

WATERFINDER

A Pathfinder Fanzine made by Fans for the Fans



ABSALOM
PaizoCon 2010



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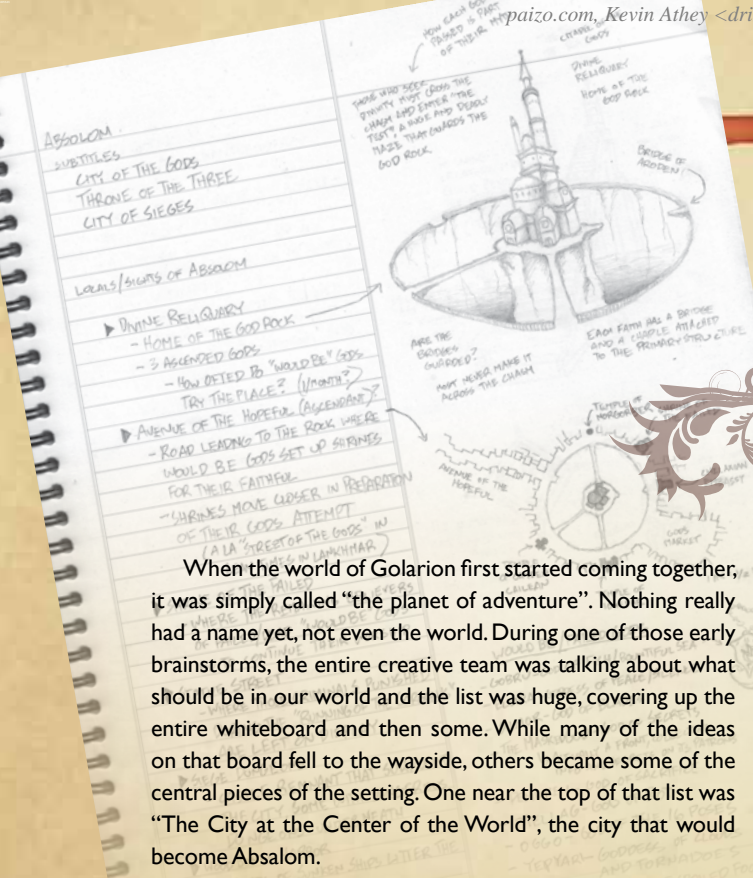
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FOREWORD

When the world of Golarion first started coming together, it was simply called “the planet of adventure”. Nothing really had a name yet, not even the world. During one of those early brainstorming sessions, the entire creative team was talking about what should be in our world and the list was huge, covering up the entire whiteboard and then some. While many of the ideas on that board fell to the wayside, others became some of the central pieces of the setting. One near the top of that list was “The City at the Center of the World”, the city that would become Absalom.

Since those early days, I have moved on to work on the rules behind the game, but back in 2007 I got tasked with helping to write one of the first sourcebooks for the world of Golarion, the *Pathfinder Gazetteer*. Erik and I split up the world for writing purposes, each taking roughly half the nations. We worked heavily with the rest of the staff to flesh out the world, making sure that every nation had its own unique feel and style, while still staying true to the spirit of the surrounding world. When it came to Absalom, there were a lot of discussions about what should go in our most important metropolis.

We knew very early on that Absalom had to be special. It was located centrally on our map, making it an important trade spot, and it was going to be very large, but size and geography was not quite enough. Enter the Starstone. We knew this was where it fell. The surrounding coastlines of the Inner Sea were shaped to look like the crater from its impact. We also knew it was going to have something to do with divinity. I was fascinated by the concept, and decided to see where the ideas took me.

Before I started at Paizo, I was an architect. In those years I had picked up an engineering notebook that I had been saving for a special occasion. It has lined pages, but half of each page is blank, leaving room for sketches and diagrams. When it came time to brainstorm out parts of Golarion, I grabbed this

special notebook and got to work. Absalom is page number 1. Not every idea from this page made it into the setting, and virtually everyone at Paizo has added something to this amazing place since then, but I am proud to say that this one page of notes and ideas was my contribution to the City at the Center of Our World.

