pass through these sections of floor.

**Magazine Firedust.** At the front of the berth deck above the engine room, a three-chambered magazine stores casks of firedust and cannonballs. A small wreath-like charm hangs in each of the three rooms, marked with "W" on the map. While a charm is mounted, all creatures and objects within 15 ft. of it gain fire resistance 20. If removed from its mount, the charm grants its resistance only to the creature carrying it. Their power fades after a day if not renewed by a special ritual.

Normally the wards prevent firedust from detonating in the magazine. Once the wards are removed, however, a cask of firedust that takes any fire damage explodes, dealing 1d6 fire damage to those within 5 ft. If multiple casks are caught in a fire attack, the size of the explosion increases to as much as a 10-ft. burst, and the concussive force of the explosion pushes any creatures in the area to outside the burst.

Even if all the wards are removed, the design of the magazine prevents an explosion in one room from setting off a chain reaction in the other rooms. The only way to detonate all the casks and cause a catastrophic explosion to destroy the ship is to damage them all simultaneously—such as by the steam boiler exploding in the engine room. That much heat is far more intense than low-level fire attacks can cause, so the PCs cannot accidentally blow up the ship.

**Furnace and Boiler.** Any creature that starts its turn or moves in front of the door of the furnace takes 1d6 points of fire damage from the roaring heat. Any creature subject to forced movement who ends up adjacent to the boiler or furnace takes 1 point of fire damage from making contact with the searing metal.

**Steps of Sabotage.**

Unless the party finds a way to interrupt them very early, the saboteurs will have already overloaded the furnace and disabled the alarm sirens when this encounter begins. To make sure the engine explodes as intended, however, they must achieve several additional goals.



## SHIP LAYOUT.

The R.N.S. *Coaltongue* has a wooden hull sheathed with 5-inch thick iron armor plating, engraved with subtle magical icons of defense and power. Measuring 220 ft. long with a beam of 45 ft. and a draft of 20 ft., the warship has three lower decks and a two-story command bridge amidships the maindeck. The steam engine, powered by heating a boiler with burning firegems, gives the vessel a top speed of 15 knots (roughly 17 miles per hour).

Twelve cannons line each side of the gundeck, which is capped on the fore by the ship's mage's quarters, and on the aft by observation rooms. Both of these rooms can be converted to firing platforms when in pursuit or flight.

Below that is the berth deck, capped by the ship's magazine at the fore and sickbay at the aft. Finally, the bottom deck contains the engine, fuel bins, and various cargo.

The bridge's main level contains quarters for captain and officers, while the second story command deck has speaking tubes to various sections of the ship, and is where the captain must stand to direct the Brand.

All the lower decks have sections of grated floor panels to help circulate air. Characters easily have line of sight, but not necessarily line of effect, through this grating.

### CAPACITOR AND BRAND.

On the *Coaltongue's* maindeck sits an elaborate glass frame, reinforced by magic to be as strong as steel, and shaped in a half-cylinder to resemble the boiler of a train locomotive. While its design is partially aesthetic, intended to evoke the power of Risur's new industry, this innovative structure is Risur's greatest trump card against Danoran warships: a magical capacitor.

Excess energy from the steam engine is stored in thin metallic etchings within the structure. Even while storing its full power, the interior of the capacitor is perfectly safe to walk through, and its expansive windows let it serve as venue for ceremonies and celebrations. But the primary purpose of the capacitor is to power attack spells of the ship's warmages, and to charge the Brand.

The Brand—so named because it burns an image into any surface it strikes—fires a massive blast of pyromantic energy from the ship's figurehead, often enough to outright destroy



One square equals 5ft.

a smaller vessel and cripple a larger one. Its range is limited to about a hundred feet, and after firing it takes hours to recharge the capacitor, but combined with the *Coaltongue's* speed and maneuverability, the Brand should deter attacks by Danor's navy.

### GOLDEN WARD.

The gunports, windows, and main deck are all ringed by a thin inlay of gold wire. As detailed in the *Player's Guide*, this prevents teleportation across the barrier.



**Countdown.** From the start of the encounter, the PCs have 40 rounds before the boiler explodes. They can take actions to gain more time, to get assistance, or to mitigate the effects of the boiler explosion.

**Overloaded Furnace.** The furnace is crammed full of firegems, hot enough to melt metal. If the door to the furnace isn't rusted shut, a PC can use a shovel to remove some firegems as a standard action, taking 1d6 points of fire damage per round, as detailed above. After a given shovel is used ten times, it slags and is no longer useful. There are two shovels near the furnace, and ten more elsewhere in the engine room.

The cantrip *mage hand* can accomplish as much as a shovel without risk. However, these firegems must be placed somewhere, so every five standard actions worth of shoveling fills one 5-ft. square with firegems, making it difficult terrain and dealing 1d6 points of fire damage to anyone in that space.

If ten standard actions are devoted to shoveling out firegems, double the rounds left on the countdown. If twenty standard actions are devoted, the countdown stops. The mitigating factor here is damage from heat, and sufficient shovels.

**Engine Alarm Sirens.** There are two alarm sirens, marked "S" on the map. Repairing an alarm siren requires you to have both hands free and succeed two Intelligence checks (DC 12), each of which takes one standard action. This repair doesn't help prevent an explosion directly, but five rounds after the alarm is fixed, Geoff Massarde and three of the *Coaltongue's* engineers will arrive to help.

**Engine Boiler Relief Valves.** There are two relief valves, marked "V" on the map. As soon as the engineers realize they've been found out, they start trying to disable them. Disabling a valve requires two move actions to close it, and a use of *rusting antennae* to break the mechanism. Each closed valve takes 5 rounds off the countdown toward explosion.

An unbroken valve can be reopened with just two move actions, which adds back 5 rounds to the countdown before explosion. Fixing a broken valve is impossible in this scene's time frame, but the relief pipes can be cracked slightly by dealing 20 damage to the pipe or making a Strength check (DC 15). This also adds 5 rounds to the countdown, but fills the engine room with searing steam, which grants everyone in the engine room concealment and deals 1 point of fire damage each round. Breaking a second valve adds another 5 rounds, but doesn't make the steam any worse.

**Fuel Bin Firegems.** Forward of the furnace is a large bin of firegems which engineers normally shovel in as fuel. Already Jenner and Ostman have filled the furnace to the brim, but they also intend to surround it with even more firegems.

Two latches hold the bin closed, marked "L" on the map, and each can be opened with a move action. Once both are opened, tons of firegems pour onto the floor and pile up beside the furnace, filling six 5-ft. squares with difficult terrain. This takes 6 rounds off the countdown.

Clearing one 5-ft. square of firegems away from the furnace with a shovel takes a standard action and adds 1 round to the countdown.

**Magazine Fire Wards.** Removing or remounting a ward just takes a minor action, or the ward can be destroyed by dealing 5 points of damage to it. Most likely Sokana will send her fire elementals to remove the charms, though they can't destroy them with their attacks.

If a PC tosses a fire ward in the furnace, it adds 5 rounds to the countdown clock, but the ward is burned away to nothing.

**Elemental Gem.** In the gundeck's aft quarters, Sokana will likely have just retrieved her gem from the duchess when the PCs come investigating. If she can toss the gem into the furnace, it flares with light and the furnace begins to shudder with barely-contained arcane energy as a large



fire elemental attempts to manifest within the furnace. Due to the space of the furnace, the elemental has difficulties manifesting and is still linked to the gem. Halve the rounds left in the countdown. She'll then tell one of the engineers to use a *rust antennae* to seal the furnace door.

Opening a rusted furnace door requires a Strength check (DC 15). A character who reaches in to pull out the *elemental gem* takes 3d6 points of fire damage, though he can manage to get the gem out first even if the damage knocks him out or kills him. Of course, there are tongs nearby, though noticing them in the heat of the moment may be difficult (Perception DC 19). Removing the gem doubles the rounds left in the countdown and the fire elemental dissipates back to its home plane.

### Boiling Point.

Once the PCs realize that the boiler is working its way toward a deadly explosion, they have to decide whether to try to undo the damage themselves, seek help, or evacuate the ship. To keep the pressure up, you might want to have a 30 second timer to represent each round; don't be too strict, especially if the players need you to clarify something their characters should know.

### Getting Help.

The drunken tiefling Geoff Massarde is not eager to risk his life, but the pressure of everyone looking to him convinces him to go. Massarde can automatically succeed checks needed to destroy the furnace (see Fix It! below), and he's quite handy with a shovel, since he's resistant to damage from the heat.





If the PCs propose the capacitor plan to Harkover Lee, he says his duty to the king takes precedence, and he makes the preparations detailed in the “Evacuate” section below.

### Evacuate.

If the PCs warn the dignitaries fast enough, there’s a chance they might be able to escape before the explosion.

King Aodhan gravely orders everyone to remain calm, and then nods to his principle minister. Harkover Lee uses a telekinetic flick of his hand to tear free the nearest piece of gold ward around the ship’s edge. After 5 rounds, the ship’s crew manages to prep the two life boats, and key political figures pile into them. Then 5 rounds later the lifeboats are in the water, and 5 rounds after that the sailors rowing them get far enough away to avoid the explosion.

Once the lifeboats hit the water in round 10, Harkover Lee urges the king that they have to leave. The king nods, orders everyone else to swim, and then removes a gold ring from one finger. Lee grabs the king and concentrates, planning to teleport a hundred feet to the nearest of the escort ships. Fey magic from Beshala disrupts his spell, and though Lee teleports away without trouble, the king is left behind. Lee is only capable of such a jaunt once a day, so he is powerless to help his king.

In round 10, those who aren’t in the lifeboats heed their king’s orders and start diving into the water to swim to safety. A quarter of the crowd manages to get to safety by round 15, and another half by round 30, but the last quarter are too feeble to swim even that far. They will be caught in the blast. The king, a 70 year-old man, swims with them, and gets to safety 15 rounds after he’s alerted to the danger.

The ocean waters are gentle (Swim DC 10 to swim).

### Fix It!

All the easy options the PCs have available only serve to delay the inevitable. Reasonably creative idea might add a round or two to the countdown clock, at your judgment. A PC who can deal cold damage each round, for instance, might add 1 round to the clock for every 5 rounds he devotes to the action.

They can mitigate the damage slightly if they replace the fire wards in the magazine. When the boiler explodes, the firedust casks don’t explode. The ship’s lower hull ruptures, and the whole thing sinks within ten minutes, but that’s enough time to evacuate everyone.

Likewise, they might stop the explosion altogether with the unorthodox tactic of detonating five or more casks of firedust in the forward compartment of the engine room. This cracks the hull, and 5 rounds later seawater floods the furnace and kills the reaction.

The most efficient way to stop the explosion is to break the furnace, which is too sturdy to be affected by most weapons. A cask of firedust pushed into the furnace immediately detonates, dealing 2d6+1 damage to those within 5 ft. but shattering the furnace. Alternately, a PC can spend a standard action and make an Intelligence check (DC 12) to correctly place a cask of firedust so it will fracture the furnace when it explodes. If two casks are detonated this way, the furnace is destroyed.

This either obliterates the relief valves—which fills all the lower decks with scalding steam for 5 minutes—or breaks open the bottom of the furnace—which spills out firegems onto the floor, warping the metal and forcing an evacuation of the engine room. Once the furnace is destroyed, though, the ship is safe.

Alternately, the PCs might go for a *Star Trek* style technobabble solution: channel excess fire mana from the engine into the capacitor, then release it as a blast of the ship’s brand. Unfortunately, since this was just supposed to be a casual cruise, the brand isn’t calibrated yet. The brand uses a complicated mix of magical energies, but it can be calibrated on the spot if PCs in the engine room succeed three checks: one each Knowledge (Arcana), Knowledge (Nature), and Knowledge (Religion) (DC 19).

The ship shudders, the engine room glows with red-orange light from all directions, and on deck, the capacitor crackles with red energy. The dignitaries scream and cower in fear, and then a gout of flame shoots forth from the figurehead with a roar, vaporizing a large volume of water on the surface of the ocean a hundred feet away. The ship shudders one last time, and then the furnace dims to a safe level.

If the PCs come up with other suitably dramatic, risky, or clever plans, those can work as well, at your discretion. Alternately, if the PCs are doing very badly, and the countdown has 10 rounds left, you might suggest they simply evacuate with all the haste they can muster.

## AFTERMATH

### Exposition/Social. Montage.

*The PCs learn the full story of what happened.*

What happens next depends on how the PCs handled the boiler sabotage.

### Critical Failure.

If the PCs don’t stop the boiler in time, it explodes. Every creature in the engine room is slain by the combination of pressure and heat. If the firedust casks are warded, the ship merely has its hull cracked. It sinks 5 ft. every round, and 7 rounds later the main deck is underwater. The escort ships rescue everyone, but the *Coaltongue* sits in a watery grave.

If the casks are not warded, though, they explode in a chain reaction, which tears apart the bow of the ship. Every creature on or near the ship is killed. If this happens and the PCs failed to warn the king, well, they’re probably already dead, but the king is too. Continue the campaign with a new set of PCs, perhaps recruited by Lya Jierre to prove that the duchess was behind the whole plot.

### Failure.

If the ship explodes, but the PCs warn the king in time for him and others to get to safety, they are publicly commended for saving the king, but privately reprimanded for botching the challenge. When they are recruited to go to Axis Island, it’s their boss Stover Delft’s attempt to get them a chance to make up for their initial failure.

### Success.

If the PCs keep the ship from sinking, they are highly commended, and are given the mission to Axis Island precisely because they have proven themselves.

### Critical Success.

The PCs might manage to stop the ship from sinking without even interrupting the king’s party. If they end up firing the brand, it might coincide with the crescendo of the national anthem, setting off a round of applause from the crowd. They can come up on deck, discreetly notify Harkover Lee to deal with prisoners, and let the king give his prepared remarks without disruption.



**Debriefing.**

In the immediate aftermath, the PCs are treated for their injuries and questioned thoroughly by Principal Minister Lee. The king himself asks to speak to them before the night is out, and he thanks them personally. He spares five minutes at a very critical time to ask their names and ask about their families. He's especially interested in anyone who has siblings. The king is troubled that his own sister could betray him, and he prays that the PCs never have to find an enemy among their own flesh and blood.

**The King's Speech.**

Either to a small crowd on the ship, or the next day before a crowd of thousands, the king gives a five minute speech in which he recounts the trials Risur has faced to defend itself from Danor through four wars that ultimately earned either side little. For centuries, the king says, his people have viewed Danorans as cursed and unnatural, while they claim Risuri are superstitious and primitive. But ironically their latest efforts to arm for war have brought the two nations closer together, as Danorans have helped Risur with its industrial revolution.

The king hopes that his successor, whoever that may be, will not have to lose any more young men and women to another pointless war. And so, even though he first started this arms race, King Aodhan now intends to seek peace with his old, respected enemy, the sovereign of Danor. In one year's time he will convene a peace summit here in Flint, and to seal the proposed treaty he intends to marry a Danoran.

Normally, making peace with a distrusted enemy is a tough sell, but reactions polarize quickly because of the duchess's assassination attempt. Even if the PCs killed all the assassins, within a few days mages have extracted from their corpses and souls enough evidence to brand the duchess a traitor. A handful try to defend the duchess's actions, claiming that Risur is going in the wrong direction, and that Danor is not to be trusted, but they are denounced. Some high-ranking supporters of the duchess are driven from their home and sent fleeing westward to Shale.

**What's Next for the Constables?**

By the time anyone knows what's going on, the duchess is long gone, having fled by magic to her stronghold in Shale, where she prepares to still launch her naval assault on Axis Island.

Even though the PCs are the heroes of the hour, they're not high-ranked enough to be given any critical assignments. Others in the constabulary are given the task of figuring out who was involved in the plot, and most of the PCs' tasks involve following up on the work of other investigators. Assistant Inspector Delft keeps them busy for the next few days conducting low-level interviews, filling out paperwork for search warrants, and the like.

A few journalists seek to interview the PCs, and they might briefly enjoy some mild local celebrity. Still, this is an age before 24-hour news and online updates, so they don't hear much about what's going on hundreds of miles away in Shale.

Then, about a week after the *Coaltongue's* launch, the PCs are in the main RHC office late one afternoon, filing paperwork or otherwise involved in office drudgery, when one of their coworkers tells them that the assistant inspector wants them in his office.



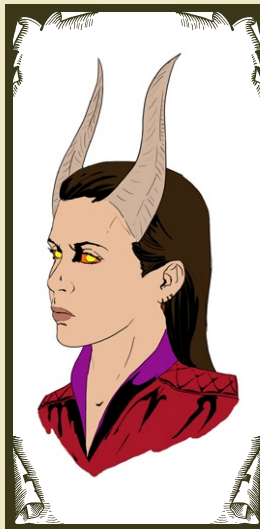




# ACT TWO: THREE TOWERS

## MINISTER OF OUTSIDERS LYA JIERRE

AN AMBITIOUS TIEFLING IN HER LATE 20s, LYA IS the niece of Han Jierre, the Sovereign of Danor (her father is Han's brother). She graduated top of her class from the prestigious academy of war, the *Jierre Sciens d'Arms*, and many students of other war colleges have read her thesis, *Field Study of Melee Effectiveness and Foe Debilitation through Focused Limb Severance Techniques Contrasted with Mainstream Opportunistic Techniques*, which she wrote near the end of the last Yerasol War.



Despite her youth, she was awarded the position of Minister of Outsiders, giving her great leeway to travel and make alliances. For the past three years she has worked with King Aodhan to keep the peace between their two nations, and as they began making plans for a formal alliance, she accepted the king's offer of marriage as a symbolic union.

Secretly, she is also a tier-four member of the Obscurati's Golden Cell, tasked with recruiting archaeologists and miners around Lanjyr to seek out ancient seals like the one on Axis Island. She merely thinks this is part of a scientific endeavor to better understand the nature of the planes. During the course of this adventure, however, the leadership of Golden Cell are all slain when Duchess Ethelyn of Shale attacks the island.

When the adventure begins, Lya is not aware of how important the operations on the island are. Only after this adventure is she contacted by the ultimate head of the conspiracy and promoted to leader of Golden Cell. Lya Jierre should be portrayed as a complex character with competing motivations. Though she gets involved with Risur out of a desire to gain great political power, she does so with no malice. After she is promoted within the Obscurati, she sees a chance for a more meaningful and lasting peace, but to reach that goal she must tell ever more elaborate lies.

In this act, the party helps open the way for Risur's navy to take down the treasonous duchess.

## THREE TOWERS

### Puzzle/Social. Real-Time.

*The wits of the PCs are tested by the cunning Lya Jierre.*

Assistant Inspector Delft is not alone in his office. He tells the PCs to sit, then introduces them to the "Minister of Outsiders" from Danor, **Lya Jierre**. She's dressed in a rich formal coat of red and purple, which is tailored to give her a lot of freedom of movement—fancy looking yet suited for a sword fight.

And indeed she has a sword at her hip; it looks like a rapier, but has some tiny mechanical device attached at the guard. The sheath is thicker than one would expect for a rapier. In the unlikely event the PCs get a glimpse, the blade's edge consists of a thin sharpened wire which works something like a razor chainsaw when the sword's mechanism is activated. The weapon is magical, a rarity and mark of great prestige among Danorans.

Without explaining why she's here, she directs the PCs' attention to a strange collection of items on Delft's desk.

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There are three ivory "towers," each three inches tall with a steel plate on its base. Next are three stone rings—one red, one green, and one blue—each just slightly larger in diameter than the towers. Each ring has three strands of thread clipped to it, and each of the nine strands ends in a small silvery magnet, which can stick to the bases of the towers.

Lya says, "The three towers are about to be attacked. They must be reinforced by magic that flows like water from three portals—fire mana is red, earth is green, water is blue. The wires are canals through which the mana flows. But if the mana streams cross, they'll destroy their respective portals. How do you arrange the portals, towers, and streams of mana so that each tower gets all three types of magic, without any of the streams crossing?"

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Delft looks impatiently amused by all this, but he tells the party to give the lady an answer so they can move on to their mission.

**Presenting the Puzzle.** If you want to assemble the test for your players, some rooks from chess with metal washers glued to the bottom work for the towers. A shower ring or cheap plastic bracelet can work for the portals, and you can use different colored threads with tiny magnets glued to their ends for the mana streams.

Alternately, some scrap paper and pens should work to let players scribble potential solutions.

**The Solution.** The puzzle is a trick, a test by Lya to see how smart the PCs are and how fast they figure out that there is *no* way to connect the three portals to the three towers without the wires crossing. More accurately, it is impossible to solve the puzzle unless the PCs bend the rules slightly and move into three dimensions.

If a PC presents a solution that tries to "jump" one wire over another, hold one tower in the air, or otherwise solves the puzzle, Lya huffs a laugh and commends them on being smart enough to change the rules of the test.



If the PCs announce the puzzle is unsolvable, Lya nods and thanks them. If they keep trying for more than a minute or two, Lya sighs, explains that the puzzle has no solution, and asks Delft if he's sure these are the ones he wants to send on this mission.

### The Mission.

After the puzzle, Delft explains what's going on. The expected civil war doesn't seem to be materializing. Instead, the duchess and some of her allies have seized a single island in the Yerasol Archipelago, known as Axis Island, because magnets spin on their axis there. The Danorans conquered the island seven years ago in the last war.

Lya says that there's a Danoran mining project on Axis Island, as well as advanced steelworks, a shipyard, and a coastal military fort. (If all of this seems surprisingly forthcoming, it's because the PCs are going to be finding it all out anyway.) According to Lya, this is a key Danoran military holding, and the duchess's attack might be seen by Danor as an act of war. Lya wants the duchess and her people off the island soon, because she agrees with King Aodhan's desire for peace, and she doesn't want to risk giving her congress enough time to start another war. But she is not authorized to command Danoran forces, and even if she did, a Danoran counter-attack might result in the accidental death of the king's sister.

So Lya is bending the rules a little bit. She wants Risuri forces to remove the duchess and hand control back within the next three days, and King Aodhan has graciously agreed.

Delft says that a fleet of Risuri ships with marines on board are preparing to assault the island in a few days. The PCs are to set out this evening, taking the Constabulary's fastest ship, the RNS *Impossible*, to meet up

with the fleet. Other investigators will take point, and the military will handle the heavy lifting, but the PCs will be there because they were the last ones to interact with the duchess's forces. They might spot something others would miss.

Simply landing at some secluded beach is infeasible, because spells at the Axis Fort will alert the duchess if anyone sets foot on the island. But Lya has a work-around. The *Impossible* will rendezvous with the naval armada, where it will pick up a group of infiltration specialists—four highly decorated Homeland constables from the Slate office. While the navy waits out of sight, the *Impossible* will enter a cove under the cover of darkness. A sea cave in that cove leads to the bottom of a mine; Lya Jierre knows its location, but not the layout of the mine. With the aid of potions of *water breathing*, the infiltrators will go in first to secure the cave, and then the PCs will be given the signal to follow.

The island's fortress has a sea wall around a harbor, which protects against storms and assault, but provides access for shipments in and out. The infiltrators are tasked with opening the fortress's sea gate so the armada can storm the fortress more easily. The military will capture the duchess, who will likely be holed up in a keep in the center of the fortress. Once the dust settles, the PCs will be on the scene to look for clues and interrogate the duchess and her associates.

At least, that's the plan. If anything goes awry, the PCs are the infiltrators' back-up. They'll be supplied with mission critical resources, but once they're on the island there won't be any help until they open the sea gate for the navy. If they get into a fight, either with the island's original Danoran defenders, or any of the duchess's allies, the PCs have approval to defend themselves, but take prisoners if feasible.







### The Complication.

While the RHC's main priority should be the capture of the duchess, Lya has two demands. First, to avoid a war, she says that by sunset three days from now (roughly 12 hours after retaking the island, if all goes by schedule), Risur must hand control back over to her people.

Second, as a personal request, Lya wants the PCs to ensure the safety of one person. Her cousin, Nathan Jierre, was on the island when it was attacked, and she's worried the duchess might have harmed him just because he's a tiefling. Nathan was just a teenager during the last war, so he should bear no punishment for whatever grudges the duchess holds. If her cousin is still alive, Lya asks them to keep him safe until her people can pick him up and bring him home.

She says she also knows other people who were working on the island, but they knew the risk of working in contested territory. Her cousin, though, is innocent, and she asks the PCs to do whatever they can to protect him.

### More Details.

Lya is willing to answer a few questions, but she's a busy woman and will soon leave the PCs to work out details with Delft. She'll readily admit that Danor has factories on the island, and that yes, strange magical things happen there, but she only ever spent a few days in the fortress, not exploring the island. She knows that there is an archaeological investigation of an ancient culture living on the island, and so she asks them to try not to damage anything of historical value. As stated above, Lya is not yet familiar with the plans of the Obscurati, so she doesn't feel any need to keep these things secret.

Once Lya Jierre leaves, Assistant Chief Inspector Delft tells the PCs

that he's got a hunch there's more going on here than what the Danorans are saying. It might just be that the island was one of the nearest Danoran military installations in the archipelago, but Delft wants the PCs to try to keep an eye open for anything unusual.

If a PC is a spirit medium, Delft smiles grimly as he explains that, if the duchess doesn't surrender, it'll be up to the ghost-talker to seek answers

### ABOUT AXIS ISLAND

Thousands of years ago, primitive peoples performed a ritual on Axis Island to seal off this world and a few affiliated planes from the rest of the multiverse. While planar travel is difficult elsewhere in the world, after such a long time, energy from these other worlds bleeds through near the Axis Seal. What some interpret as the island being alive is just random fluctuations of reality caused as slivers of foreign planes briefly overwrite parts of the island.

These fluxes happen most often in the presence of stray conscious thoughts, where idle imaginings make it easier for a foreign reality to become real. Large quantities of people tend to stabilize an area, since the mass of thoughts crowd out other planes. Likewise, the nature of the seal ritual makes iron act as a ward. The seal-builders placed key components of their ritual in veins of iron-rich rock, and the Danorans working on the island install small iron spikes at regular intervals in walls or floors, which help lock normal reality in place.

The fortress on Axis Island is led by a military commander, General Alsanor, who is also head of the Obscurati's Golden Cell. He dies before the PCs ever make it to the island, though the PCs might ask about him.



as to whether the duchess has any other secret accomplices, or if there was some ulterior motive for her attacking this particular island.

If any PCs have the Yerasol Veteran theme feat, they may have fought a battle on Axis Island nine years ago. It was a pretty place, with steep jungles and beautiful beaches, at the edge of the wild magic zone that surrounds Danor's dead magic zone.

There weren't too many casualties because the place wasn't inhabited to begin with, and their commanders weren't willing to settle in for a slog. A lot of weird stuff happened there, though—terrain seeming to shift, spells backfiring, rockslides and treefalls happening too often to be coincidence—almost like the island was fighting both sides who were trying to claim it. Even the Danorans seemed spooked, but they're not a superstitious type, so they held out while the Risuri commander ordered a withdrawal.

### Mission Critical Supplies.

The PCs will each be given two sunrods, one potion of *waterbreathing*, and two potions of *aid*. As a group they'll receive a selection of specially-prepared scrolls crafted by Principal Minister Harkover Lee and his aides, which can be activated by any character, even non-spellcasters, without requiring a caster level check. These include a total of four scrolls of *pyrotechnics*, two of *silence*, and two of *passwall*. The RHC, of course, expects any unused material to be returned.

The PCs each receive payment now: 1000 gp, as detailed in Rewards (page 3). They can use it to requisition equipment. Non-RHC characters are paid 300 gp, but get to keep items they loot from the island. Assistant Chief Inspector Delft encourages them to get some sort of healing

item, and recommends spellcasters purchase scrolls so they have enough spells for a long mission.

## THE R.N.S. IMPOSSIBLE

### Social. Montage.

*The party sets sail for Axis Island and links up with their fellow constable infiltrators.*

That evening, the *Impossible*—a 220-ft. long clipper—leaves Flint's harbor and turns west. The captain, Rutger Smith, recalls the PCs from the events aboard the *Coaltongue*, though his opinion of them depends on how well that great ship fared.

During the brief but intense voyage, the PCs get to experience his unorthodox tradition of discussing philosophy with his crew during meals. If you want to give the PCs a chance to ponder the pros and cons of the duchess's actions, now is a good opportunity. Of course, while the crew is willing to discuss the topic, all of them insist they're firmly loyal to the king.

Aided by a skyseer to keep the course at night and a druid to guide the wind, the *Impossible* sails the five hundred miles to Axis Island in just under two days, arriving before sunset the day of the first-quarter moon.

### Infiltrators.

The four other constables arrived earlier in the day from Slate. They take a rowboat from their ship to the *Impossible*, and make quick introductions before getting down to planning.







## INFILTRATOR STATS

The infiltrators likely all die or are disabled before they have a chance to get into any fights, but if you need to make up quick combat stats, assume each of the group ranges from 3rd level to 5th. Tanya would be a druid, Letmas a wizard (illusionist), Seven-Foot Dan a fighter, and Burton a rogue.

- ♦ **Tanya.** Half-elf druid with a hound companion. Leader of the group, confident but cautious. Double-checks everyone's armor and gear before setting out.
- ♦ **Letmas.** Human illusionist who is excellent at faking accents. Slips off to make tea during the mission briefing while an illusion of himself stays behind.
- ♦ **Seven-Foot Dan.** Towering human fighter with a spiked chain. A veteran of the Fourth Yerasol War. Offers to give lessons in "breaking stuff," and has a bag full of bricks and wooden boards for that purpose.
- ♦ **Burton.** Goblin rogue who carries a fancy surgical kit containing many varieties of daggers, knives, saws, and scalpels. According to Letmas, Burton once camped out in a Danoran latrine for three hours to get a shot at the commander of an enemy company. Ever since then, he's worn an amulet that constantly cleans him as the spell *prestidigitation*.

The plan is that evening the ship will hoist black sails and reach the cove around 9pm, at low tide. Once they arrive at the sea cave entrance, Letmas casts *water breathing* so that the infiltrators and PCs can breathe underwater for an hour or so. The infiltrators will then take a 500-ft. length of rope, dive underwater, and swim to the sea cave. There's supposedly a 200-ft. stretch of submerged cave before an opening with fresh air at the bottom of a mine.

Once there, they'll secure the location, and signal back—by *animal messenger*, or sending Burton back, or just tugging really hard. The PCs will then follow the rope to link up with them. Sunrods will let everyone see underwater.

Together, the two groups will make their way to the mine's exit (marked as Mine C on the island map), which should be on a low mountain facing an island valley. They'll then cross over the north shore of the island and descend to the back of the fortress. They'll use *passwall*

## QUITTING EARLY?

The most likely course of action after the infiltrators are put out of commission is for the party to enter the sea cave, head to the surface, then sneak into the fortress and finish the infiltrators' mission. But the PCs might decide otherwise.

If they avoid getting onto the island altogether, the *Impossible* sails back to the fleet, which uses its back-up plan of landing on the shore near the fortress and marching their forces in for a traditional attack. The fort's defenses are already weakened from one successful assault, so the forces loyal to the king will succeed, though they'll take worse casualties. They can still call in the PCs for all events of Act Three.

If the PCs get onto the island but avoid the fortress or don't try to open the gate, they might witness some strange phenomena as they try to survive the island. A few hours later they'll hear sounds of cannons and battle, and later in the day troops loyal to the king will track them down and bring them back to the fortress, just in time for them to deal with Act Three.

to breach the fortress, and then the infiltrators will try to open the sea gate. Once it's open, they'll use *pyrotechnics* to send a signal flare up to alert the navy.

Meanwhile the PCs hole up and wait for the military to arrive. Once the fleet is signaled, it will take about ten minutes for them to strike. They'll be able to sail directly into the interior harbor of the fortress, and they outnumber the duchess's forces about 5 to 1, so victory should be a foregone conclusion.

Once the dust settles, they'll bring the PCs in to handle Nathan Jierre and to pore through whatever evidence the duchess and her allies may have left behind. If needed, however, the infiltrators or military may ask the PCs for help.

## SEA TUNNEL

### Exploration. Real-Time.

*Tragedy forces the PCs to decide whether to undertake their mission without aid.*

The first-quarter moon hangs overhead as the infiltrators dive overboard and swim for the sea cave, trailing a rope behind them. It should take them less than five minutes to get through, but two minutes in a strange vibration wave ripples the water around them, and the rope goes slack. A few minutes later, the rope starts to jerk fitfully.

What happened is that while the infiltrators swam through the tunnel, a random planar fluctuation dislodged part of the stone above them, and they were crushed. Unless you'd like to keep some of them alive, Tanya, Letmas, and Seven-Foot Dan were killed instantly. Burton only got his leg caught under a boulder; he's now bleeding from a compound fracture, and is barely conscious enough to tug on the rope for help.

When the PCs come upon the scene, the *water breathing* potions allow them to speak with Burton, who says he felt like he was someplace else for a moment—a swamp with yellow frogs and a purple sky—and then the ceiling cracked. He's a little delirious, and after explaining what happens he grabs anyone beside him. He demands they cut off his leg and get him out of here before sharks eat him.

If the party can manage to shift 1000 pounds (a DC 25 Strength check will do it, or some quick fulcrums and levers), they can unpin Burton. His leg can be tended so he won't bleed to death, but he's useless for the mission until he can see a healer back with the navy. That's time the party can't really spare, and when he calms down a bit Burton will suggest leaving him in the mine, then coming back for him when the mission's over. A better plan might be to take him to the *Impossible* now.

The party has a little while to discuss their options, but the *water breathing* only lasts about an hour more. If they press on, the sea cave goes about two hundred feet more before opening into a large vertical chamber.

## GENIUS LOCI

### Action/Exploration/Social. Real-Time.

*A paranoid mine foreman tries to kill the PCs as they examine an airy artifact.*

**Nicolas Dupiers, mine foreman**  
 Axis Air Elemental  
 Axis Earth Elemental  
 Axis Shadow Stalker





The 80-ft. diameter, 60-ft. high cave at the end of the tunnel has no light sources, but the air is pleasantly warm for being underground. At low tide when the PCs likely arrive, the water at the bottom of the cave ranges from 10 ft. deep to just a few inches. Wooden platforms anchored to the walls form a makeshift dock and stairs, which lead up to a 30-ft. wide tunnel that intersects horizontally with this chamber 35 ft. above the water line. Iron spikes, each 6 inches long, are driven into the walls every 30 ft. as a defense against planar fluctuations.

A 20-ft. diameter pillar of dull gray stone rises from the water line to the ceiling. A dramatic splinter of white marble extrudes from the gray stone, 5 ft. wide and rising 17 ft. above the water. Ages of surf have eroded its surface, but in places one can still find hints of ancient pictogram carvings. It looks like once the splinter was part of a longer column, but something snapped free its top. The missing section of pillar is nowhere to be found.

In a tiny nook carved into the tip of the marble splinter sits an oversized gold coin. About three inches across, it has primitive designs of birds, clouds, and dots that might represent stars. A PC with the Skyseer theme feat, or any other character who succeeds a DC 19 Knowledge (Nature) check, recognizes the constellation of The Eagle, said to hold great influence over the planet Avilona, which affects weather and air magic.

One of the mining platforms sits just beneath the nook. Anyone standing right beside the marble splinter hears what sounds like voices muffled by a thin wall. The coin, the *Golden Icon of Avilona*, can easily be removed. *You probably shouldn't give the full item description below to the players, unless you want them asking prematurely what the Axis Seal is.*



#### Golden Icon of Avilona

Minor Artifact

**Aura** faint transmutation; **CL** 10th

**Slot** Neck or Held; **Weight** 1 lb; **Price** Unique.

**Description** Once per day, before the end of your next turn you can make one 60 ft. fly move as a move action.

While on Axis Island—or if the Axis Seal is opened—a person holding the *Icon* or wearing it as a necklace gains a +5 competence bonus to Jump checks, and can influence air magic. The wielder of the *icon* casts spells with the air descriptor as though they were one caster level higher. Most notably, air elementals are drawn to it, and they defend the bearer and obey his or her orders.

#### Being Watched.

When the PCs arrive, a Perception check (DC 20) spots a lurking shadowy figure that quickly flees up the stairs to the tunnel 35 ft. up. The shadow is bound to **Nicolas Dupiers**, the mine's foreman, who has hidden here since the duchess's attack. His makeshift lair is nearby in the bottom of the mine, and he wears a necklace with two golden icons similar to the one in the marble splinter—one tied to shadow magic of the planet Nem, and one to earth magic of the planet Urim. These are the only icons of this type the Danorans have excavated so far, and when the attack came, Dupiers tried to hide them.

Dupiers has set a loyal shadow creature here to watch the lower entrance to the mine, and has an earth elemental watching another approach to his lair. If the shadow alerts him, he sneaks up to the top of this chamber. He's very paranoid and twitchy, so unless the PCs come in talking about how great Danor is, Dupiers hears their accents and assumes they've come to kill him. He tries to strike with the element of surprise.



**Nicolas Dupiers, Mine Foreman**

CR 1 • XP 400

Male human expert 3

CN medium Humanoid (human)

**Init** +1; **Senses** Perception +2**Defense****AC** 14, touch 11, flat-footed 13 (+3 armor, +1 Dex)**hp** 23 (3d8+6)**Fort** +2, **Ref** +2, **Will** +2;**Offense****Speed** 30 ft.**Melee** dagger +2 (1d4 / 19–20)**Ranged** pistol +3 (1d8/x4)**Statistics****Str** 10, **Dex** 13, **Con** 13, **Int** 12, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 9**Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 13**Feats** Exotic Weapon Proficiency (firearms), Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot**Skills** Climb +2, Diplomacy +2, Intimidate +2, Perception +2, Profession (miner) +5, Sense Motive +2, Stealth +3, Survival +2**Languages** Common, Dwarven**Combat Gear** *Golden Icon of Nem*, *Golden Icon of Urim*; **Other Gear** studded leather armor, pistol**Golden Icon of Nem**

Minor Artifact

**Aura** faint necromancy; **CL** 10th**Slot** Neck or Held; **Weight** 1 lb; **Price** Unique.**Description** Once per day, you may become incorporeal until the end of your next turn. This effect ends if you attack.