There are a lot of gems here, from my simple drawings of what I thought the Starstone cathedral should look like to sketches of the holy symbols of “would-be” gods. I was reading a lot of Fritz Leiber at the time, and really wanted a “Street of the Gods” element to Absalom, but in the case of our world, with the real possibility of divinity at the end. Of course, this led me to dream up a host of “would-be/failed” gods. Just for ease of reference, the ones appearing on this sheet are:

- Demuren – god of sacrifice
- Eltara – goddess of peace/silence
- Gobru – god of fish/bountiful sea
- The Masked God – god of secrets (actually a front, collecting info and secrets about its patrons)
- Mellag – god of rot
- Oggo – god of the sixteen poses
- Plokkis – god of spoiled food and wastefulness
- Silmor – god of blades
- YepYari – goddess of clouds and tornadoes

Of all of my notes, dreaming up kinda pathetic deities was by far the most entertaining. I had a piece of paper somewhere detailing Oggo’s poses, but it is probably for the best that it is lost to the ages.

As you flip through the rest of this beautiful magazine, looking at all of these new, and exciting contributions to Absalom, remember that this city can be what you need it to be, a hive of villains, a center for trade, the home of adventure, or the launching point for quests that span the world. Absalom has room for it all, even Oggo and his sixteen poses.

Jason Bulmahn
Lead Designer
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The Nature of the Beast

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

by Elaine Cunningham
illustrated by Claudia Burgos

Channa Ti crouched beside the body, her booted feet just beyond reach of the pool of blood darkening the fine Qadira carpet. Death had come quickly. A single bite had torn the victim's throat; there were no other injuries. A spotted jungle cat, a long-legged beauty in a jeweled collar, was chained beyond reach of the body, but the man could have stumbled back a pace or two before he fell.

He lay face up, staring at the ceiling with sightless eyes and an oddly affronted expression. The richness of his green and gold tunic told Channa he'd been a wealthy man. The ostentatious display of Absalom's colors, from his green snakeskin boots to the gold and jade rings on his hands, suggested that he'd identified himself with the city's ruling elite. His purse held a few coins, mostly silver. Except for the presence of an exotic cat, this death had nothing in common with the crimes she'd been tasked with investigating—a string of robberies witnessed only by household animals.

She rolled the dead man onto his side and pulled down the neck of his tunic. Livid bruises darkened the skin of his back where the blood had settled. He'd died several hours ago, perhaps as early as the previous day's sunset. As she lowered him back to the floor, Channa noted the ruff of small, iridescent green feathers decorating the neck of his tunic. Bright as emeralds, they were edged in what appeared to be flecks of gold. "Boninji feathers," she muttered.

"I see you're well acquainted with the Mwangi's treasures." Anook Vastille, the owner of the estate and a merchant dealing in exotic animals, nodded approvingly at Channa before glancing to the room's other occupant, a plainly dressed Osirion woman nearing her fortieth year. "Khamira said a druid was needed. She did well to recommend you."

"About that." Channa sat back on her heels and regarded the older woman. "You're a more powerful druid than I am. I was raised in the Mwangi, but I don't have any particular affinity for jungle animals. Why call me?"

"You would have been sent here eventually," Khamira said.

Channa didn't deny it. Something strange had gotten into Absalom's animals and she'd been told to figure out what. She was a little surprised that Khamira knew of her involvement.

She studied the jungle cat. The jangar lay in calm repose, chin resting on spotted paws. Golden eyes regarded the two humans and the half-elven Channa with mild interest and not a hint of fear.

"Has the cat attacked anyone before?"

Anook frowned. "Never. Never before, and not now. My jangars are gentle and reliable. But no one will believe this unless I can give them the real killer. I need someone who can do this quickly and discretely."

Channa lifted one brow. "You haven't reported this man's death?"

"If I did, the cat would be destroyed," Anook said. "That, I cannot permit. She is a valuable animal, a breeding queen. Her unborn offspring have already been sold."

The Osirion woman huffed with disgust. "And there's the true crime, Channa—keeping wild creatures in cities."

"This jangar is two generations removed from the jungle," Anook protested. "She's as tame as any hunting hound."