While on Axis Island—or if the Axis Seal is opened—a person holding or wearing the *icon* gains darkvision 60 ft. and casts spells with the shadow descriptor as though they were one caster level higher. Shadow elementals are drawn to the *icon*, and they defend the bearer and obey his or her orders.

**Golden Icon of Urim**

Minor Artifact

**Aura** faint necromancy; **CL** 10th**Slot** Neck or Held; **Weight** 1 lb; **Price** Unique.**Description** Once per day, you may cast a variant of *wall of stone* that creates up to three 5-foot squares.

While on Axis Island—or if the Axis Seal is opened—a person holding or wearing the *icon* gains a +1 natural armor bonus and casts spells with the earth descriptor as though they were one caster level higher. Earth elementals are drawn to the *icon*, and they defend the bearer and obey his or her orders.

## TAKING PRISONERS.

As mentioned earlier, we suggest you let PCs knock out enemies when they're reduced below 0 hit points, instead of killing them, without imposing a penalty to the character's attack roll. Similarly, the duchess's forces here want to take the PCs prisoner. You can use the following rules for situations where enemies might prefer to take the PCs alive rather than slaughter them.

If the whole party is defeated while on Axis Island, they wake up in the fortress prison. They can interact with the other prisoners, detailed in Act Three, and will eventually be rescued when loyalist forces manage to finally breach the fortress's defenses, shortly before Asrabey Varal storms the inner wall.

**Axis Air Elemental (Small)**

CR 1 • XP 400 each

N Small outsider (air, elemental, extraplanar)

**Init** +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +4**Defense****AC** 17, touch 14, flat-footed 14 (+3 Dex, +3 natural, +1 size)**hp** 13 each (2d10+2)**Fort** +4, **Ref** +6, **Will** +0**Defensive Abilities** air mastery **Immune** elemental traits**Offense****Speed** fly 100 ft (perfect)**Melee** slam +6 (1d4+1)**Special Attacks** whirlwind (DC 12, 10–20ft)**Statistics****Str** 12, **Dex** 17, **Con** 12, **Int** 4, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 11**Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 15**Feats** Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse**Skills** Acrobatics +7, Escape Artist +7, Fly +17, Knowledge (planes) +1, Perception +4, Stealth +11**Languages** Auran**Axis Earth Elemental (Small)**

CR 1 • XP 400 each

N Small outsider (earth, elemental, extraplanar)

**Init** –1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.; Perception +4**Defense****AC** 17, touch 10, flat-footed 17 (–1 Dex, +7 natural, +1 size)**hp** 13 each (2d10+2)**Fort** +4, **Ref** –1, **Will** +3**Immune** elemental traits**Offense****Speed** 20 ft., burrow 20 ft., earth glide**Melee** slam +6 (1d6+4)**Special Attacks** earth mastery**Statistics****Str** 16, **Dex** 8, **Con** 13, **Int** 4, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 11**Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 13**Feats** Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack**Skills** Appraise +1, Climb +7, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +1, Knowledge (planes) +1, Perception +4, Stealth +7**Languages** Terran**Axis Shadow Stalker**

CR 1 • XP 400 each

CE Medium undead (incorporeal) (*Tome of Horrors Complete* pg. 541)**Init** +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +8**Defense****AC** 14, touch 14, flat-footed 11 (+1 deflection, +2 Dex, +1 dodge)**hp** 6 (1d8+2);**Fort** +2, **Ref** +2, **Will** +2**Defensive Abilities** incorporeal, channel resistance +1, shadow blend; Immune undead traits**Offense****Speed** fly 40 ft (good)**Melee** incorporeal touch +2 (1 strength damage)**Statistics****Str** —, **Dex** 15, **Con** —, **Int** 5, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 14**Base Atk** +0; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 15 (can't be tripped)**Feats** Dodge**Skills** Fly +6, Perception +8, Stealth +8; Racial Modifiers Perception +4**Languages** None





### Special Abilities

**Strength Damage (Su)** The touch of an Axis shadow stalker deals 1 point of Strength damage to a living foe. A creature drained to Strength 0 by an Axis shadow stalker dies. This is a negative energy effect.

**Shadow Blend (Ex)** In any light condition less than bright light, the Axis shadow stalker's form blends into the surrounding shadows, granting it concealment.

### Tactics.

The shadow stalker gets as close as possible, and Dupiers shoots as soon as it attacks. The earth elemental throws a barrel of oil, then intercepts anyone trying to climb up its master. Thereafter Dupiers hides behind barrels for cover and struggles to reload his gun fast enough to keep PCs at bay. An air elemental lurks near the ceiling, almost invisible. It doesn't join the battle unless someone has the air icon, at which point it acts as that creature's ally.

**Negotiating.** As soon as the fight begins, Dupiers yells to the PCs:

"You killed all my men, you dirt worshippers! That wasn't enough? Now you want me dead as well?"

The PCs might be able to talk him down, at which point he'll call off his monsters. If he's under half health, though, Dupiers starts screaming that he's going to die. He tries to get the air icon, either from the pillar or by knocking out whoever has it. He thinks it will keep him safe.

### Terrain.

Ladders stretched horizontally between platforms can be crawled across safely, or walked across with an Acrobatics check (DC 12). A character who fails makes no progress; one who fails by 5 or more falls off.

Normal vertical ladders lead between levels of the scaffolding. A rope dangles from a wooden crane at the tunnel at the top of this chamber. The rope can be climbed (Climb DC 12), or a creature at the crane can raise or lower the rope 20 ft. as a move action.

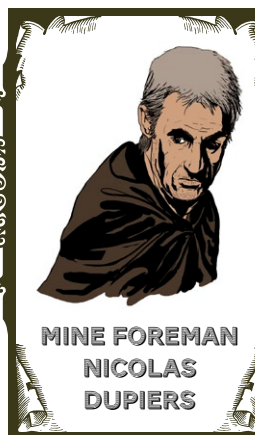
A pair of ropes stretch between two sides of the scaffolding. Normally the miners hung lanterns from here for light, but a daring character could try to walk (Acrobatics DC 19) or climb (Climb DC 12) along the ropes.

The barrels in the high tunnel are filled with lantern oil, and Dupiers rigged them with charges of firedust. A creature can throw or drop a barrel, making a ranged attack roll as though the barrel were an improvised

## WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

The ancient heroes who created the Axis Seal carved runes and symbols into trees as part of the ritual. These carvings, along with specially crafted golden icons, drew a small group of planes to this world. The ancients used magic to turn the trees to stone and lower them into the earth, ensuring a strong connection between the worlds. They then crafted smaller stone pillars, and placed them in a pit beneath the massive golden Axis Seal in the center of the island. This locked the connections in place.

The Danorans dug mines on Axis Island to retrieve iron ore, but Obscurati members guided their excavations toward the locations of the ancient petrified trees. For their ultimate plan, the Obscurati will need to replace the icons each tree is tied to, which is why Nicolas Dupiers has two of them already. The ancients did not know about the sea cave when they lowered this pillar into the earth. The force of tides and erosion broke the pillar, which weakened the world's connection to Avilona, the plane of air. Recall that in ZEITGEIST, flight magic is limited.



MINE FOREMAN  
NICOLAS  
DUPIERS

A white-haired Danoran in his 50s, Dupiers meets the PCs several days after the duchess attacks Axis Island. He ran the iron mines, and is completely unaware of the Obscurati. However, he knew that archaeologists working for the island's military commander—General Alsanor—had found golden icons that resemble coins three sites deep underground. When the fighting began, Dupiers panicked, stole two of these icons, and fled to the mine that contained the third icon, thinking their magic might help him. When he realized they let him see in the dark, he hid in the mine, fearing discovery by Risuri forces.

weapon, dealing 1d8 damage plus your Strength modifier on a hit. If a barrel strikes a creature or solid surface it shatters, and each creature in within 5 ft. takes 1d6 fire damage.

### Aftermath.

If taken alive, Dupiers recounts how, when the island was attacked, he stole the *Golden Icons* from a safe, then fled to the mine. He thinks most of his miners fled into the jungle. If the PCs explain the situation and calm him down, he can guide them safely to the fortress.

Exiting the mine is relatively easy; the industrious Danorans hung signs with handy directions. At the mine's forested exit, however, the party finds a recent mass grave. The PCs find signs that the Danorans tried shooting and hacking at trees, like the forest itself attacked them. A few hours after Dupiers got into the mine, many other Danorans tried to flee there, but dryad allies of the duchess ambushed the men and slew dozens of miners.

## ISLAND MYSTERIES

### Exploration. Montage.

*The oddities on Axis Island make the path to the fortress dangerous.*

The PCs have a few brief encounters on their trip to the fortress. Also, if they are enticed to wander and explore, or if they finish their mission and want to take a look around before leaving, we also provide suggestions for other possible encounters.

### Road Trek.

If the PCs follow the trails and roads from the mine to the central valley, then around the coast to the fortress, they have the following encounters.

**Duchess Patrol.** Occasionally the duchess's forces send out patrols to hunt for Danorans or search Danoran facilities. A typical patrol consists of 1 Rebel Investigators and 4 Rebel Patrolmen. Stats for these enemies are presented in the Sea Gate encounter, below.

At least once while traversing the main road, the PCs get dangerously close to one of these patrols. Have each PC make a Perception or Stealth check (DC 12), or let them devise their own avoidance method. If at least half the party succeeds, they can get away without being spotted.

**Reality Fluctuation.** The PCs are all gripped by vertigo. Their surroundings briefly flicker, revealing a wooded marsh filled with croaking yellow frogs, where a blue sun sets in a purple sky. Then the world snaps back to its normal form. A few PCs' shoes or cloaks are still damp from having fallen into the marsh.





If the PCs wait long enough, a similar event occurs every few hours, each time with a different odd landscape, some not so benign. But all have the same blue sun. That element shows up later at the fortress's observatory, providing a clue to the island's purpose, so make sure to mention it.

**Trap.** The PCs come across an overturned wagon. Swords and fire-arms have spilled out onto the road, but this is a lure to get people to come close. A suspicious PC using *detect magic* can make a Spellcraft check (DC 12) to detect a magical aura infused with wintry cold. Alternately, Perception (DC 19) reveals that the weapons couldn't have fallen where they are; they must have been placed there.

The duchess's forces inscribed runes of warding on the wagon and its spilled contents. If any of the inscribed items are disturbed, all the runes trigger at once. If a PC picks up any of the weapons or examines the wagon, the magical ward activates.

#### Freezing Ward Trap

CR 2

**Type** magical; **Perception** DC 26; **Disable Device** DC 26

**Trigger** touch; **Reset** none

**Effect** Atk +5 melee touch. On a hit, the target takes 1d8 cold damage and is restrained as chains of ice manifest around his arms and legs. The chains are as impressively strong and require a DC 19 Escape Artist check to break out of or must be shattered (20 hp, 4 hardness).

Disabling the trap will let the party loot the wagon for supplies safely. A failed check triggers the trap. Cautious or clever players, of course, could set off the trap from afar.

Truly clever players might try to retrieve the items without triggering the trap (Spellcraft or Disable Device DC 19), though each item has only one ward, which has a lesser effect.

#### Frost Shackle Inscription

Weapon Property (single-use)

**Property** The first time any weapon inscribed with a frost shackle rune hits a target, the rune is expended from all weapons that were inscribed as part of the same trap. The target hit takes an extra 1d6 cold damage and is the subject of a targeted *slow* spell (DC 13 Will to negate).

**Wandering Monster.** The PCs hear metallic grinding and the thump of heavy footsteps coming from the woods, headed vaguely in their direction. Any character with the Spirit Medium theme feat also hears echoes of voices, too many to make out.

If the PCs wait or investigate, they find a huge iron golem lumbering through the forest, missing its head from what looks like a combination of magical rust and an explosion. It leaks black oil that seems to have motes of white light floating inside it. This substance—gloom oil—will make an appearance in Adventure Two, *The Dying Skyseer*, where the PCs will discover that it absorbs the souls of those who die nearby, and that when the oil is burnt these souls provide great magical power.

If any PC gets within 10 ft. of the golem, it blindly swipes at him. There's no reason for the PCs to fight this CR 13 monster, but if they try, they're unlikely to be successful (treat as an iron golem).

#### Wilderness Trek.

If the PCs avoid the roads and just climb over the mountain to reach the fortress, they have the following encounters.

**Fire in the Woods.** At one point a fierce gout of flame bursts up from the trees a hundred feet away, rising fifty feet into the air. It's a solitary event, and while a few trees get slightly scorched, there's absolutely no sign of the fire's source.

**Perilous Terrain.** Descending the mountain is hazardous. Have each PC make a Climb or Survival check (DC 12). If at least half the party succeeds, the whole party avoids injury. Otherwise, each PC takes 1d6 damage from slips and falls.

**Reality Fluctuation.** This encounter happens regardless of which path the PCs take.

**Wandering Monster.** This encounter happens regardless of which path the PCs take.

#### Optional Encounters.

If the PCs go exploring, they might come across these encounters, and you can also re-use encounters from the above treks.

**Abandoned Facility.** There are more than a dozen different villages, mines, light houses, and dig sites on the island. All such places show signs of fighting in the past week, and in many places the bodies of dead Danorans lie in the mud. Each village usually has a small factory, using local magical energies instead of traditional mill or steam power. One factory refines iron and rare gems into the metal adamantium, while others craft huge but perfectly-balanced gears and cogs, or ropey exhaust piping with dozens of small exhaust valves, or other bizarre and advanced arcano-technology. If the PCs poke around too long, a Duchess Patrol might arrive, intent on searching the facility for incriminating evidence.

**Axis Ruins.** Occasionally the PCs might spot a few ancient bricks from crumbled buildings, or find a rock wall carved with primitive designs that resemble men and beasts. On the south of the island, though, a temple survives fairly intact, preserved by layers and layers of ritual magic. The huge compound, an eerily empty marvel of Stone Age architecture, must remain for now an enigma. The designs on the walls come from before the invention of written language, so while clearly this place was very important at one time, its purpose and creators are inscrutable.

**Danorans in Hiding.** About a hundred Danorans hide in scattered pockets in the jungle. The PCs might spot a campfire, or stumble across a hunting or scavenging party in an abandoned facility. The Danorans are easily spooked, and would rather run than fight, but they might be convinced to provide a distraction against the duchess's forces for the PCs.

## AXIS FORTRESS

#### Exploration. Montage. Level 1.

*The PCs sneak inside a Danoran stronghold controlled by the duchess.*

In order for the Risuri navy to attack, the PCs must breach the fortress's outer wall, reach the harbor, activate the sea gate control mechanism in the lighthouse, then signal the fleet and make sure the duchess's forces cannot close the sea gate for ten minutes.

The PCs might just follow the infiltrators' plan (see page 22). But if they aren't particularly stealthy, or if they've managed to lose their supplies, they'll have to come up with a new plan. Also, they might decide to roam, so make sure you're familiar with the fortress's general layout.

#### Fortress Layout.

Axis Fortress has a 60-ft. high **central keep**, topped by an astronomical observatory. A **hedge labyrinth** surrounds that, recently grown by a male dryad-like fey named Gillie Dhu. Barracks and critical supply warehouses are built into the 40-ft. high inner wall.

The outer fortress has dozens of buildings, and is effectively a small town. Many of these buildings were damaged or destroyed in the duchess's assault, and only a few important ones are occupied.



## Axis Island Fortress.



1. Sea Gate
2. Central Keep
3. Passwall
4. Teleportation Circle
5. Makeshift Brig

Namely, a nondescript warehouse houses the fortress's **teleportation circle**. Unlike a normal *teleportation circle* spell, this etched circle on the floor acts as a beacon. Such magic is rare and expensive, but invaluable when transporting large amounts of materiel. Normal teleportation magic is risky on Axis Island and other areas in the Malice Lands, so this beacon serves two functions.

First, any spellcaster who teleports more than a mile at a time and targets a destination within twenty miles of the circle has their spell redirected here. This helps protect the fortress from long-range assaults, whereas the wards in the walls inhibit shorter-range jaunts by enemies already on the island.

Second, a spellcaster who knows the proper arcane password key can use lower level *teleport* spells to create a brief one-way portal that leads safely to the circle. Likewise, a spellcaster standing beside the circle who knows the password key can create a portal and safely teleport off the island. Without the proper key, or especially powerful magic, it is impossible to flee the island by teleportation.

When the duchess attacked, she used a circle key provided by Nathan Jierre to march hundreds of soldiers directly into the fortress. After securing the fortress, she suppressed the teleportation circle with a spell of her own, and placed eighty-nine gold-inlaid blades in and around the circle so that anyone who managed to teleport anyway would be sliced to pieces. As an additional layer of security, she has a dozen guards stationed here, ready to sound an alarm if anything stirs in the circle.

Also, a stable was converted into a **makeshift brig** to house about fifty prisoners who surrendered or were captured for ransom. The prisoners are crammed in tight quarters, and guarded by ten men.

Finally, the sheltered bay is surrounded by a 40-ft. high sea wall. A **sea gate** opens to the north, its control mechanism in the basement of a nearby lighthouse. Currently only a handful of ships sit in the harbor. Several sank in the duchess's assault.

The locations of the outer and inner fort are detailed in Act Three.

### Fantasy Defenses.

Beyond the normal thick walls—sloped and angled to reduce damage from cannons, star-patterned to give defenders wider firing arcs with

### WHAT'S SHE UP TO?

Now that she has Axis Island, the duchess plans to hold it until her own naval reinforcements arrive. Her patrols scour the island, documenting what the Danorans were up to here. Though her assassination attempt failed, she still believes she has solid proof that Danor is a threat, at least enough to get the nobles of Risur to reject her brother's peace plans.

However, ships loyal to the king have been busy keeping the duchess's allies from reaching the island. A whole separate level of unseen conflict is occurring between King Aodhan and the duchess's fey allies; in particular, the king has used subtle magic to hide the approach of his fleet from the aquatic fey the duchess is counting on to warn her of an attack.

Right now the duchess is considering abandoning her position and teleporting back to her stronghold in Shale, but she is not ready yet to abandon land that she claimed for Risur. Indeed, she hopes Danor does try to take back the island, because if she dies it will spur more Risuri to view them as enemies.





muskets—Axis Fortress integrates magical defenses to thwart common fantasy siege tactics. Since Danor does not use magic much itself, most of these defenses were crafted by Drakran dwarves.

Webs of iron bars etched with ritual inscriptions are set within the walls, which generate a slight outward force that weakens the impact of cannons and has the fringe benefit of making it exceedingly difficult to climb. Rings of gold thread weave together deep inside the walls, forming a barrier against teleportation and similar magic. Finally, intermittent pockets of the rare stone opaline acts as a magic sink, absorbing spell energy.

On a more mundane note, the walkways along the tops of the walls and roads near them on the inside are all covered in a patina of light gravel, which crackles underfoot, making it more difficult for people to move about invisibly. The fortress also had many watchdogs trained to attack creatures they could smell and hear but not see, but most of those are dead or in a kennel now.

Lya Jierre provided the RHC with details of a known weak spot in the walls, which is the best spot to use the *passwall* scrolls. In any other location, a *passwall* spell would stop only a few feet into the stone, blocked by a gold ward. This location is marked on the Axis Fort map. Recall that the specially-prepared scrolls do not require a caster level check to use.

The inner walls have no such vulnerable points, and indeed are more resistant to magic. The Risuri military plans to try magic to bypass it when they arrive, but those spells will have no effect.

### Moving About the Fortress.

Once the PCs reach the fortress, they can use a *passwall* scroll to get inside the Outer Fort. The duchess doesn't have enough forces to keep a full look-out, and if the PCs are all natives of Risur they might have the benefit of being able to pass as members of the duchess's forces.

She brought only a few hundred people, though, so people will be wary of unfamiliar faces.

There's not much to be gained by looking around right now, but the party might try to release prisoners as allies, rig up some sort of distraction, or even go confront the duchess and try to talk her down.

As the PCs go through the fortress, they must make skill checks. Keep track of the number of Stealth checks they fail. While the defenders won't chase after every person they might happen to spot in the distance, the more small disturbances occur, the faster the duchess's forces will respond to the PCs revealing themselves.

### FORTRESS SECURITY

Moving between areas requires Stealth checks. Failed Stealth checks increase the alert level, and the higher the alert level, the faster forces will respond when the PCs finally reveal themselves. Most likely the PCs will only reveal themselves once they're at the lighthouse sea gate, but if they make a mess of things early, use the response groups from the Hold the Lighthouse encounter, below.

#### Alert Level

*Secure.* (0 failed Stealth checks) Business as usual.

*Mild Alert.* (1 to 3 failed Stealth checks) Fortress defenders are slightly nervous, but suspect any trouble is a false alarm.

*Elevated Alert.* (4 to 5 failed Stealth checks) Fortress defenders are suspicious of strangers and have weapons close to hand. Increase the DC of Bluff checks by 2.

*High Alert.* (6 or more failed Stealth checks) Fortress defenders are prepared for immediate battle. Increase the DC of Bluff checks by 5.



**Explore Outer Fort.** Each PC must make a Stealth check (DC 8) to avoid being noticed. The PCs become familiar with the layout of the streets and buildings, and learn the two facilities being guarded—the brig and the teleportation circle. They can move to the sea wall without requiring an additional check.

**Get into a Secure Location.** A PC can attempt a Bluff check (DC 12) to get the party access to the brig or the teleportation circle. Failing this check means the PCs have revealed themselves, and response teams will come after them.

Instead, a PC could try to break in. He must make a Disable Device check (DC 20) to open a path for the rest of the party, and with each attempt he must make a Stealth check (DC 8) to avoid attracting attention. Once the way is open, the rest of the party must make Stealth checks of their own to get in.

**Enter Inner Fort.** Stealth (DC 12) for each PC. From here the PCs might survey the hedge labyrinth so they know its layout in advance.

**Enter the Central Keep.** It's very difficult to get to the central keep without Gillie Dhu spotting and confronting them (Stealth DC 19 per PC). A truly brazen PC might try to deceive Gillie Dhu and the guards into letting him and the party through (Bluff DC 19), but if anything goes wrong the PCs will be in no position to flee.

## THE SEA GATE

### Action. Tactical.

The PCs must get past enemy look-outs and get inside a lighthouse to open the sea gate.

### Rebel Wizard

### Pseudodragon

### Rebel Investigator

### 5 Rebel Patrolmen

### Rebel Soldier

Once the PCs get to the harbor, they can easily get onto the sea wall. From there, it's 300 ft. to the lighthouse. However, a wizard in the lighthouse will make their approach difficult if he spots them, and a handful of workers and look-outs are active on the sea wall, searching a docked ship.

If combat breaks out, the lighthouse wizard will ring a bell to alert the main fortress, which counts as a failed Stealth check for determining the Alert Level. If the PCs are very sneaky, they might manage to take the lighthouse without an alarm going up, giving them a chance to rest for a few minutes before they reveal themselves by opening the sea gate and using *pyrotechnics* to signal the fleet.

### Methods of Approach.

The cleverest method might be to use *water breathing*, swim up to the lighthouse, sneak in, and assassinate the wizard and his guards.

The PCs could try to sneak along the sea wall (Stealth DC 14 or lower). The defenders are unlikely to pay attention to anyone more than a 100 ft. away (i.e., off the battle map). Gaslight lamps every 60 ft. each illuminate 20 ft. in every direction, leaving small pockets of shadow between them. People might not notice if a couple lamps flickered out—snuffed by cantrips or precise bowshots. Alternately, the PCs could try to con their way in (Bluff DC 19 or lower).

If the PCs get to the lighthouse without starting a fight, the moment they open the sea gate or fire off a signal, the local defenders will try to stop them. More likely, though, the PCs will tip their hand and combat will begin. Before they go in, it might be an ideal time to quaff a potion of *aid*, since they can expect a fight.



### Rebel Wizard

CR ½ • XP 200

Male human Wizard 1

N Medium Humanoid (human)

**Init** +2; **Senses** Perception +1

#### Defense

**AC** 13, touch 13, flat-footed 10 (+2 Dex, +1 dodge)

**hp** 9 (1d6+3)

**Fort** +2, **Ref** +2, **Will** +2

#### Offense

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** dagger –1 (1d4–1/19–20)

**Special Attacks** hand of the apprentice (5/day)

**Wizard Spells Prepared** (CL 1st; concentration +3)

**1st**—*feather fall*, *shocking grasp*

**0**—*detect magic*, *ray of frost*, *resistance*

#### Statistics

**Str** 8, **Dex** 14, **Con** 14, **Int** 15, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 13

**Base Atk** +0; **CMB** –1; **CMD** 12

**Feats** Dodge, Eschew Materials, Scribe Scroll

**Skills** Diplomacy +2, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Knowledge (planes) +6, Perception +1, Spellcraft +6

**SQ** arcane bond (ring), nature sense, wild empathy +1

**Languages** Common, Elven, Dwarven

**Combat Gear** *potion of cure light wounds*, *scroll of mage armor*, *scroll of magic missile* (2); **Other Gear** dagger, robes



**Pseudodragon**

CR 1 • XP 400

NG Tiny dragon

**Init** +2; **Senses** blindsense 60ft., darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +6**Defense****AC** 16, touch 14, flat-footed 14 (+2 Dex, +2 natural, +2 size)**hp** 15 (2d12+2)**Fort** +4, **Ref** +5, **Will** +4**Immune** paralysis, sleep; **SR** 12**Offense****Speed** 15 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)**Melee** sting +6 (1d3–2 plus poison), bite +6 (1d2–2)**Space** 2½ ft.; **Reach** 0 ft. (5 ft. with tail)**Statistics****Str** 7, **Dex** 15, **Con** 13, **Int** 10, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 10**Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 10 (14 vs. trip)**Feats** Weapon Finesse**Skills** Diplomacy +5, Fly +15, Perception +6, Sense Motive +6, Stealth +19 (+23 in forests), Survival +6; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Stealth (improves to +8 in forests)**Languages** Draconic; telepathy (60 ft.)**Rebel Investigator**

CR ½ • XP 200

Male human Druid 1

CN Medium Humanoid (human)

**Init** +1; **Senses** Perception +6**Defense****AC** 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14 (+4 armor, +1 Dex)**hp** 14 (1d8+6)**Fort** +4, **Ref** +1, **Will** +4**Offense****Speed** 30 ft.**Melee** club +2 (1d6+2)**Special Attacks** storm burst (1d6 nonlethal damage, 5/day)**Druid Spells Prepared** (CL 1st; concentration +3)1st—*faerie fire*, *shillelagh*0—*create water*, *detect poison*, *mending***Statistics****Str** 14, **Dex** 13, **Con** 14, **Int** 8, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 10**Base Atk** +0; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 13**Feats** Combat Casting, Toughness**Skills** Knowledge (nature) +5, Perception +6, Spellcraft +3, Stealth –1, Survival +4**SQ** nature bond (Weather domain), nature sense, wild empathy +1**Languages** Common**Combat Gear** *potion of cure light wounds*; **Other Gear** hide armor, club**Rebel Patrolmen (5)**

CR ½ • XP 135 each

Male human warrior 1

LN Medium Humanoid (human)

**Init** +1; **Senses** Perception –1**Defense****AC** 14, touch 11, flat-footed 13 (+3 armor, +1 Dex)**hp** 12 each (1d10+2)**Fort** +3, **Ref** +3, **Will** –1**Offense****Speed** 30 ft.**Melee** longsword +1 (1d8 / 19–20)**Ranged** light crossbow +2 (1d8 / 19–20)**Statistics****Str** 11, **Dex** 13, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 9, **Cha** 8**Base Atk** +1; **CMB** +1; **CMD** 12**Feats** Lightning Reflexes, Point Blank Shot**Skills** Climb +3, Survival +0, Swim +3**Languages** Common**Other Gear** studded leather, longsword, light crossbow**Rebel Soldier**

CR ½ • XP 200

Male human fighter 1

LN Medium Humanoid (human)

**Init** +1; **Senses** Perception +1**Defense****AC** 17, touch 11, flat-footed 16 (+6 armor, +1 Dex)**hp** 17 (1d10+7)**Fort** +5, **Ref** +1, **Will** +1**Offense****Speed** 20 ft.**Melee** glaive +4 (1d10+3 / ×3)**Statistics****Str** 15, **Dex** 13, **Con** 16, **Int** 10, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 8**Base Atk** +1; **CMB** +3; **CMD** 14**Feats** Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (glaive)**Skills** Intimidate +3, Survival +5, Swim +1**Languages** Common**Combat Gear** *potion of cure light wounds*; **Other Gear** chainmail, glaive**Set-Up.**

One rebel patrolman stands guard inside the ground level of the lighthouse, while the rebel wizard watches from the window one floor up. His pet pseudodragon naps beside him. A patrolman stands watch near each of the three lamp posts on the map. The remaining patrolman is on the ship and gangplank down the ramp to the left. The investigator is directing a search of the ship, while the rebel soldier is smoking a pipe at the bend in the ramp switchback.

**Tactics.**

The patrolmen hang back, trying to shoot from cover as much as possible—behind lamp posts, doors, or barrels. The investigator links up with the soldier and they advance as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, the lighthouse wizard blasts from relative safety. When the wizard is reduced below half hit points, or if the PCs breach the tower, he and his pseudodragon move downstairs to back up the patrolman.

Bear in mind the elevation differences; a shooter at sea level might not be able to target someone on the outer side of the sea wall.



### Terrain.

A lamp post, door, and windows provides cover. The sloped ramp down to the inner harbor provides a good venue for rolling barrels down at foes (+4 ranged attack; 1d6+1 damage and knocked prone). If the fight happens to reach the top floor of the lighthouse, anyone in the path of the light is blinded, and the beacon turns 90 degrees at the start of each turn.

The highest ledges of the sea wall have chest-high stone railings, so forced movement can't slide PCs into the ocean, at least not easily.

If the PCs investigate the pallets on the docked ship, they find crates full of firedust, just waiting to be detonated with a little fire damage. The explosion hits everyone within 5-ft., does 1d6 points of fire damage, and turns the ship's deck catches fire, dealing 1d6 damage to any creature that enters or starts its turn there.

The bottom floor of the lighthouse contains the sea gate mechanism and a small hearth for warmth. A closet leads to a cluttered storage basement, too tight for much combat, but with plenty of odd things PCs might use as barricades or traps in the next encounter.

**Sea Gate Mechanism.** Operating the sea gate mechanism is quite easy. A single standard action lets a PC turn some valves, open a safety latch, and pull a lever, which starts the sea gate moving with a loud mechanical clanking sure to alert anyone nearby. It takes a minute for the gate to open enough to let a ship through.

### Aftermath.

The next encounter starts as soon as the PCs open the gate or signal their allies. A very stealthy party might manage to secure the lighthouse without an alarm being raised, and could rest briefly. Otherwise, enemies are on the way, leaving no time to rest.

## HOLD THE LIGHTHOUSE

### Action. Real-Time.

*The PCs must defend the lighthouse as the fortress's defenders try to close the sea gate.*

When the PCs launch *pyrotechnics* to alert the navy, an alarm goes up, and fortress defenders move toward the mainland end of the sea wall in preparation of an attack on the lighthouse. The PCs have limited time to prepare. They have to defend their position for ten minutes, long enough for reinforcements to arrive.

We present this scene as a quick, tense skill encounter, which should make the whole thing go by much faster than if you choose to run a traditional combat.

### Hold the Lighthouse (CR 1 Skill Encounter).

You can see enemy forces gathering in the distance. You have limited time to prepare yourself, but a little ingenuity might negate the need for a fight.

**Key Skills:** Bluff, Constitution, Craft (Trapmaking), Diplomacy, Knowledge (Engineering), Intimidate, Sleight of Hand, Spellcraft, Stealth, Strength

**Difficulty:** Unless otherwise noted, all skill checks are DC 15.

In this encounter, the PCs want to ensure the sea gate remains open so their allies can storm the fort. They are contested by enemy forces trying to reach the controls for the sea gate and close it. The enemy forces come in waves, and the PCs have time before each wave to prepare defenses.

## FOR ALL THE WARGAMERS OUT THERE.

If you think your players would get a kick out of a "defend the base" combat, you can use stats from the previous encounter to create waves of enemies. The PCs have a few rounds to set up barricades and possibly even traps. Use the skill challenge timeline and alert level to determine how much lead time the party has.

• **Wave A.** 8 Rebel Patrolmen and 2 Rebel Soldiers.

• **Wave B.** 1 Rebel Investigators, 2 Rebel Soldiers, and 12 Rebel Patrolmen.

• **Wave C.** 2 Pseudodragons, 1 Rebel Wizard, and 3 Rebel Soldiers, and 12 Rebel Patrolmen.

Putting several combats in a row could be a bit of a grind, though, and the enemies are all fairly faceless, so if you plan to run this scene as a traditional combat, you can give it more emotional impact by making NPCs whom the players will want to thwart. Perhaps as they sneak through the fort they spot a smarmy military officer making a pair of Danoran scullery maids fight each other with knives for the amusement of him and his men. The PCs would be in no position to attack a large force out in the open, but now that they have walls to protect them, it could be satisfying to get some revenge.

The PCs can lay traps, set up barricades, actively attack, or otherwise fend off the enemies' advance. If the enemies defeat the PCs, they can close the sea gate and make it much harder for the party's allies to attack.

**Victory:** The PCs win if the sea gate is open at the end of Round Ten or any round thereafter. Their allies sail through and provide enough reinforcements that the duchess's forces cannot manage to retake the lighthouse.

**Failure:** The PCs lose if they are all knocked unconscious, surrender, or flee, and the sea gate is closed.

### Passage of Time.

Every minute of the encounter is one "round," and each PC can take one action per round. PCs can also cast spells or use potions/scrolls to heal or prevent damage, in addition to their primary action; the amount of time required is inconsequential in the span of a one minute "round." However, for each spell cast (or other thing that takes a standard action), the PC takes a -1 penalty to his or her check on that round.

### Locations.

There are three locations in this skill challenge: the sea wall, outside the lighthouse, and inside the lighthouse. Keep track of where each enemy group is.

When PCs take their actions they can move to any location, but they remain in that location until the start of their next turn. If a PC wants to set up a trap on the sea wall, for instance, he risks being caught in the open by approaching enemies.

If getting to a location would require moving through a location currently occupied by enemies, the PC must make a Stealth check (DC 8). This does not count as his action for the round, but if he fails, he gets stuck in the enemies' location. If that happens, he can choose a different action, to try to make the best of a bad situation.



**Sea Wall.**

This location is too large to barricade effectively.

**Outside the Lighthouse**

This location can have no more than 20 points of barricade at a time.

**Inside the Lighthouse**

This location can have no more than 10 points of barricade at a time. If the lighthouse has more than 5 points of barricade, PCs cannot easily move into or out of the lighthouse. If an ally can throw a rope down from a window, the PC can get inside, but both PCs involved take a -5 penalty to their actions for the round.

**Enemy Forces.**

Three waves of enemy forces are on their way. Mechanically, each wave consists of a number of enemies. As the PCs use their actions to kill enemies, you can use the suggested compositions in the sidebar on page 31 to help flavor your descriptions.

**Wave A.** 5 enemies. Arrives on the sea wall at the start of round 1.

**Wave B.** 10 enemies. Arrives on the sea wall at the start of round 4.

**Wave C.** 16 enemies. Arrives on the sea wall at the start of round 7.

If the PCs manage to defeat a given wave they might have some time to prepare for the next one. If a latter wave reaches the location of an earlier wave, combine them into one group.

**Timeline.** The alert level when the PCs reached the lighthouse adjusts the arrival times of the waves. If Secure (0 failed Stealth checks), delay each wave's arrival by 3 rounds. If Mild (1-3 failed checks), delay the wave by 2 rounds. If Elevated (4-5), delay by 1 round. If High alert, use the base time.

**Enemy Actions.** After the PCs take their actions, the enemies act. Various PC actions can destroy enemy units, but to reflect the simultaneity of the scene, an enemy that is destroyed still gets to act on the turn. It is then removed at the end of the turn.

When enemies act, they move as far as they can, but they cannot enter a location with a barricade, and they stop if they reach a location with a PC, trap, or ward.

If they stop next to a barricade, they first work to remove the barricade. Each enemy reduces a given barricade by 1 point. When the barricade is reduced to 0, it is destroyed.

Then, if they are in a location that contains a PC, for each enemy that didn't use its turn to remove barricades, one PC in the location takes 2 damage. If there are multiple PCs in the area, the PCs divide the enemies' attacks as they choose among themselves.

Finally, for every enemy who still hasn't acted, one PC in an adjacent location takes 1 damage from enemy ranged attacks. The enemies can only affect PCs inside the lighthouse if those PCs spent their action to attack this turn. (Otherwise the PC is considered safe behind walls.)

PCs reduced to 0 hit points this way automatically stabilize and can be revived by healing.

**Suggested Character Actions.**

You may want to remind your players that they can always aid their allies if their own skill modifiers are too low to have much chance of succeeding alone.

**Assemble Barricade.** (Strength or Knowledge [Engineering]) A PC hurriedly piles whatever's at hand to halt the enemies' advance. The PC creates 3 points worth of barricade inside the lighthouse, or 2 points of barricade outside the lighthouse. A failed check places 1 point of barricade.

A PC cannot assemble a barricade in a location already occupied by enemies, and there is not enough material to effectively barricade the sea wall.