"No cat is tame," Khamira retorted. "A jeweled collar doesn't change an animal's nature. Cats are predators. Any creature small and slow enough for them to kill is prey. For a jangar, that includes humans." She turned back to Channa, her eyes pleading. "Is that not so?"

"Jangars keep to the shadows when elves and humans are near. If cornered, they'll fight, but otherwise I'd say no."

Khamira frowned. Without warning, she darted toward the jangar, arms flailing. The cat slunk back. When Khamira reached out to touch the cat, it hissed and swatted at her hand.

"You see?" the druid said triumphantly. "This man did something that frightened the cat. It probably didn't take much. She probably felt threatened in the presence of a strange human and acted accordingly."

"This young man was no stranger," the merchant said quietly. "He was called Peedar Morilla. I assume you recognize the name, Channa?"

The half-elf shrugged. "I know House Morilla is one of the city's most influential families. Other than that, no."

"Peedar was a younger son of a minor branch. He and Jamesh were friends. I believe they were to go out with a group of friends last night, but Jamesh turned his ankle yesterday and cannot walk without pain. We assumed Peedar went on without him."

"Let's back up a few paces," Channa said, holding up one slim brown hand. "Who's Jamesh?"

"My son," said Anook and Khamira in unison.

Channa rose to her feet. "Your son," she repeated.

"I know what you're thinking," Khamira said wearily. "A druid and an animal merchant is an unlikely pairing."

"No, a shepherd and a wolf is an 'unlikely pairing.' And you live in Absalom?"

"Most of the time," the druid said. "I sail for Osirion once or twice a year."

The half-elf shook her head in disbelief. "I've never met anyone less suited for life in the city. Desert dust blows through

your veins. I can't believe you'd leave Osirion for the love of a slave trader."

Khamira laid a hand on Anook's arm to quiet his sputtered protest. "To a druid, that is what you are," she said. "Did you think me alone in this opinion?"

The merchant's lips twisted in a wry smile. "Is that why you insisted upon calling another druid? To settle this old debate?"

"Would you like to resolve our differences? Truly?"

Anook looked startled, then sheepish.

"And there it is." Khamira turned to Channa. "When I met Anook, I was younger than you are now. We shared a love of wild places, wild things. We hunted together and slept under the desert stars. Now?" She shrugged. "We are as you see us. We cannot live together, but Anook is my son's father and I believe a child should know both of his parents."

"So you moved to Absalom," said Channa softly.

The Osirion nodded. "After living in a city for these many years, I'm not much of a druid. I have a closer affinity for Absalom's pack camels than for any wild creature. But you—I've never known anyone with a better understanding of predators. Surely you can convince Anook that the jangar should not be living among humans, but returned to the wild."

Channa and the dealer exchanged a quick and significant glance.

Anook cleared his throat. "Will you tell her, or must I?"

"If the jangar killed a human, for whatever reason, she will be destroyed," Channa said. "That's the law."

Khamira stared at Channa, disbelief written large upon her face. "How is that lawful? A man who defends himself is not found guilty of murder. Who's to say this cat did not act in her own defense?" She spun toward Anook. "Now do you understand my concerns about Jamesh's new 'friends'? They're wild and unruly, no better than a pack of jackals."

"Those jackals," the merchant said, "are scions of Absalom's most wealthy and influential families. Several of their parents will be coming here, tonight. I am hosting an evening's entertainment to give them the opportunity to view some of my new acquisitions." His gaze

flicked to the feathered trim on the dead youth's tunic.

Channa's eyes widened. "You have boninji birds? Here, at the estate?"

"For about a month now," the merchant said proudly. "And there's no need for that accusing tone. We removed their poison sacs, of course. The birds are as beautiful as peacocks and just as harmless."

The half-elf pressed one palm to her forehead and shook her head in silent frustration. "Please tell me you don't plan to go ahead with this party."

"If I do not, those invited will wonder why. It's a garden party. No one will enter the house."

Channa looked to the Osirion druid, who spread her hands, palms up, in a gesture that inquired, *What can be done with such a man?*

Gritting her teeth, she turned back to the merchant. "I need to talk to Jamesh. Now. Here."

"I don't see the point," Anook said. "My son can tell you nothing. He hasn't even been told of his friend's death."