**Battle.** (Special) The PC does not have to make a check to perform this action. Instead, he must have a combat action (melee, ranged, or spell—even a cantrip) that can affect an enemy in range. Melee attacks work if the PC ends his turn in the same location as the enemies.

The PC kills 1 enemy. If he describes a particularly effective strategy or gambit, he might at your discretion kill 2 enemies.

A PC in the lighthouse can make a Stealth check (DC 18) to snipe and move to cover when attacking enemies outside the lighthouse or on the sea wall. If successful, he takes no damage from any ranged counterattacks.

**Boiling Oil.** (Special) This action can only be done once, and only has an effect if enemies are right outside the lighthouse. No check is required, but three PCs must be in the lighthouse and must all use this action in the same round to have any effect. The PCs use the lighthouse beacon's brazier and supplies of fuel to create a pan of boiling oil, which they pour out the window, searing anyone in front of the entrance. This kills 5 enemies.

As with Battle, a PC can attempt Stealth to reduce damage from counterattacks.

**Brace.** (Strength or Constitution DC 10) The PC must be inside the lighthouse to use this action. By using his own force to hold barricades in place, he makes it harder for enemies to get through. The first 2 enemies who try to remove barricades this round have no effect.

**Sabotage the Gate.** (Special) A PC with the Technologist theme feat does not have to make a check to perform this action. Other PCs must make an Intelligence check (DC 15). If successful, the PC damages the controls of the sea gate mechanism. Even if the PCs are defeated by the enemy forces, it takes 2 rounds for the enemies to repair the damage and close the sea gate, giving reinforcements more time to get in.

**Set Trap.** (Craft (Trapmaking) or Disable Device) A PC uses available materials (weapons, ropes, loose stones, supplies from storage) to assemble a crude trap that lasts until the end of the encounter or until expended. A PC cannot assemble a trap in a location already occupied by enemies. When the enemies reach that location, the trap is expended and kills 1 enemy.

**Set Ward.** (Spellcraft) As Set Trap, except a PC scratches some sigils into a surface and uses one of his spells to prepare a temporary trap that lasts until the end of the encounter or until expended. To use this action, the PC must have a spell available that deals damage. Even a cantrip works.

**Stall.** (Diplomacy or Intimidate) The PC shouts to the approaching enemies, perhaps to try to convince them to surrender, to negotiate a feigned surrender of the PCs, to cow them into holding off for reinforcements, or to create a hostage situation. If the check succeeds, no enemies advance this round.

Increase the DC by 2 for each previous round the enemies were stalled.

## SMALLER OR LARGER PARTIES.

Reduce Waves A, B, and C by 1, 2, and 4 enemies each for each PC fewer than five, and increase likewise for larger parties. A party of seven PCs, for instance, would face 7, 14, and 24 enemies.



If the PC is using Diplomacy, increase the DC by 2 if the party attacks at all this turn. If the PC is using Intimidate, increase the DC by 2 if the party *doesn't* attack at all this turn.

If the PCs have hostages, they get a +5 bonus to checks to Stall. If the stalling PC lies (such as to feign surrender, or to fake having hostages), he must also make a Bluff check (DC 12) or the Stall attempt fails.

Multiple PCs can try to Stall. Only one needs to succeed to stop the enemy advance.

### Complications and Lucky Breaks.

If things are going too easily for the PCs and you want to ratchet up the tension, or if you want to cut them some slack, consider these options.

**Extra Enemies.** The simplest option is to add an extra wave of enemies equal to the number of PCs in the party. This might be necessary if it hits round 7 and the party has 30 points of barricade up.

**Invisible Ambush.** If no PC spots them (Perception DC 19), a pair of pseudodragons fly up the side of the tower, break through the windows, and get inside the lighthouse. Place 2 enemies in the lighthouse. This might provide enough of a disruption for the next wave to get close and assault the lighthouse doors.

**Surrender or He Dies!** If a PC is knocked out in an area occupied by enemies, the enemy leader might put a sword to the PC's throat and threaten to kill him unless the rest of the party surrenders. Be careful if you think your players might resent being sentenced to death by their "friends."

**Unnatural Wave.** At the start of the round, the PCs spot a sudden disturbance on the coastline, as the local planar fluctuations cause a hundred foot high shaft of amber to erupt out of the sea floor, then disappear just as suddenly. A massive wave rushes toward the sea wall, and at the end of the round it hits. The wave deals 2d6 damage to each PC on the sea wall, and it kills half of the enemy forces on the sea wall.

### Aftermath.

If the PCs win this challenge, allied ships sail into the harbor, and archers and mages on-deck attack any remaining enemy forces. Within a few minutes, soldiers reach the lighthouse to reinforce it, and military doctors and druidic healers start to tend to the PCs' wounds. Each PC is healed back to full hit points, but then they only get a brief respite before the beginning of Act Three.

If the PCs fail, the sea gate slams shut, and the PCs are carted off in shackles to the makeshift prison in the outer fort. It takes several hours for the navy to maneuver to shore and prepare a ground assault. It's nearly sunrise by the time the PCs are rescued, and their allies have already suffered hundreds of casualties. When they're rescued, doctors and healers tend to them, as above.



## HOLD THE LIGHTHOUSE.

### On the Sea Wall.

Cannot be barricaded.

### Outside Lighthouse.

Can have up to 20 points of barricades.

### Inside Lighthouse.

Can have up to 10 points of barricades. PCs can't enter or leave the area if there are more than 5 points of barricades.

### Conducting the Encounter.

**Timeline.** Each round is one minute. Allies arrive in round ten, and if the sea gate is open, the PCs win. Each round, first all the PCs act, then all enemies act. Enemies that are destroyed still act and are removed at the end of the round. PCs reduced to 0 HP or less automatically stabilize.

**Tracking Locations.** Place PC minis in the appropriate area whenever they move. Use coins or dice to keep track of how many enemies are in each area.

**PC Turn.** PCs move to an area, then take one action. Suggested actions include:

*Assemble Barricade.* Strength or Knowledge (Engineering) DC 15. Create 3 points of barricade inside lighthouse, or 2 points outside lighthouse. On a failed check, create 1 point. Area must have no enemies.

*Battle.* No check or attack roll required. Destroy 1 enemy, or 2 if clever or daring.

*Brace.* Strength or Constitution DC 10. Barricade in your area resists first 2 points of enemy action this turn.

*Set Trap or Ward.* Craft (Trapmaking), Disable Device, or Spellcraft DC 15. When enemies enter this area, destroy 1 enemy. The trap is expended.

*Stall.* Diplomacy or Intimidate DC 15. Enemies don't advance this turn. +2 DC per round.

PCs can also cast spells or use potions/scrolls to heal or prevent damage without having to spend extra actions, but each such effort incurs -1 penalty to skill check for that turn.

**Enemy Turn.** Enemies move as far as they can toward the lighthouse interior. They stop when they reach a location with a PC, trap, or ward. If there are any barricades in an area, they stop *before* entering that area.

Then for each enemy, act in the following order.

Remove 1 point of barricade from an adjacent area until there are no adjacent barricades.

Deal 2 damage to a PC that shares the area with the enemy. PCs can choose who among them take the damage.

Deal 1 damage to a PC in another area.





# ACT THREE: UNDER THE WHEEL OF STARS

## HIGH ELF DREADNOUGHT ASRABEY VARAL

A CENTURIES-OLD HIGH ELF WARRIOR, Asrabey was born shortly after the death of the goddess Srasama. When he was old enough, he became one of the many husbands of Kasvarina Varal, a powerful matriarch who had survived the Great Malice. Kasvarina was unable to have children, and she encouraged Asrabey's resentment of the humans who had sentenced their people to death. For years he trained, and undertook many daring raids until he became famous as one of the greatest high elf warriors in the world.



Eventually Kasvarina and her clan realized that they needed to be more discreet to survive humanity's hunt of them. Asrabey left Elfaivar and offered his services to the Unseen Court, though he has kept a much lower profile for the past two hundred years. The fey lords have been content to squabble amongst themselves, and have only called upon Asrabey when someone of prominence in Risur starts to scheme against them.

Asrabey has not seen Kasvarina for fifty years, and he has not the slightest inkling of her affiliation with the Obscurati. He might respect a few humans from Risur, but he hopes that someday Kasvarina will come to him and ask him to lead a final war of retribution against the Clergy that ruined their race, and the nation of Danor, whose tiefling leaders bear the mark of their crime.

Asrabey is supposed to be much more powerful than the party under normal circumstances, but because he has to fight so many to get to the duchess, the PCs will have a chance to take him down.

Asrabey is a 15th level character who, by the time he reaches the duchess, is down to 1 hit point. His defenses are nearly unhittable, but the party can defeat him with a natural 20, abilities that damage without an attack roll, or by various clever tricks. Combat is likely to be fast and brutal, since if they don't drop him, Asrabey can easily take down one PC per round.

In essence, the PCs should be scared to engage with Asrabey and likely will not have sufficient powers to realize how wounded the high elf actually is. GMs should subtly help PCs understand that fighting Asrabey is a gambit that could end with multiple deaths!

In this act the party helps take down the duchess and confronts a daunting emissary of the Unseen Court.

## THE ASSAULT

### Social/Exposition. Montage.

*The PCs rest for an hour as their allies muster and assault the fortress.*

Risuri warships sail into the harbor, firing cannons, arrows, and spells at the duchess's forces who dare to break from cover. The duchess's forces fall back to the walls of the Outer Fort while ships line up out the mouth of the harbor. Crews lash gangplanks from prow to stern so a thousand soldiers can march to the mainland.

### The Second Invasion in a Week.

Axis Fortress still has damage from the last time it was sacked, and so the Risuri loyalist forces have several options for breaching the defenses. They outnumber the duchess's forces five to one, and plan to quickly climb over the walls with the aid of siege engines they brought on the lead ships.

The fort is designed to be defended by people with muskets and cannons, weapons the duchess's forces aren't well-trained with, so the outer wall will be overcome within an hour. The inner wall is a tougher nut to crack, however, and so the plan is basically to surround it and assault different sides in turn, then fall back, forcing the defenders to rush from battle to battle. This should eventually cause them to leave an opening that can be exploited, while minimizing casualties to loyalist forces.

If the PCs failed to open the sea gate, though, the duchess's forces have more time to prepare and attack incoming siege engines, which makes it much harder for loyalist forces to breach the outer fort.

### Mission's Not Over.

The PCs have a chance to rest, and after about half an hour Captain Rutger Smith of the *Impossible* arrives at the lighthouse to speak with them and get a report. He offers them all cigars, but tells them not to smoke them until the mission is fully complete. He explains that with the tragic death of the infiltrators, they're technically the highest authority for non-military matters, so it's their responsibility to deal with the duchess once the soldiers reach her. Captain Smith suspects she'll hole up in the central keep, but the military should be able to surround her within a few hours.

If the PCs seem reticent to stay involved (such as if they're out of spells or consumables), they can arrange to get a small military escort of one Allied Soldier apiece. You can use the stats below, which we provide in printer-friendly format at the end of the adventure.

Alternately, if you prefer simpler rules with fewer minis in combat, you can give the PCs access to the following two abilities to represent the involvement of their allied soldier.

**Allied Soldier Defense (Ex)** Your allied soldier is on guard, providing warnings and a handy shield. You gain a +2 bonus to AC and to saving throws.

If you are knocked unconscious, the allied soldier stabilizes and protects you.





You can also have your allied soldier suffer the effect of an attack in your place. The attack does nothing to you, but your allied soldier is incapacitated until he can get a few minutes to rest and heal out of combat. While your allied soldier is incapacitated, you lose the Allied Soldier Offense ability and the AC bonus and stabilization options of this ability. If you have your soldier suffer the effect of an attack a second time in the same combat, he is killed, and you lose this ability.

**Allied Soldier Offense (Ex)** Your allied soldier assists you when you attack. You gain a +2 bonus to your melee attack rolls. Once per combat, you can have your allied soldier hurl a flask of alchemist's fire (+2 ranged touch attack). The soldier makes no other attacks.

**Meet the Grunts:** Sergeant Glassman reports for duty to the PCs, and introduces the rest of his small detachment of warriors, who will be the party's allied soldiers.

Glassman has taken a vow of total honesty, which makes him appear rather fatalistic. If the PCs direct him and his men into harm's way, he'll remind them that it's likely they'll be responsible for his death. He'll obey orders, but he occasionally chimes in with off-color comments (e.g., if they're going to send someone into danger, he'll suggest, "Send Private Waterhouse first. I don't much like the guy.>").

The corporal has just finished introductions when a commotion draws the party's attention outside.

#### Allied Soldier

CR ½ • XP 135 each

Male human warrior 1

LN Medium Humanoid (human)

**Init** +1; **Senses** Perception –1

#### Defense

**AC** 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15 (+4 armor, +1 Dex, +1 shield)

**hp** 12 each (1d10+2)

**Fort** +3, **Ref** +1, **Will** –1

#### Offense

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** longsword +1 (1d8 / 19–20)

**Ranged** light crossbow +2 (1d8 / 19–20)

#### Statistics

**Str** 11, **Dex** 13, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 9, **Cha** 8

**Base Atk** +1; **CMB** +1; **CMD** 12

**Feats** Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot

**Skills** Climb +1, Ride +2, Stealth –1

**Languages** Common

**Combat Gear** *potion of cure light wounds*, alchemist's fire (3); **Other Gear** chain shirt, buckler, longsword, light crossbow

## THE DREADNOUGHT

### Action. Real-Time.

*A servant of the Unseen Court, high elf warrior Asrabey Varal, makes an imposing and dramatic arrival.*

Gunshots and screams of panic sound from one of the Risuri ships in harbor, hundreds of feet away from the lighthouse. A few flashes of fire light up the night, and then a massive ball of flame engulfs the ship. Smoke billows upward as the rigging catches ablaze, and the party can faintly make out a humanoid figure striding across the burning deck. He points a flaming sword and sweeps it in an arc toward the sea wall. All of the gas lamps shatter and go dark.

This is Asrabey Varal, armed with a sword of pure fire and a lion-faced shield that can fly and bite his enemies. He then leaps thirty feet from the ship to the sea wall, and his cloak transforms into a cloud of smoke, making him practically invisible in the night.

All this transpires in two rounds, too fast for the PCs to get close enough for a fight.

Asrabey stowed away aboard one of the warships headed for Axis Island, using fey magic to remain invisible in the hold. Once the assault began and the crew disembarked, he left his hiding place, but was confronted by the remaining crew. Refusing to be delayed, he slew the men and used a spell to set fire to the ship, hoping the demonstration of his power would make others hesitate to stand in his way.

A few sailors on nearby ships saw what happened, and if the PCs question them they describe the high elf as if he were an invincible demigod. They say he was shot by three men but did not flinch, and that his shield flew from his hand to maul a druid who might have had the magical power to stand against him. Messengers have already set off running to alert the rest of the military. The ship takes an hour to burn to a husk, by which time rowboats have nudged it away from the rest of the fleet.

**Character Knowledge.** From their own distant observations, or by examining the ship before it becomes too inflamed to be safe, the party might draw some conclusions.

- ♦ **Knowledge (Arcana).** DC 10: The magic used is fey in origin.
- ♦ **Knowledge (Arcana).** DC 15: The spellcaster was likely a high elf, probably a Vekeshi mystic, based on patterns of scorch marks and the way tongues of the still-active fire takes the shape of hands. A PC with the Vekeshi Mystic theme feat doesn't need to make a check to know this.
- ♦ **Knowledge (History).** DC 10: The attacker had a flaming sword and a flying shield. There was a fey warrior who matched that description at a battle two hundred years ago, in the First Yerasol War.
- ♦ **Knowledge (History).** DC 15: His name was Asrabey, and he fought to rescue a high elf woman who was captured by a Danoran general. He aided the Risuri forces indirectly, but was not technically an ally.
- ♦ **Perception.** DC 10: The warrior's flaming sword switched shapes between a short blade and some sort of long flaming flail or whip.
- ♦ **Perception.** DC 15: There is just a little fresh blood on the sea wall, probably from the attacker.

If PCs succeed the hard (DC 15) checks for both Knowledge checks (Arcana and History), they can put together that Asrabey works for the Unseen Court, though they can only speculate for now why he's here. You might also remind them that the duchess has been Risur's liaison to the Unseen Court for decades.

**Pursuit.** Asrabey is heading at break-neck speed for where the Risuri loyalists are setting up their siege engines. He'll rush to the top of one of those engines as it nears the fort's outer wall, killing anyone who gets in his way. Then he leaps with magical force over the wall and cuts through swaths of the duchess's warriors who make the mistake of attacking him on the far side.

From there he runs to the nondescript warehouse in the outer fort that conceals the teleportation circle and disables the defenses the duchess put up around it. His plan is to go to a less-defended section of the inner wall, where he will unleash the power of an ancient magical item to get him into the inner fort. He runs along the tops of the hedges of Gille Dhu's labyrinth, setting it afire, then jumps to the outer wall of the central keep. He *spider climbs* to a window and tears free stones in the wall



until he finds the gold thread designed to block teleportation. He rips the golden ward out, teleports through the window, and battles his way to the top floor of the keep.

He plans to confront and kill the duchess, leave a scroll containing a letter for King Aodhan atop her body, and then rush back to the warehouse with the teleportation circle, and *teleport* to the mainland using a brief ritual taught to him by his lords in the Unseen Court.

It's not particularly feasible for the party to pursue Asrabey, especially not through the battle going on at the outer wall. The adventure assumes that the party will next cross paths with him as he breaches the inner wall (see *Immurement*, below), but the party might wander into the same location he is before then. Asrabey cares only that his mission is not stopped, so he prefers to just avoid combat and conversation if possible. If his movement is blocked he will cut down one or two PCs, then flee over their bodies, unconcerned about opportunity attacks.

## BRIG AND BELLIGERENCE

### Social. Real-Time.

*The PCs question Danoran prisoners.*

About an hour later, a courier finds the PCs and reports that they've found a makeshift brig housing dozens of Danoran prisoners the duchess had captured. Twelve of them are tieflings, and so they thought the party might want to check to see if Nathan Jierre is among them.

The courier can guide the PCs (and their allied soldiers) to the brig, a stable that was hastily converted with iron bars to make cells out of animal pens. Along the way they spot a lot of wounded, a few dead on their side, and slightly more dead on the duchess's side. The soldiers are busy disassembling their siege engines, hoisting them over the outer wall, and reassembling them on the far side, all by torch or lantern light, and while ducking the occasional magical missile or arrow fired from the inner wall.

The brig itself sits about 200 ft. from the inner wall, but at a location with minimal fighting. Inside, a single wounded soldier and a handful of enlisted sailors are trying to take a survey of the prisoners, but between the cacophony of livestock and the angered shouts of nearly a hundred Danorans, they're making slow progress.

Infantryman Sander Wodeham took an arrow through his hand, and so was assigned here. He says he was told to convince the Danorans to provide information that might make breaching the inner wall easier. Plus his superiors want a recommendation whether it's safe to release

the Danorans and just keep them under watch, so the actual cells could be used to house prisoners from the duchess's forces. Wodeham gladly passes this task off to the PCs.

### The Jail Boss.

Nathan Jierre is not here, but if the PCs can get the Danorans talking, they can learn what happened to him. Getting them talking could be tough, though.

Danorans think of Duchess Ethelyn of Shale as an infamous enemy, so when it was clear that the fortress was lost, many soldiers retreated into the island to prepare a guerilla campaign. Those who stayed behind were mostly non-combatants—cooks, maids, factory workers, and such.

Only one officer was taken captive: **Lieutenant Hessar Marseine** took shrapnel to his eye and was unconscious when brought to the brig. The lieutenant has the respect and obedience of the other prisoners, and he has ordered them not to answer Risuri questions or help in any way. If the PCs want any information they're going to have to convince Marseine first.

If the PCs start asking questions, the crowd of prisoners yell at them until finally Marseine stands and gestures for them to be quiet. He says they should listen to what the PCs have to say before jumping to conclusions. In truth, though, this is just a polite and reasonable face. Marseine has a short temper and is willing to fight at the slightest provocation. He just wants out of the cell first.

### Negotiating.

Marseine already knows the basic story of who's attacking whom and why. He says he'd be willing to have his people provide help, on the condition that any Danoran who's willing be given weapons and allowed to join the fight against the duchess's forces. He insists on a show of good faith—he wants a pistol, a musket, and a sword—before his people will talk.

Marseine's cooperative if the party gives him what he wants, but if they mock him, question his combat skill, or even just remind him that he's in the brig because of a dumb accident, he'll get snippy, and will start to take everything in the worst light possible. If not handled gently, he might threaten a PC, possibly even attack one if provoked. This could ruin the party's ability to get some useful information.

### What they Know.

If the PCs manage to get the prisoners to talk, they report that the duchess's initial assault used the teleportation circle located inside the walls of the fort. No one out of the group here knows much about how magic works, but they were led to understand that the key to activate the portal was secret. They suspect someone on the inside betrayed them. They can show the party in person or on a map.

Additionally, Lieutenant Marseine has a key to the roof door of the central keep, hidden under a pile of hay in his cell. An architect prisoner knows the route of the sewer system under the keep, and could provide a map to let PCs sneak into the basement of the central keep, avoiding the hedge maze labyrinth. The map starts in any of several buildings in the Outer Fort, and the only obstacle in the way to the central keep is some stinking offal and a couple of iron grates. Removing them triggers alarms, but the duchess's forces don't know enough about the fort to respond to the breach.

The only Danoran officer on Axis Island taken captive when the duchess invades, Marseine has a wretched wound to his eye where he took shrapnel from an exploding musket. Several generations of his ancestors died in wars against Risur, and he eagerly served in the Fourth Yerasol War, excited for the chance to repay his grudge.

The duchess's assault has caused his anger to flare back, and he's eager for a chance to spill Risuri blood. But Danoran tradition demands its soldiers to be cool and rational, so he seethes and tries to goad his captors into giving him an excuse for a fight.







## IMMUREMENT

### Action. Real-Time.

*Asrabey tears the fabric of reality to open a path to the duchess, and the PCs have a chance to follow him.*

As the party is wrapping up their investigation of the prison, read or paraphrase the following passage, but give them a chance to interrupt if they want.

A flash of red-orange light illuminates the street from above, and as it streaks by you hear footsteps sprint across the roof of the brig. You hear shouts of dismay outside, a gunshot, and then more shouting. A soldier runs in from the street and yells, "The fire monster's coming!"

Outside you see an entity leap from the roof and into the street, sprinting for the inner wall. The figure resembles a cloud of smoke with a faint humanoid outline inside illuminated by an orange glow.

A couple of defenders on the wall start firing arrows, and you hear an audible curse of pain from the smoky entity. He ducks behind a bit of debris down the street, 80 ft. away from the wall, 120 ft. from the brig. He pulls out an orb that glows with white light, which pierces even his smoke shroud.

The whole street begins to shake, and the brig with it. Iron nails and iron prison bars shudder in their mountings, and a few rip violently free. In the street outside, cobblestones shatter upward and iron spikes burst out of the ground and float inches off the ground. Some of the Danorans in the brig cry out in shock as the space they're occupying becomes a tangle of jungle. Up on the wall, the duchess's defenders scream as the wall beneath them turns to mist and they plummet to their deaths on a lightly-wooded field.

In an area roughly two-hundred feet across, the landscape that was the fortress is comingled with a day-lit jungle landscape. Only in places with enough iron does the original landscape remain, while in a few pockets, typically along the edges, other landscapes flicker in and out—a fiery rockslide, a swamp with yellow frogs, a beige bank of clouds. You notice the edges are shrinking inward slowly, and you can guess the wildly powerful magic will only last a minute or two.

On the other side of the comingled terrain, you can make out the keep where you suspect the duchess is, and a huge tangle of brush around it. The smoky entity discards his orb and runs forward through the temporary gap in the inner wall. He casually lashes out a whip of flame to kill a defender who tries to get in his path, and then sprints onward toward the keep.

The light in the orb is slowly fading; the effect will end in a minute or two.

Asrabey has used a rare *immurement*, a type of magic item that houses a sliver of another world within it. The item's power was magnified by the fluctuations of Axis Island. The PCs have a choice between charging ahead into the center of the fort with minimal back-up, or hanging back and being cautious. After a few minutes the *immurement's* magic ends, and the fort returns to its previous shape. The *immurement's* power is expended, but it would be an interesting curio to keep.

If the PCs wait, they can sneak in through sewers, or wait until the military surrounds the keep, by which point Asrabey will have taken the duchess hostage.

If the PCs go in now, emphasize the strangeness of the overlaid world they run through, which is lit from a sun they cannot see. Moments after they clear the gap the *immurement's* magic ends, and the fortress wall snap back into existence. In the sudden darkness, a handful of the duchess's soldiers on distant walls fire errant bowshots. The party will want to make a beeline for the hedge maze only a few dozen feet away. This is the labyrinth of Gillie Dhu, a fey ally of the duchess. The tops of the hedges are already on fire from Asrabey's passage.

## THE LABYRINTH OF GILLIE DHU

### Action/Social. Tactical.

*A furious fey tries to thwart the PCs' path to the duchess, but he can be convinced that Asrabey—who just set fire to his hedge maze home—is a greater threat.*

#### Gillie Dhu

CR 2 - XP 400

CG Medium unique fey

**Init** +4; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +11

#### Defense

**AC** 17, touch 14, flat-footed 13 (+4 Dex, +3 natural)**hp** 27 (6d6+6)**Fort** +5, **Ref** +9, **Will** +7**DR** 5/cold iron**Weaknesses** Flammable Home

#### Offense

**Speed** 40 ft.**Melee** shillelagh+4 (1d6+1, plus see Bonded Shillelagh below)

#### Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th)

Constant—*Speak with plants*3/day—*faerie fire*1/day—*entangle* (DC 15)

#### Statistics

**Str** 10, **Dex** 19, **Con** 13, **Int** 14, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 18**Base Atk** +3; **CMB** +7; **CMD** 17**Feats** Agile Maneuvers, Great Fortitude, Stealthy**Skills** Climb +9, Craft (sculpture) +11, Escape Artist +15, Handle Animal +10,

Knowledge (nature) +11, Perception +11, Stealth +15, Survival +8;

**Languages** Common, Elven, Sylvan; *Speak with plants***SQ** hedge meld**Other Gear** shillelagh

#### Special Abilities

**Hedge Meld (Su)** Gillie Dhu can move into and through his hedges, similar to how the spell *meld into stone* functions. While inside a hedge he can be attacked and gains no cover or concealment from the hedge.

**Flammable Home (Su)** Gillie Dhu is mystically bonded to his hedge maze. Whenever Gillie Dhu starts his turn, he takes 1 point of fire damage for each 5-ft. square of the hedge in the labyrinth that is on fire. At the end of Gillie Dhu's turn, every square of burning hedge adjacent to him burns up in a sudden flash and becomes clear terrain.

**Bonded Shillelagh (Su)** When Gillie Dhu hits a creature with his shillelagh, he makes a follow-up roll (1d20+7 vs. the target's CMD). If he hits, he pushes the target 10 ft. He can even push creatures through hedges, which part briefly for the passage then magically seal themselves to strand the victim. Gillie Dhu's shillelagh functions as just a normal club in the hands of anyone else.

### Tactics.

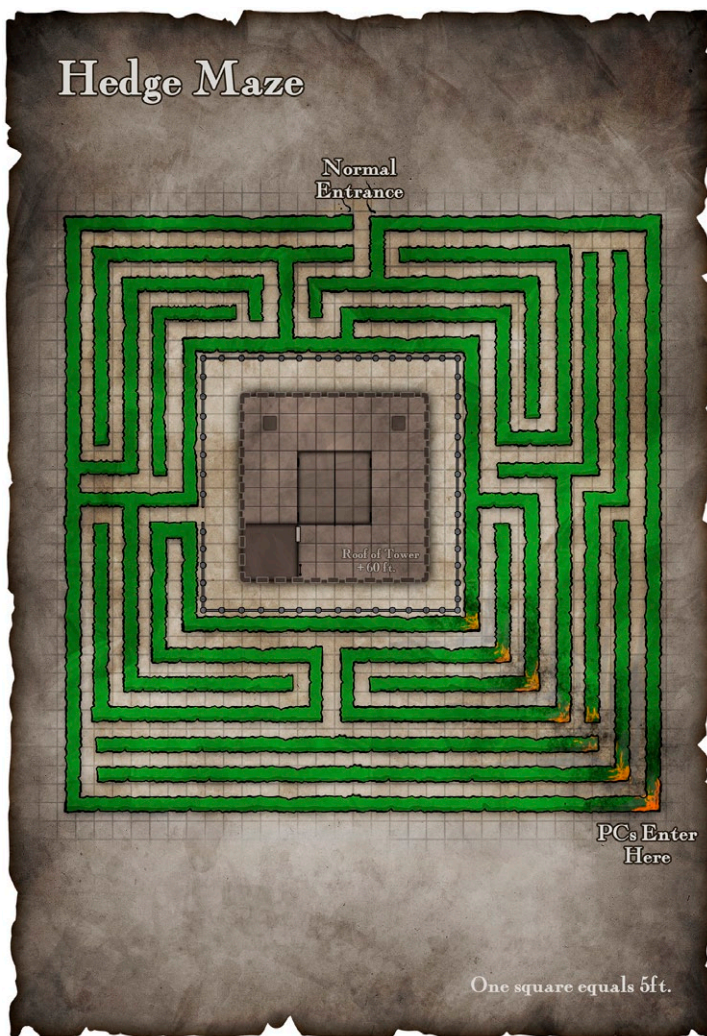
When Asrabey reached the hedge, he ran across it, his footsteps igniting a few spots. If the PCs are in hot pursuit of the high elf, when they arrive here they spot Gillie Dhu beating his club at a burning hedge at the edge of his labyrinth. The fire goes out and the bit of hedge withers to ash, opening up a path into the maze.

When Gillie Dhu spots the PCs he disappears into the maze, shouting, "Your flaming friend may have gotten by me, but I shall not let you pass! None shall harm Lady Ethelyn!"





## Hedge Maze



### Terrain.

**Hedges:** Hedges are normally impassible, and they provide concealment and superior cover to those on the opposite side. A character can try to enter a hedge's space, which requires 20 ft. of movement and an Escape Artist check (DC 15).

Hedges are 8 ft. tall and can be climbed (Strength DC 12). The top of a hedge is difficult terrain, and moving across it requires an Acrobatics check (DC 15) to avoid falling prone.

**Burning Brush:** If a spell or attack deals 1 or more fire point of damage, any hedge spaces in the area catch fire. A single-target attack can also be aimed at a 5-ft. square of the hedge, and if it does 1 point of fire damage, the hedge square catches fire. A hedge that catches fire burns slowly; it might go out by itself or spread over the course of several minutes, but for the duration of the encounter the hedge simply continues to burn on its own unless someone puts out the fires.

Because each square of burning brush does damage to him, usually Gillie Dhu will disengage from the PCs and rush to put out fires on his turn. He assumes he'll have time to get back to the party before they can navigate the maze. If a PC is creating a lot of fire, though, he'll focus his attacks on that character. Even if the PCs themselves have no fire attacks, their allied soldiers each have flasks of alchemist fire. Clever PCs can manage to keep Gillie Dhu busy putting out fires until they get to the central keep.

**Negotiating:** Gillie Dhu gladly talks with the PCs during combat, calling them scallawags and fools for doing the dirty work for a bunch of Danorans. He assumes Asrabey came with the party and the fleet. If

the PCs suggest that the high elf means to kill the duchess, and they just want to take her prisoner, a hard (DC 20) Diplomacy check can convince him to stand down and let them into the keep.

## THE TRIO

### Social. Real-Time.

*The party must confront the deadly Asrabey before he executes the duchess and abducts Nathan Jierre.*

At the center of the hedge maze sits the tower keep, 60 ft. tall. It consists of three floors. The first two contain a command center, arrow slits around the outer walls, and quarters, with basement supply rooms to hold out in a siege. Cramped sewer tunnels lead into the basement.

The third floor, 20 ft. above ground level, houses a library including maps of the island and the night sky, as well as a work room for scholars. The top floor, which has a 40-ft. high ceiling, houses a telescope observatory, which Nathan Jierre and other astronomers used to track the interactions between planetary or stellar orbits and magical fluctuations on the island.

In the observatory, a metal staircase leads to a door that provides access to the crenellated roof, where musketeers could harass any approaching enemies, though the duchess doesn't have enough forces to put troops there. The main bulk of the roof is a mechanically-operated hatch. Controls in the observatory can manipulate the hatch to provide a broad view of the night sky. The door and hatch are both locked from the inside.

The duchess has been directing the battle from the keep, and her non-combatant advisors and allies—including **Nathan Jierre**—fled to the observatory when Asrabey attacked. The high elf managed to breach the keep's defenses and kill the duchess's guards. If the PCs are in pursuit, moments before they arrive he defeats the duchess in battle, and prepares to execute her.

**Getting In.** If the PCs reach the front door, they find it ajar and burning, having been blasted open from within by Asrabey. If they took the sewer route, they emerge in the basement and find the lower level smoldering. The bodies of dozens of soldiers lie about slashed and charred, and as the party ascends the stairs it should be clear that Asrabey is far more powerful than them.

Alternately, the PCs might climb the outer wall of the tower and enter through the roof door, using a key provided by Lieutenant Marseine.

**Eavesdropping.** If the PCs reach the top floor after pursuing Asrabey, they hear Asrabey, the duchess, and Nathan Jierre arguing in the observatory chamber. A few of the duchess's advisors lie nearby, killed only moments earlier, as well as a dozen soldiers who had been protecting the roof. The duchess sits on the ground, holding a hand over her stomach, which is blackened and bloody. The bodies of slain summoned wolves are slowly fading away. Nathan Jierre cowers on the far side of the chamber, trying to hide behind an orrery.

Asrabey circles the duchess, limping slightly. He's covered in small cuts and bruises, and is managing to stay standing despite a handful of arrow and bullet wounds across his legs and arms. His wooden, lion-faced shield bears fresh blood on its fangs, and his flaming sword flares whenever he wants to emphasize a word or sentence. The smoke shroud does not hang around him.

Read or paraphrase the following, but give the PCs a chance to interrupt at any time. If the party decided to wait for the army to surround the keep, they can hear the details of this conversation if anyone manages to survive.



**Duchess:** “Asrabey, don’t do anything you’ll regret.”

**Asrabey:** “Save your pleading breath for prayer.”

**Duchess:** “If you have come for the reason I suspect, you should pray with me as well. You are a murderer, Asrabey. Did I so displease the Court that you needed to slaughter a hundred to reach me?”

**Asrabey:** “To forestall war, yes! Your people must not think we ally with a kingslayer. And worse,” *he sneers at the tiefling*, “one who consorts with devils.”

**Tiefling:** “Um, perhaps reason is bit much to expect at this time, but can we talk about this?” *Asrabey flicks his sword, which extends out to a flaming whip and cracks the tiefling across his face, then snaps back to a longsword.*

**Asrabey:** “You are lucky your cursed flesh will not burn. But I have other ways to make you suffer.” *To the duchess he says*, “Prepare yourself, and you may die with dignity.”

**Duchess:** “Wait! My brother won’t execute his own blood, and so long as I live I can still oppose him. There are more important matters than—”

**Asrabey:** “You struck the first blow. Aodhan was a soldier, as I am, and forgiveness does not come easily to our kind. He’ll never listen to you, not in the short years he has left. Already you are vilified. You promised your land would pull away from these fiends, would return to the old ways, yet you have fallen in with them yourself.”

**Duchess:** “You don’t understand. Nathan is on our side. There’s a threat to Risur and the Unseen. I told the Court as much—”

**Asrabey:** “Enough. Ethelyn, please do not make me watch you beg.”

**Duchess:** She glares. “Asrabey Varal, your closed mind has doomed us all.” She sits up straight despite her stomach wound. “Very well. Finish it.”

**Tiefling:** “Wait a minute, Varal? Are you kin to a Kasvarina Varal?”

The high elf stops before he has managed to raise his sword for a killing blow. He turns away from the duchess, grabs the tiefling by his vest, and leans close.

**High Elf:** “How do you know Kasvarina?”

**Tiefling:** “Um, what? She— she was here, months ago! She was on the arm of a Crisillyiri man. In the company of my cousin. They took a tour of the mines. They left a few days later. I... I think she was the one who crafted the portal ring.”

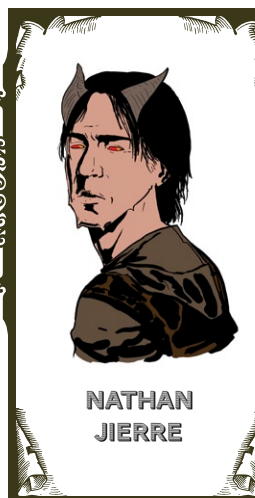
**Duchess:** “Asrabey, I’m trying to tell you, he’s an ally. He’s seen things, and we’re trying to find out what it all means. I think Danor means to destroy both our nations. My brother wouldn’t listen, even the Court ignored me, but you have to believe me.” *Asrabey considers this for a long moment. Then he heads for the double doors to check his escape route.*

If the PCs aren’t here, Asrabey sees the battle outside and realizes that getting Nathan Jierre off the island will be difficult, so he changes plans and prepares a hostage situation. But if the PCs are here, Asrabey notices them. If they don’t make the first move, he’ll demand they leave or else he’ll kill the duchess.

**Hostage Situation.** If Asrabey gets a chance to make demands, he says he intends to leave this island with the tiefling. First, he wants a message delivered to King Aodhan, explaining that the Unseen Court did not endorse the duchess’s actions, and that they desire her execution as a traitor. Second, he wants a ship prepared with an unarmed skeleton crew. They will sail him to the Risuri mainland, at which point he will let them go. He will hand the duchess over once he boards this ship.