"About that," Channa said in a grim tone. "I'm obligated to report to Azlanti Keep tomorrow, and I will not omit the death of a nobleman's son from my report."

"And the jangar?" asked Khamira.

Channa pointed to the bloody corpse. "If the jangar did this, she swallowed some of those boninji feathers. If by tomorrow morning she either coughs them up or passes them in her scat, her fate is sealed. In the meanwhile, I'll look for other explanations. We could stand here discussing them, or you could fetch Jamesh and let me get started. Your choice."

The merchant stalked over to the door, scowling, and tugged at a bell pull. A servant came promptly and was sent off to fetch Jamesh.

In a very short time, a youth of about sixteen came haltingly into the room, one



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ankle wrapped in bandages. He leaned heavily on a cane, but even standing straight he would fall well short of his father's height. Slim and slight, Jamesh strongly favored his mother, with the straight black hair and red-brown skin of the Osirion upper class. As his gaze fell on his friend's body, his face took on a distinctly greenish cast.

He stared for a long, silent moment before he whirled away and fell to his knees. His body wracked with great, heaving gasps long after his stomach had emptied.

Khamira knelt beside her son and helped him to his feet. "You see?" she demanded, glaring at Channa. "Jamesh knows nothing of this. I'm taking him home with me until this is over."

The half-elf nodded and motioned for Anook to follow them out. When the door shut behind him, Channa walked to the room's only window and ran her fingers over the wooden sill. Scratches marred the wood, shallow but fresh. Beyond was a short drop to the solarium, a long glass-walled room roofed with wooden shingles painted a rich cerulean.

Channa climbed through the window and dropped lightly to the solarium roof. As she suspected, there were more claw marks on the shingles. She followed the trail until it disappeared. A pace or two beyond was a gap where three shingles had come loose.

The druid climbed down a trellis draped with fragrant jasmine vines and searched the garden beneath. She found the three missing shingles among the flowers, along with several mangled stems and two footprints in the well-tilled soil, one considerably deeper than the other. Someone with two legs ending in very human feet had fallen off the roof . . . and landed badly.

Channa prowled the gardens until she was satisfied that her assessment of the situation was correct. She found Anook in the boninji rookery, absently tossing grain to the bright-feathered flock. Eight birds, Channa noted. Emerald feathers dusted with gold—the colors of Absalom. The people who came to view Anook's latest "treasures" would be prepared to pay well for such finery.

"I'll be coming to your party tonight," she informed him.

His dubious gaze slid down her, lingering on her pointed ears and again on the well-laden weapon belt around her hips. Channa understood his concern. Half-elves were not common in Absalom, and they were more likely to be courtesans than fighters. The rich brown hue of her skin, her only legacy from her human mother, made her an oddity among half-elves. For that matter, her height alone—she was taller than most full-blooded elves and nearly all human women—would make her conspicuous among the human guests.

She glanced toward the garden pond, on which glided several black swans. "Don't worry," she told Anook. "No one will know I'm here."

Torchlight gleamed on Channa's ebony feathers as she glided across the garden pond. Her borrowed form had excellent vision—not quite as sharp as the albatross form she favored, but keen enough. She watched Anook Vastille's guests laugh and talk and admire the boninji birds that strutted along the garden paths like living jewels.

Nine boninji birds, Channa noted. Anook had acquired one extra.

The gong rang to summon the guests to dinner. She watched them gather by the wine fountain and raise their goblets in the traditional toast to their host. Everyone drank. Some managed to take a few steps before the boninji poison took effect. Most of them dropped where they stood.

The plan was clever, as far as it went. When spat directly into the face of golden lemurs, the boninji's usual prey, this poison caused instant paralysis. Even greatly diluted, it would keep the humans drugged for hours. That would be more than enough time for a fledgling druid to change out of animal form and open the gates to the pack of human jackals waiting beyond.

Channa slipped from the pool and shook the water from her feathers. She shifted back to her natural form with the ease of long practice.

The ninth boninji took a bit longer to make the transition, longer still to limp toward the southern gate.

Channa followed, silent as a shadow. As he reached for the latch, she came up behind him and tapped his shoulder.

Jamesh whirled to face her. She cut off his startled cry with a fist to the jaw and caught him as he fell. Slinging the youth over one shoulder, she strode through the silent garden and into the house.

The butler lay sprawled on the hall floor. No doubt every servant in the estate would awaken with a pounding head and no memory of what had transpired. Boninji poison had that effect.

She climbed the stairs to the room where Peedar Morilla died. His body still lay where it had fallen. The jangar, still chained, kept silent vigil. Channa was not surprised to note that the cat's jeweled collar had been replaced by a simple leather band.

The half-elf dropped Jamesh onto a settee. She lit a candle and placed it on the nearby table. "We need to talk, Khamari."

The shadows behind her stirred, and the Osirion woman stepped into the light. "When did you know?"

Channa turned to face her. "You know how city laws deal with animal attacks. You pretended you didn't. I assume that was for Anook's benefit. If you stressed the jangar's guilt knowing it would be killed, he'd know something was amiss. He might conclude you were protecting someone even more important to you."

The older druid sank into a chair and passed one hand over her forehead. "I found a vial of boninji poison in Jamesh's room. I suspected that he might be involved in the robberies. One night I

Elaine Cunningham

took animal form and followed him. But I swear to you, he didn't kill the Morilla boy."

"I know he didn't. When Jamesh was sick, you didn't even glance at what he brought up. If you had any doubt about his guilt, you would have checked for feathers. You knew there wouldn't be any."

Jamesh groaned and stirred. Khamari rose and walked over to the settee. Her gaze lingered on the bruises darkening his jaw. "You were hunting him. I had to do something."

"But killing his friend? Placing the blame on the jangar?"

"That was not my intention," she said wearily. "I saw Peedar Morilla come here for Jamesh. I followed him and confronted them both. Peedar told me Jamesh *had* to go through with the next theft they'd planned. Peedar complained of his debts, the creditors following him. When I told him that that was of no concern to me or my son, he drew a dagger and threatened me. Jamesh changed—instinctively, instantly. He's very good at animal form," she added as an aside. "But if he attacked Morilla, he might have been killed. Or he might have killed."

"So you beat him to it?"

Khamari nodded. "By then Jamesh was long gone. You know how an unplanned change can be."

Channa knew. Taking on a new animal form was difficult, even for a well-trained druid. For someone so young, a spontaneous change could be deadly. Certainly it would have left him disoriented and confused.

"And now?" she asked.

Khamari held out both hands. In one palm rested several boninji feathers, in the other, the jeweled collar. "It will be as you told Anook. By tomorrow morning, the jangar's guilt will be confirmed beyond doubt. She will be destroyed, and with her, Anook's slave trade. No one will buy exotic animals from someone who sold a man-killer."

The half-elf nodded slowly. "He might be ruined regardless. I spent the day checking Jamesh's victims. As I expected, every person he and his friends robbed had purchased animals from Anook. I won't be the only person to make that connection. Trust me, I won't weep for Anook, but it seems to me that the wrong people are paying the price."

"Don't judge Jamesh too harshly," Khamari said. "He was never meant to live in a city. That was my choice, and it was the wrong one."

Channa couldn't dispute that. When she stayed within walls for more than a few days, she began to know the rage and despair of a caged beast. She might not like Khamari's solution, but she could understand and respect it.

"Take him away from Absalom," the druid pleaded. "He needs to run with a pack. It's his nature. I only wish he'd found one more worthy of him."

"I'll make sure he does," Channa promised.

Khamari gazed at her son for a long moment, then she quickly buckled the jangar's jeweled collar around her throat. A moment later, two identical jungle cats studied Channa with golden eyes that held neither fear nor regret.

The half-elf unhooked the chain from the jangar's plain leather collar and attached it to Khamari's jeweled band. She tied a leash to the leather collar and walked the cat over to the settee. She grabbed a handful of the boy's shirt and hauled him to his feet. He blinked at her, still dazed.

"We're leaving," Channa said. "Your mother wants me to take you to the Mwangi."

Jamesh's gaze slid from one cat to the other. "I don't understand."

"You changed to jangar form last night. So did your mother." Channa handed him the jangar's lead. "She killed Morelli, and now you both have to run or face Absalom law."