He claims, falsely, that he will not harm her. The whole plan is a ruse, though. He actually intends to use the duchess as a human shield until he and Nathan Jierre can reach the outer fort. Then he will slit her throat, heave Nathan over his shoulder, and run for the teleportation circle. Once there, he only needs about a minute to complete his spell, which will teleport him to an old forest deep in the Risuri wetlands.

**Brinksmanship.** Asrabey is hesitant to make the first move, and he hopes to intimidate the party into leaving because he’s not sure he has



Cousin of Lya Jierre and nephew of Danor’s sovereign, Nathan avoided politics and pursued science. After years studying theories of magic and astronomy, he came to Axis Island to understand how the two are tied together. His attention easily drifts to cerebral topics, and so people often have to repeat things to him. But he has a knack for seeing what most people miss, and his enthusiasm for understanding complex interactions helps him unearth things that others are interested in hiding. Once he realized his people were building new weapons, he went to the duchess, hoping to avoid another war. He did not expect the duchess to attack. Now he realizes he’s a traitor, and is afraid what will happen when his people find out.

the strength left to take them in a fight. The party might likewise try to cow him into backing down.

The high elf is willing to talk for a few minutes to gauge the party’s intentions and willingness to risk their lives. The duchess—who recognizes them from the *Coaltongue*—tries to break in and explain why she tried to kill her brother. She tells of her vision (see page 1), but Asrabey cuts her off soon after that. He’s not interested in letting his hostages talk, and will try to cow the party into leaving.

**Combat.** If the party refuses to leave or raises weapons to fight, Asrabey will try to disable them all. The duchess is at 0 hit points and has no spells remaining for the day, but she’s stable. She won’t die from her wounds, but she can’t fight unless a PC can grant her healing. Nathan Jierre is a non-combatant.

#### Asrabey Varal

CR 15 • XP 38,400 (currently 1,000)

Male elf fighter 15

CN Medium Humanoid (elf)

**Init** +8; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +13

#### Defense

**AC** 35, touch 16, flat-footed 31 (+12 armor, +2 deflection, +4 Dex, +2 natural, +5 shield)

**hp** 162 (15d10+75), currently 1

**Fort** +12, **Ref** +9, **Will** +8; +2 vs. enchantments, +4 vs. fear

**Defensive Abilities** bravery +4

#### Offense

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** *Vekeshi Blade* +28/+23/+18 (1d8+14/17–20 plus 1d6 fire)

**Special Attacks** weapon training (heavy blades +3, light blades +2, thrown +1)

#### Statistics

**Str** 22, **Dex** 19, **Con** 16, **Int** 12, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 8

**Base Atk** +15; **CMB** +21; **CMD** 37

**Feats** Cleave, Critical Focus, Great Cleave, Greater Vital Strike, Improved Critical (longsword), Improved Initiative, Improved Iron Will, Improved Vital Strike, Iron Will, Power Attack, Step Up, Toughness, Vital Strike, Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialization (longsword)

**Skills** Acrobatics +12, Climb +17, Intimidate +12, Knowledge (nature) +6, Perception +13, Sense Motive +6, Swim +17; **Racial Modifiers** +2 Perception, +2 Spellcraft identify magic item properties

**SQ** armor training 4, elven magic, weapon familiarity

**Languages** Common, Elven

**Other Gear** *amulet of natural armor* +2, *belt of physical perfection* +4, *cloak of smoke*, *raiment of defense*, *lion shield*, *slippers of spider climbing*



**Duchess Ethelyn of Shale**

CR 9 • XP 6400

Female human sorcerer 10

CN Medium Humanoid (human)

**Init** +6; **Senses** Perception +0**Defense****AC** 13, touch 13, flat-footed 10 (+2 Dex, +1 dodge)**hp** 47 (10d6+10)**Fort** +4, **Ref** +5, **Will** +9**Offense****Speed** 30 ft.**Bloodline Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 10th; concentration +14)7/day—*laughing touch*10 rounds/day—*fleeting glance***Sorcerer Spells Known** (CL 10th; concentration +14)5th (3/day)—*teleport*4th (6/day)—*fear, hallucinatory terrain, poison*3rd (7/day)—*deep slumber, haste, lightning bolt, nondetection*2nd (7/day)—*cat's grace, eagle's splendor, fox's cunning, hideous laughter, mirror image*1st (at will)—*entangle, expeditious retreat, feather fall, magic missile, ray of enfeeblement, sleep*0 (at will)—*detect magic, detect poison, flare, light, mage hand, mending, message, read magic, resistance***Bloodline** Fey**Statistics****Str** 8, **Dex** 14, **Con** 13, **Int** 12, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 19**Base Atk** +5; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 17**Feats** Dodge, Empower Spell, Eschew Materials, Improved Counterspell, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Leadership, Quicken Spell**Skills** Bluff +12, Diplomacy +14, Handle Animal +9, Heal +5, Knowledge (history) +6, Knowledge (nature) +9, Knowledge (nobility) +6, Knowledge (planes) +6, Spellcraft +9**SQ** bloodline arcana, 10 rounds/day—*fleeting glance, woodland stride***Languages** Common, Sylvan**Tactics.**

**Fight.** Asrabey charges into the midst of the PCs and tries to take them out as quickly as possible. Realizing that killing the famed investigators who saved King Aodhan might provoke further unwanted attention towards the Unseen Court, Asrabey uses only non-lethal attacks on the PCs.

**Negotiation and Takedown.** Truly bold PCs might convince Asrabey to leave without a fight. Even if the PCs convince him he can't win a fight, he at first demands to leave them the duchess, while they give him the tiefling. The party had better be very imposing to get him to leave and take nothing back. He definitely refuses to surrender, though he could be taken alive after a fight.

**Terrain.**

The ceiling here rises an impressive 40 ft. high. A 10-ft. high platform dominates the room, with a 20-ft. high telescope mounted atop it, so leaving a 10-ft. space to a hatch, which opens up to allow viewing of the night sky. A control panel at the base of the telescope can be activated as a minor action to open the hatch to the roof. The panel can also adjust the aim of the telescope.

Someone inclined to climb the telescope can find easy handholds (Climb DC 8), though not much space to stand or fight.

**HIGH LEVEL EQUIPMENT**

Below are the listed rules for all equipment wielded by the Dreadnought Asrabey Varal. Take note that the equipment presented here is meant for GM reference only, and PCs should not be expected to acquire this gear under any circumstance, as it far exceeds their current power level. On the same note, statistics are presented here for Duchess Ethelyn, but she is left unequipped. GMs can assume she trusted her most precious items to minions, or GMs can craft their own item set for the noblewoman as potential extra rewards for completing the adventure.

**Vekeshi Blade**

Normally a +3 *flaming longsword*, the Vekeshi Blade wielded by Asrabey Varal is a potent artifact of the Unseen Court. The wielder of the Vekeshi Blade can transform the weapon into a whip-like form that has 15-ft. reach and can be used to make trip attacks, but which still deals damage as a longsword. The blade shifts and reverts as a free action at the wielder's control.

**Lion Shield**

A specially crafted +3 *heavy wooden shield*, the Lion Shield can also be loosed to attack on its own. It fights for 4 rounds using the base attack bonus of the one who loosed it and then drops. For combat purposes, the Lion Shield is treated as having a 2d6 damage bite attack with the Grab special rule (CMB equals the CMB of the wielder). While attacking, it cannot make attacks of opportunity, and the person who activated it is not considered as having the shield equipped. The shield is considered wielded or attended by the creature for all maneuvers and effects that target items. While attacking, the shield shares the same space as the activating character and can attack adjacent foes. The shield accompanies the person who activated it everywhere, whether she moves by physical or magical means. If the wielder who loosed it has an unoccupied hand, she can grasp it while it is attacking on its own as a free action; when so retrieved, the shield can't dance (attack on its own) again for 4 rounds.

**Cloak of Smoke**

An ornate cloak from the lands of the Unseen Court, this cloak fills the air around the wearer with a constant roil of smoke, causing enemies to take a 20% miss chance due to concealment. The wearer can see through the smoke without trouble, and can dismiss or invoke the smoke as a free action. In addition the wearer receives a +2 deflection bonus to AC.

**Glamered Plate**

Woven of a distilled essence made from stories of warriors dodging deadly blows, this cloth tunic protects its wearer as well as +3 *full plate*, but does not hinder his movements or skills.

Someone on top of the telescope, or with a rope (or a whip, like Asrabey's sword), can spend a standard action and make a Strength check (DC 12) to knock the huge object off its mount, which can crush those nearby. Those in the way must make a DC 13 Reflex Save or take 2d8 damage on a hit, half damage on a miss.

A few bits of furniture are covered in charts and old plates of food. Doors in the north corners lead to the hydraulic mechanisms that move the roof hatch, as well as rain cisterns.

A catwalk staircase in the southwest corner provides roof access, though the door at the top of the stairs is locked from the outside (Disable Device DC 20). The roof itself has crenellations, but all the defenders who had been there rushed down and were cut down by Asrabey.



magic and planetary movement. While the Skyseers and others long ago noted how the planets affect major types of elemental magic, Nathan was tasked with determining what magic is affected by the much more distant stars.

It could be coincidence, but the star he has been observing most thoroughly is a bright blue one, the same color as the sun the PCs witnessed when reality flickered earlier. He also has, in a glass case, a dissected frog from that same strange place, pinned down with gold needles.

### Departure.

The military grabs the duchess's forces, loads its people on ships, and departs. Eventually only the *Impossible* remains behind. Near sunset, a steam-powered Danoran warship named *Lux Profectusque*—squat and slower than the *Coaltongue*, but sturdier for open seas travel—coasts into the Axis Fortress harbor. Lya Jierre disembarks, flanked by a pair of unusual bodyguards.

### Lya's Retinue.

The first, **Rush**, is a snide half-elf who carries a pair of elaborately decorated platinum rods, slotted into holsters at his hips. Amid images of roiling clouds and celestial spheres, two golden buttons stand out by each rod's gripping end. The man's forearms are massively muscled.

The second, a hulking half-deaf half-orc named **Merton**, wears a steel helmet with unusually thick protection over his ears, but otherwise has no armor. He holds a thickly-wrapped object, like an overlong walking staff, twice as thick at the top as where he holds it. Layers of white cashmere conceal the object's head.

These two warriors accompany Lya most everywhere she goes, and when the party finally gets an opportunity to face them in combat in a later adventure, they will discover that Rush fights with a pair of specially-designed extensible *immovable rods*, while Merton carries a polearm capped with an adjustable and powerful sonic tine, like a giant tuning fork. Lya Jierre, of course, has an arcano-technological *vorpai rapier*.

### Handover.

When Lya sees the party she smiles and asks if she can take back her country's island. She'd like to know what happened, especially to her cousin, but first she has to go through a few formalities. She produces a pair of matching documents, minor treaties that state simply, without any legalese or jargon that Risur condemns the duchess's attack on the island and will not press a claim to its ownership on account of this particular military event. The PCs are empowered to sign on behalf of Risur.

Lya is genuinely thankful the party has helped avert a crisis, and even if they have bad news about her cousin, she remains positive. She asks that the party leave soon, because not all of her people are as fond of Risur as she is.

But before the party leaves, find some way to work into the conversation that Lya Jierre is planning to marry King Aodhan if the negotiations over the next year go well. She might mention (if Nathan is headed to Risur) that she hopes she'll see him before the wedding; or she might simply invite the PCs by way of saying thanks.

With that, there's nothing left to do but board the *Impossible* and sail back to Risur. The mission is accomplished, but a mystery is just starting to reveal itself.

## AFTERMATH

### Social. Montage.

*On behalf of the victorious forces, the PCs turn control of Axis Island back to Danor.*

After resolving the situation with Asrabey, the party might have prisoners—or bodies—to take back to Risur. The navy came prepared to take spellcasters into custody, and can slap *mage cuffs* (see the Player's Guide) on the duchess or Asrabey if needed. Nathan Jierre cooperates, though he enthusiastically petitions the PCs to guarantee him passage to Risur, especially if he learns that his cousin Lya is coming.

With fairly limited time left before the island must be handed over, the party might search for clues of what was going on. It should be clear that Danor was experimenting here with merging magic and industry, and that they're on track to build military shipyards and gunworks. The excavations of ancient ruins might raise some suspicions, but there is no evidence of a direct, immediate threat to Risur.


### Nathan's Knowledge.

Either by speaking with Nathan Jierre, or making a few Knowledge (Arcana or Nature) checks in the observatory, the party learns that the Danorans were interested in tracking an unusual interaction of



## CONCLUSION

By the end of this adventure, the party should have a clear sense of the relationships among Risur, Danor, and the Unseen Court. They've met several future power players, including King Aodhan and Lya Jierre, and they should realize that Danor is up to something on Axis Island, but that they aren't equipped to find out what yet. And by finding themselves in the right place at the right time (more than one time, already), they've had a chance to shape the fate of their nation.

The next adventure in the ZEITGEIST adventure path, *The Dying Skyseer*, keeps the action and mystery entirely in the city of Flint, as a high-profile murder draws the party into an investigation of foreign doctors, fey terrorists, local corruption, and soul-stealing dark magic from the city's past. Before playing Adventure Two, you and your players should also review Section Three of the *Player's Guide* for important background information about the city of Flint. In order to prepare for their coming trials, each PC should advance one level, bringing them up to 2nd level. 

## PRISONERS, PUNISHMENTS, AND PARDONS.

A few months pass between this adventure and the next, *The Dying Skyseer*. In that time, the king gets his house mostly in order, though some protest groups are emboldened and treat the duchess as a hero, especially if she died. If she survived, a public ritual strips her of her title, leaving her with only weak magical powers. Now just Ethelyn, she's imprisoned in the Bridge Tower in Slate.

Nathan Jierre, if the PCs let him go to Risur, becomes a guest of a minor noble in Flint, but his movements are almost as limited as the duchess's. If the Danorans get him, he eventually flees a trial for treason and finds his way to Risur anyway.

The PCs get a very stern talking to if they killed Asrabey, because he was technically a diplomat of the Unseen Court, but circumstances justify their actions. If he survives, he is soon allowed to return to the Dreaming with no consequences. His sword, shield, cloak, and most of his lesser items are returned to him or given to his allies, along with his body, if he died.

## NPC QUICK REFERENCE FOR GMS.

- ♦ **Thames Grimsley.** Grizzled sailor. Leads docker union. Dislikes police. Oratorical, theatrical speech patterns. Pause for dramatic effect a lot.
- ♦ **Assistant Chief Inspector Stover Delft.** Party's boss. Chews tobacco. Cane. Spits. Good-natured.
- ♦ **Principal Minister Harkover Lee.** King's magical advisor/bodyguard. Straight-backed. Beran accent (sort of Mexican or Spanish).
- ♦ **Geoff Massarde.** Tiefling engineer. Drinks, but low-tolerance. Airy voice. Danoran accent (sort of French). Dislikes Danor.
- ♦ **Captain Rutger Smith.** Bold. Idealistic. Loves philosophy. Smokes cigars.
- ♦ **Duchess Ethelyn of Shale.** King's sister. Considers words before speaking. Old-fashioned. Fondly recalls time before she was rich and powerful.
- ♦ **Sokana Rell.** Duchess's handmaiden. High elf disguised as elf. Quiet. Tries to avoid attention. Despises Danorans.
- ♦ **Flint City Governor Roland Stanfield.** Aasimar. Constant expression of contented optimism. Perfect politician's smile. Old war wound in his lower back.
- ♦ **King Aodhan.** Cool-headed. Deflects trouble rather than fight. Healthy despite being 70. Physically feels the emotions of nearby fey.
- ♦ **Minister of Outsiders Lya Jierre.** Tiefling martial scientist. Ambitious. Haughty but friendly. Progressive. Wants peace. Arcano-technological vortal rapier.
- ♦ **Mine Foreman Nicolas Dupiers.** Paranoid. Golden icons of earth and shadow. Pistol.
- ♦ **Lieutenant Hessar Marseine.** Nasty eye wound. Looking for a fight. Reasonable if you're polite to him.
- ♦ **Nathan Jierre.** Tiefling astronomer. Observant but short-sighted. Wants peace, but didn't realize duchess wanted war. Afraid his people will brand him a traitor.
- ♦ **Asrabey Varal.** High elf warrior of unmatched prowess. Flaming sword. Animated lion shield. Cloak of smoke. Despises Danorans. Sent to execute duchess.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

**Assistant Chief Inspector Stover Delft.** A local Flinter in his early 40s, Delft is your direct superior. Generally good-natured to his subordinates, he has a penchant for grousing about people behind their backs. A much better manager than investigator, Delft has advanced this far in the Constabulary by finding good agents, supporting them on difficult missions, and sharing the accolades from their successes.



Delft chews tobacco, and thinks he looks charming if he grins while sucking on tobacco juices. He walks with a cane because a mimic tore a chunk out of his leg fifteen years ago. He has a habit of poking inanimate objects with the cane before he gets too close to them, and spitting on them when he wants to be extra sure.

**Principal Minister Harkover Lee.** Perhaps the most powerful mage in Risur, Lee acts as King Aodhan's bodyguard and chief of staff. Straight-backed and virile despite being in his 60s, Lee has a slight Ber-tinged accent, and was said to be quite the ladykiller in his youth. He always dresses in reds and golds and carries a solid gold wizard's orb tucked into his robes. He never eats or drinks in public.



**Geoff Massarde.** A 40-something tiefling with an airy voice and a fondness for wine that outmatches his ability to handle his alcohol, Massarde is one of a handful of Danoran tieflings working for the Risuri military to help construct warships and other weapons. He has few kind words for his homeland. He is fascinated with ice, and carries a wand which can chill small objects with a touch. Mostly he just uses it as a novelty to cool beverages.



**Captain Rutger Smith.** Captain of the *R.N.S. Impossible*, one of the RHC's vessels. Smith earned his first command five years ago. Now 37, he has never led his ship into battle. That, combined with his fondness for the Malice-era philosophical writings of the pacifist monk William Miller, has made him the target of mockery by more established naval officers.



**Duchess Ethelyn of Shale.** The king's sister, Duchess Ethelyn was a commoner before earning her title in the Third Yerasol War. She dislikes industry and leads a coalition of powerful individuals with strong ties to the Unseen Court. She wears extravagant diamond cluster earrings – representing the stars of the night sky – to show her allegiance to the old ways. Accounts tell of her possessing many different types of magic, though many of these could be exaggerated.



**Flint City Governor Roland Stanfield.** Stanfield witnessed the fall of the high elf goddess Srasama five hundred years ago and died soon thereafter in the chaos of Elfaivar's fall. But he reincarnated, and has for centuries served as Flint's governor.



**King Aodhan.** Now in his 70s, the current king of Risur looks rather unassuming, and was a common warrior before the previous king chose him as a successor after the Third Yerasol War. He prefers to resolve disputes by being cool-headed and rationally persuading those who will listen to his side. Despite all this, though, he trains regularly to keep his stamina and swordplay robust, and the rites of rulership grant him daunting magical powers.