"My mother killed Peedar," he repeated. "To protect me?"

"Yes."

The boy laid one hand on the jungle cat's head. "I'm not worth it, Mother," he told the jangar in a despairing whisper. "You shouldn't have done that for me."

Channa glanced at the chained druid as she pushed

Khamari's son toward the door. "I'm not sure she had a choice. She's your mother. It's her nature."



Ask a Shoanti, Wayfinder's violent advice columnist, again resurfaces from his recent adventures to take the time to provide answers to our burning questions.

Dear Ask a Shoanti

My party recently defeated an ancient green dragon. But afterwards our GM required that our party pee in a cup. Regrettably we discovered that my eidolon has been taking performance-enhancing steroids. We lost all our XP from the battle and we have been banned from several regulation dungeons. What can we do to restore our credibility?

Sincere Regards,
Anabolically Assisted

Dear Anabolically Assisted

Get your party off the juice man! I've known fighters on that stuff – shrunken testicles – it ain't pretty. Immediately implement a harsh regime of randomized *detect poison* castings for your party, administered by a respected third party. Be sure to include all familiars, *figurines of power*...no exceptions – even the party bard.

Yours very truly,
Ask a Shoanti

Alchemy in Absalom



In Absalom virtually any sort of craft has a guild that oversees its activities. Though both the College of Mysteries and the Arcanamirium claim exclusive authority over the practice of alchemy in the city, for nearly a century the alchemy guild has been the real voice for practitioners of the “noble art”. It earned its status not through political intrigue or economic clout but with the simplest and most obvious expedient of all; by keeping its secrets close...

New Alchemical Items

Absalom’s alchemist guild guards its secrets very well indeed. It claims that only members of the guild know the classified formulas needed to create the alchemical items detailed below. Of course, guild members are still free to sell them to anyone with the coins to buy them.

Blister Water: When squeezed this small, hand-held canister releases a thin spray of caustic green liquid. Creatures vulnerable to poison who are struck by this liquid must make a DC 15 Fortitude saving throw to avoid becoming blind and sickened for at least 1d4 rounds. Those who fail their initial saving throw can make a new save, with a +2 bonus, at the end of those 1d4 rounds. If they fail this save they remain blind and sickened for another 1d4 rounds. During each subsequent 1d4 round interval they get a new save, and an additional +2 bonus, until the saving throw is successful and can act normally thereafter. Firing blister water is a ranged touch attack with a range increment of 10-feet.

Breath Book: These books are made from specially

treated paper which sticks together unless a particular person, determined at the time of creation, turns the pages. Their name comes from the persistent rumor, neither confirmed nor denied by the guild, that the glue binding the pages together responds to the breath of their owners. Others consider this a deliberate misdirection and think the perspiration of the owner’s hands a more likely catalyst. Whatever the truth, guild rules require that all members must scribe their formulas and other secret lore in a breath book. This is one of the primary reasons why the guild has managed to keep its secrets for so long. There are also rumors that senior members of the guild know of some way to make *universal solvent* effective on the glue in breath books.

Fall Foam: Each one of these bandoliers contains dozens of tiny vials filled with a viscous blue liquid that explodes into a gelatinous mass when it experiences a sudden and sharp change in elevation. This mass cushions the blow of falling damage and often saves its wearer’s life. Anyone wearing fall foam who falls more than 20 ft. takes half the damage from that particular fall. In addition, the wearer gets a +5 alchemical bonus on Acrobatics checks made to convert lethal damage from a fall into nonlethal damage. Once activated it takes a full-round action for a wearer to brush this goop off his body. Until removed he suffers a -2 penalty on all Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution based checks.

Glue Gloves: These pearly white gloves have many tiny beads along their surface which leak and break when brought into contact with a surface. These beads release a clear liquid that smells like a combination of pine sap and wet wool but serves as sort of temporary glue that makes it much easier for the wearer to find purchase on a wall. Anyone wearing glue gloves gets a +5 alchemical bonus on Climb checks but suffers a -2 penalty on all attack rolls and skill checks requiring use of either or both hands until the gloves are removed. The gloves lose their potency 10 minutes after they are first used.

Shield Tar: It takes a full-round action to pour this thick black substance over shields or similar sized objects. For one minute (while the tar dries) any weapon coming into contact with the tar has a chance of getting stuck. Anyone who makes a melee attack against someone carrying an object coated with shield tar must make a DC 15 Reflex save or Strength check to avoid losing grip on his weapon. He gets a +2 bonus on the Strength check if holding a weapon with both hands. Once an object coated with shield tar traps a weapon, it cannot hold another and the person carrying is considered entangled until he drops it. Once dried, it takes a full-round action to scrap shield tar off an object; this also releases any weapon fixed to it. Attempting to remove a weapon before the shield tar dries requires a full-round

action and a DC 15 Strength check, which provokes an attack of opportunity.

Thick Smoke Sticks: When set ablaze, this bundle of specially treated twigs acts like a torch which interferes with any particularly keen sense. For instance, its smoke releases tiny filaments that interfere with echolocation while the cloying smell and unnerving popping sound dull the edge of the keenest noses and sharpest ears. Though it has no effect on creatures with relatively normal senses, such as most humanoids, it interferes with scent, blindsight, blindsense, and similar exceptional forms of perception. Creatures cannot use these senses to gain any information about the person carrying thick smoke sticks or anything in a 5 ft. radius of him. If they rely on these senses, he gains concealment. If they rely exclusively on these senses he gains total concealment and becomes effectively invisible. Thick smoke sticks normally burn for 2d4 rounds.

Guild Discoveries

Alchemist-class members of the Absalom alchemy guild can add the following discoveries to the list they can choose from. Like any other discovery they must meet any requirements and prerequisites of a particular discovery in order to select it.

Align Bomb: When an alchemist creates a bomb, he can choose to have it deal twice as much damage to creatures with a particular alignment subtype (chaotic, evil, good, or lawful) and half as much damage to creatures without that subtype. An alchemist must be at least 8th level before selecting this discovery.

Evaporation: Once per day, the alchemist can evaporate any one potion or elixir into a 10 ft. radius cloud that lasts 1 round. Any creature breathing it during that round gains the full normal benefits of drinking the potion or elixir. Evaporating a potion costs a number of gp equal to twice that potion's market price. This discovery cannot be used to evaporate extracts or mutagens. An alchemist must be at least 16th level and possess the dilution discovery before selecting this discovery.

New Feat: Absalom Alchemist

Your membership of the alchemy guild gives you access to all of its trade secrets as well as a greater understand of the role alchemy plays in many different parts of life.

Prerequisite: 1st-level alchemist or Craft (alchemy) 5 ranks.

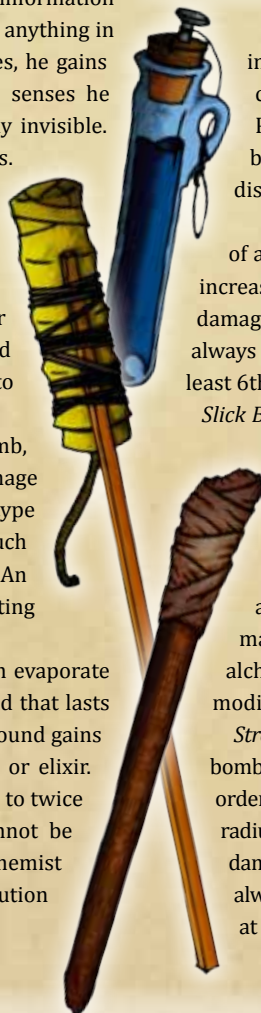
Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus on any Appraise, Disable Device, Spellcraft, or Use Magical Device check relating directly to alchemy (alchemical items, potions, etc). You also have access to the secret formulae and discoveries available exclusively to members of the alchemy guild.

Predatory Mutagen: Whenever the alchemist imbibes a mutagen, he gains scent and a +5 competence bonus on Acrobatics, Climb, Perception, and Stealth checks. An alchemist must be at least 8th level and possess the feral mutagen discovery before selecting this discovery.

Rocket Bomb: The alchemist increases the range of any bombs he creates to 40 ft. In addition, he can increase the range by a further 20 ft. for every die of damage he eliminates from the bomb. The bomb must always deal at least 1d6 damage. An alchemist must be at least 6th level before selecting this discovery.