## HOLD THE LIGHTHOUSE.

### On the Sea Wall.

Cannot be barricaded.

### Outside Lighthouse.

Can have up to 20 points of barricades.

### Inside Lighthouse.

Can have up to 10 points of barricades. PCs can't enter or leave the area if there are more than 5 points of barricades.



### Conducting the Encounter.

**Timeline.** Each round is one minute. Allies arrive in round ten, and if the sea gate is open, the PCs win. Each round, first all the PCs act, then all enemies act. Enemies that are destroyed still act and are removed at the end of the round. PCs reduced to 0 HP or less automatically stabilize.

**Tracking Locations.** Place PC minis in the appropriate area whenever they move. Use coins or dice to keep track of how many enemies are in each area.

**PC Turn.** PCs move to an area, then take one action. Suggested actions include:

*Assemble Barricade.* Strength or Knowledge (Engineering) DC 15. Create 3 points of barricade inside lighthouse, or 2 points outside lighthouse. On a failed check, create 1 point. Area must have no enemies.

*Battle.* No check or attack roll required. Destroy 1 enemy, or 2 if clever or daring.

*Brace.* Strength or Constitution DC 10. Barricade in your area resists first 2 points of enemy action this turn.

*Set Trap or Ward.* Craft (Trapmaking), Disable Device, or Spellcraft DC 15. When enemies enter this area, destroy 1. The trap is expended.

*Stall.* Diplomacy or Intimidate DC 15. Enemies don't advance this turn. +2 DC per round.

PCs can also cast spells or use potions/scrolls to heal or prevent damage without having to spend extra actions, but each such effort incurs -1 penalty to skill check for that turn.

**Enemy Turn.** Enemies move as far as they can toward the lighthouse interior. They stop when they reach a location with a PC, trap, or ward. If there are any barricades in an area, they stop *before* entering that area.

Then for each enemy, act in the following order.

Remove 1 point of barricade from an adjacent area until there are no adjacent barricades.

Deal 2 damage to a PC that shares the area with the enemy. PCs can choose who among them take the damage.

Deal 1 damage to a PC in another area.

## THE ASSAULT.

### Allied Soldier

CR ½ • XP 135 each

Male human warrior 1

LN Medium Humanoid (human)

**Init** +1; **Senses** Perception –1

#### Defense

**AC** 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15 (+4 armor, +1 Dex, +1 shield)

**hp** 12 each (1d10+2)

**Fort** +3, **Ref** +1, **Will** –1

#### Offense

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** longsword +1 (1d8 / 19–20)

**Ranged** light crossbow +2 (1d8 / 19–20)

#### Statistics

**Str** 11, **Dex** 13, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 9, **Cha** 8

**Base Atk** +1; **CMB** +1; **CMD** 12

**Feats** Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot

**Skills** Climb +1, Ride +2, Stealth –1

**Languages** Common

**Combat Gear** *potion of cure light wounds*, alchemist's fire (3); **Other Gear** chain shirt, buckler, longsword, light crossbow

### Allied Solder (Alternate Version)

**While your allied soldier is alive, you gain the following abilities:**

**Allied Soldier Defense (Ex)** Your allied soldier is on guard, providing warnings and a handy shield. You gain a +2 bonus to AC and to saving throws.

If you are knocked unconscious, the allied soldier stabilizes and protects you.

You can also have your allied soldier suffer the effect of an attack in your place.

The attack does nothing to you, but your allied soldier is incapacitated until he can get a few minutes to rest and heal out of combat. While your allied soldier is incapacitated, you lose the Allied Soldier Offense ability and the AC bonus and stabilization options of this ability. If you have your soldier suffer the effect of an attack a second time in the same combat, he is killed, and you lose this ability.

**Allied Soldier Offense (Ex)** Your allied soldier assists you when you attack. You gain a +2 bonus to your melee attack rolls. Once per combat, you can have your allied soldier hurl a flask of alchemist's fire (+2 ranged touch attack). The soldier makes no other attacks.

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LN Medium Humanoid (human)

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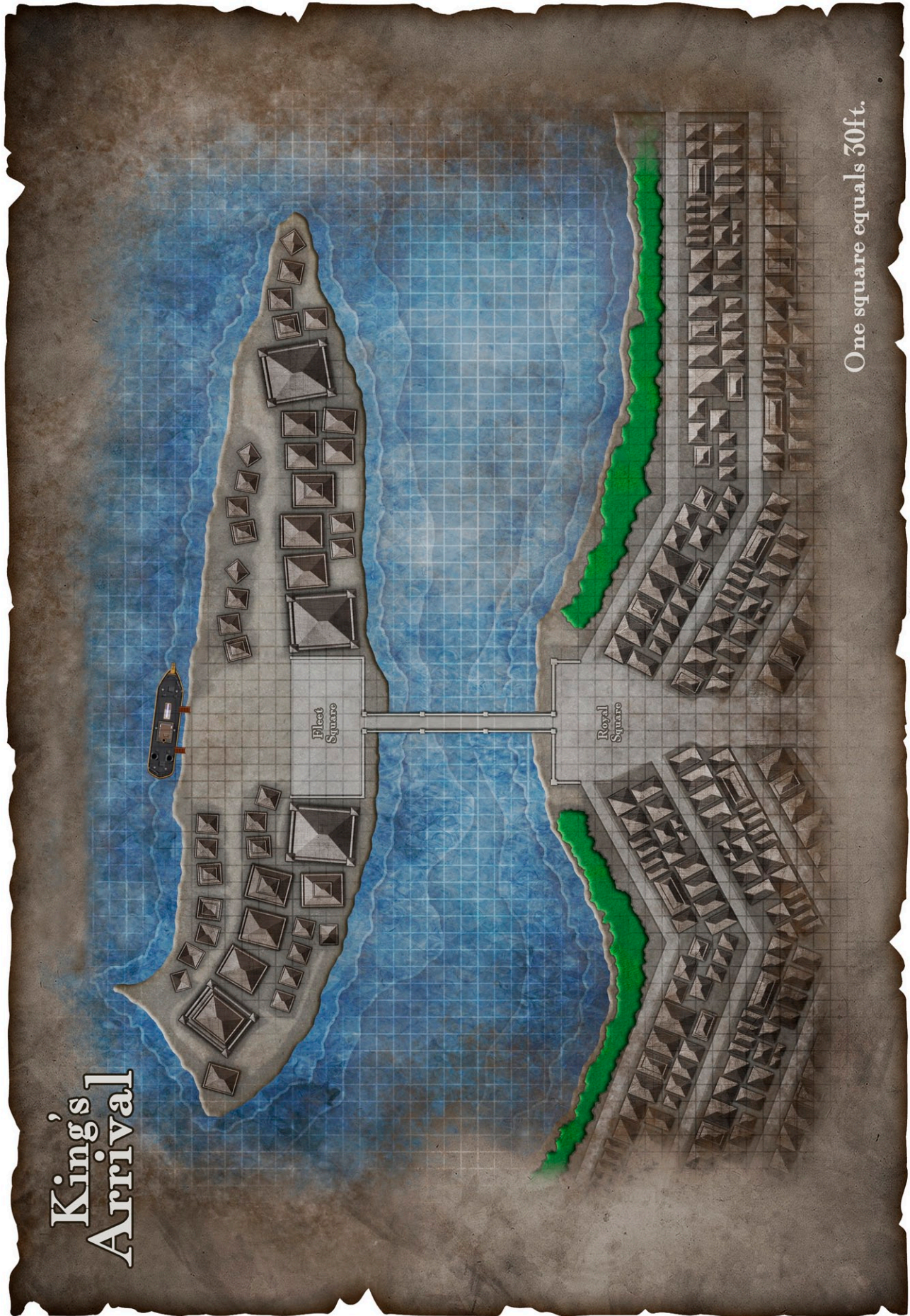


- 1. Governor's Mansion
- 2. Pardwright University
- 3. RHC Headquarters
- 4. King's Station
- 5. Royal Shipyard
- 6. Cauldron Hill
- 7. Alchemy Row
- 8. Danoran Consulate





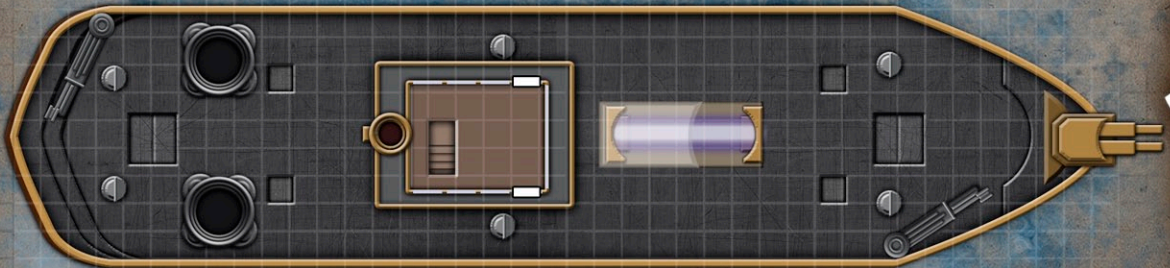
# King's Arrival



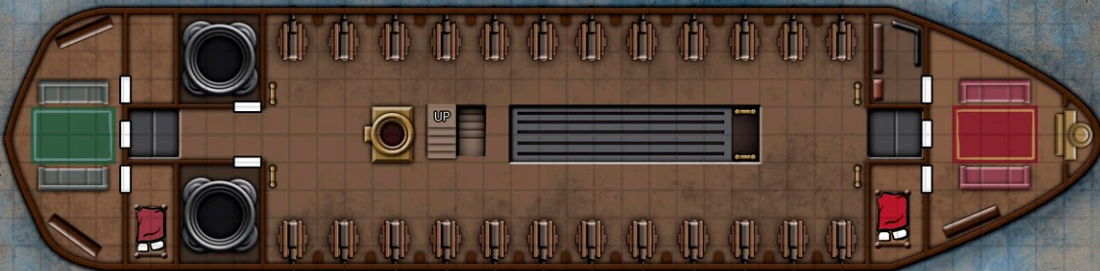


# Coaltongue

Main Deck.



Gun Deck.



Berth Deck.



Engine Deck.



One square equals 5ft.







# The Sea Cave



One square equals 5ft.





- 1. Sea Gate
- 2. Central Keep
- 3. Passwall
- 4. Teleportation Circle
- 5. Makeshift Brig



# The Docks

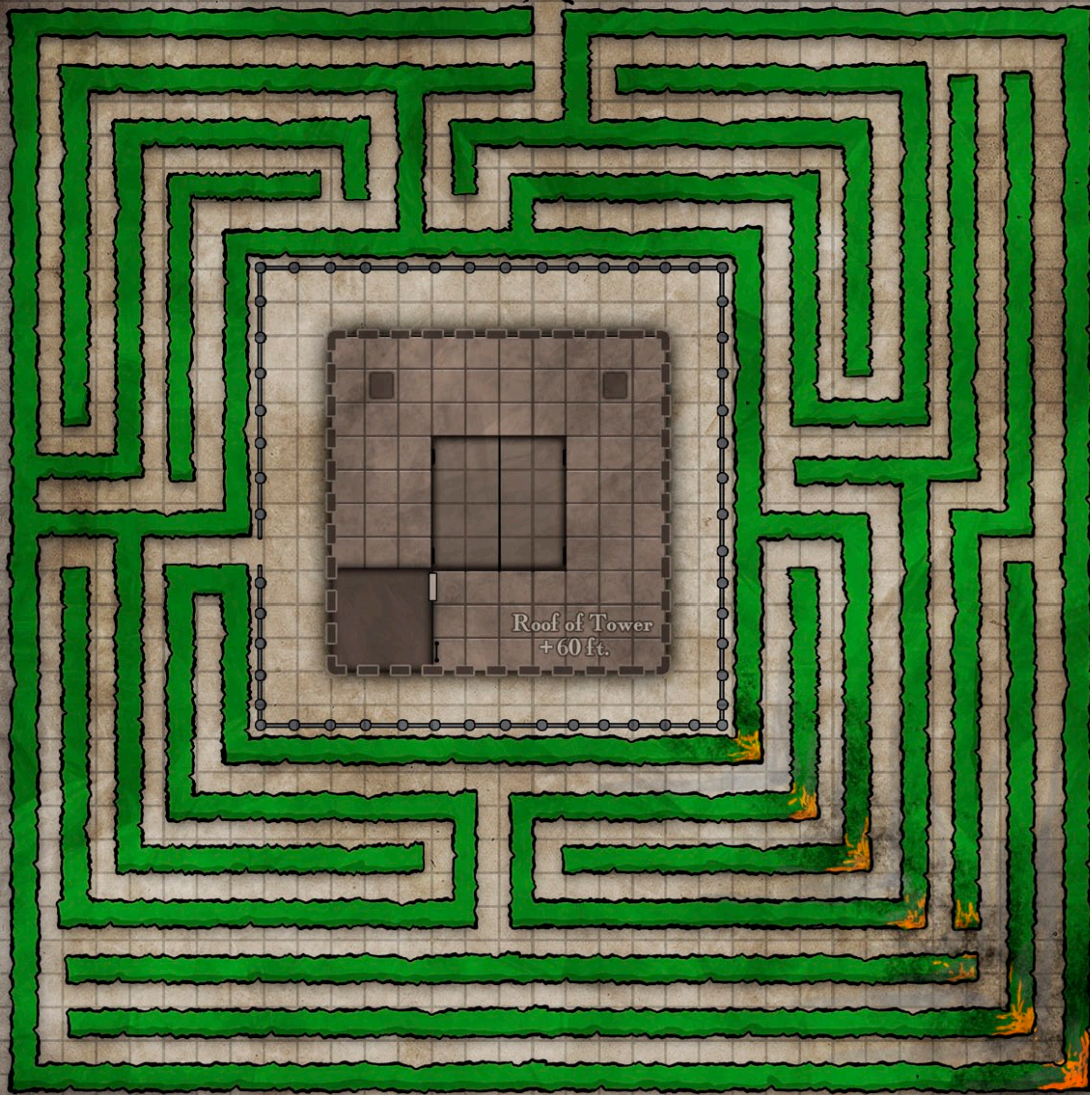


One square equals 5ft.



# Hedge Maze

Normal  
Entrance



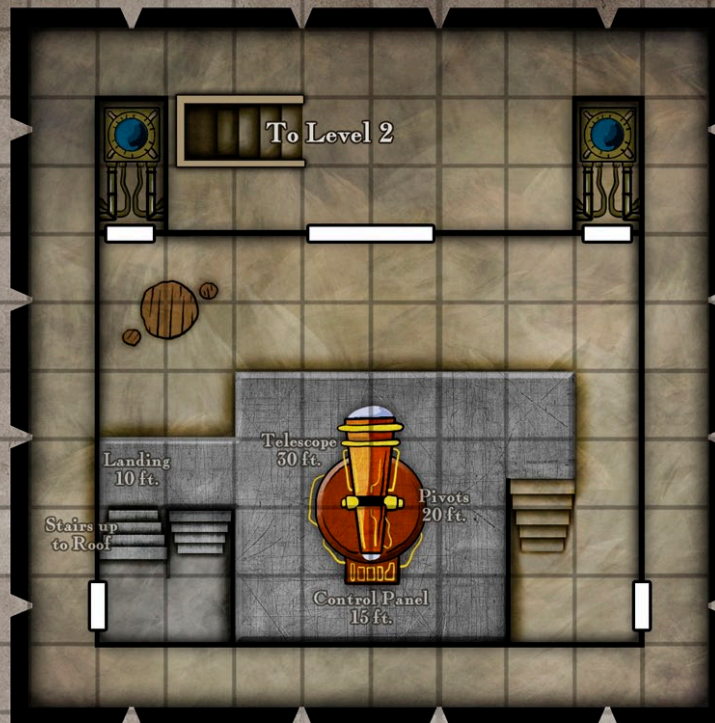
PCs Enter  
Here

One square equals 5ft.

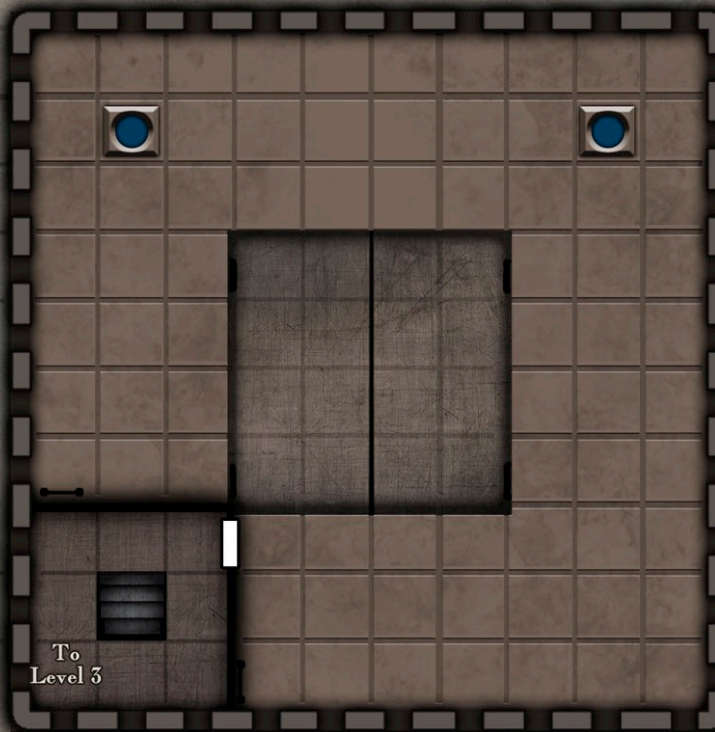


# Hedge Maze Tower

Level 3



Level 4  
(Roof)



One square equals 5ft.





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THE GEARS OF REVOLUTION

## THE ISLAND AT THE AXIS OF THE WORLD

A Technological Marvel Is Ready to Launch!

In factories throughout the city of Flint, a legion of mages, engineers, and shipbuilders have finally concluded months of ceaseless toil. Now well-wishers from across the nation of Risur have come to witness the launch of the world's mightiest vessel of war: the R.N.S. *Coaltongue*, impervious to spell and cannon and armed with fire that could slay even a dragon. On the docks, Risuri constables keep a close eye on celebrants and troublemakers; in the shadows, conspiracy and betrayal threaten this technological titan on its maiden voyage.

Meanwhile, on an isle in the lush Yerasol Archipelago, Risur's traditional enemies unearth ancient ruins while crafting a metal masterpiece of their own. Cloaked in layers of secrecy, their designs creep toward completion, unknown to the outside world. But when a band of rookie constables thwarts the sabotage of the *Coaltongue*, the traitors responsible flee to that same hidden island, threatening to reveal the dangers that lie at the axis of the world.

The first adventure in the ZEITGEIST adventure path takes the heroes from the metropolitan city of Flint to legendary Axis Island on the hunt for a traitor.

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