Slick Bomb: When an alchemist creates a bomb, he can cause it to produce an extremely slippery byproduct that makes it difficult for anyone to move across the ground in the blast radius for 1 round per alchemist level. Any creature entering the square the bomb landed in or the area affected by the bomb's splash effect, must make a Reflex saving throw (DC=10 + 1/2 the alchemist's class level + the Alchemist's Intelligence modifier) to avoid falling prone.

Street Sweeper Bomb: When an alchemist creates a bomb, he can reduce the damage dealt by his bomb in order to increase the radius of its splash effect. The radius of the splash effect increases by 5 ft. for each die of damage he eliminates from the bomb. The bomb must always deal at least 1d6 damage. An alchemist must be at least 4th level before selecting this discovery.



Alchemical Items

Item	Cost (silver marks)	Weight	Craft (alchemy) DC
Blister Water	35 gp (350 sp)	1/2 lb.	25
Breath Book	100 gp (1,000 sp)	4 lbs.	25
Fall Foam	50 gp (500 sp)	8 lbs.	25
Glue Gloves	10 gp (100 sp)	1 lb.	15
Shield Tar	15 gp (150 sp)	1/2 lb.	20
Thick Smoke Sticks	75 gp (750 sp)	1 lb.	25

MIDNIGHT PROWLERS

by Jonathan "Wicht" McAnulty
illustrated by Kendall R. Hart

The wall surrounding the estate was a large, Taldan affair. It fit well with the general feel of wealth that permeated the neighborhood and complemented the many trees planted all along the avenue. However, despite its daunting appearance, it was still just a wall and did not greatly concern the two men on the other side of the cobbled street. They were more interested in the guards patrolling within. They stood beneath a stout elm tree. In the dark of the night, its shadow ensured that they remained unseen. According to the style of nocturnal burglars everywhere, each was dressed all in black.

"What do you think, Smithson?" asked the smaller of the two, Gardon, a small, slim man with a pinched face and balding, straw-colored hair.

"You tell me," replied the other, "You're the professional burglar." Smithson was tall, muscular, and possessed a full head of black hair. A sword hung at his hip and he carried a bow of ebony in his hand.

"You're the better judge of character."

The one called Smithson thought before replying, "Not the one with the scarred, swarthy face. The bigger one."

"By the bow, I knew you were going to say that," said Gardon sighing with mock frustration. He shifted the stout, iron-shod club at his belt so it would rest easier on his hip.

"Say when," whispered Smithson as the swarthy guard once more walked past the gate into view.

Gardon, mentally keeping time, said nothing at first. Then with a motion to his partner, he raced across the street. Like a cat, he reached the wall at a run and scaled it. Without wasting a single motion, he vaulted over the top of the wall and down onto the thick, lush grass of the yard right in front of the second guardsman.

The guard was startled only shortly. His employer was wealthy and had the luxury of being able to hire some of the best men in Absalom.

"That wasn't smart, now," said the guard, grinning nastily. The smile spoke of a man that loved his career not because it paid well, which it did, but because it afforded him the opportunity to hurt people. He drew his sword and slowly cracked his neck first to one side and then the other. Hefting his weapon, he began to move toward the small man before him, only to be interrupted by a large, heavy boot crashing against

the side of his face. The guard fell senseless to the ground.

"Took you long enough," complained Gardon.

"I timed it perfectly," replied Smithson. The guardsman moaned.

"Just a moment," said Smithson. He struck the felled man hard across the head with his bow shaft. The moaning stopped. "Alright then, carry on."

They placed the unconscious guard in the shadows of a thick bush and then, waiting only long enough for the swarthy guard to pass by, they circled around towards the side of the house. Once in position, they waited again.

"What do you think makes people take to a life of crime?" asked Smithson, his voice hushed.

"Are you asking rhetorically?" replied Gardon.

Smithson continued, "Is it the excitement of crouching in the dark or the potential for being caught?"

"Most do it for the money," said Gardon. He cocked his head. "Shh, he's coming back."

They hid until the guard had moved well out of sight, then Smithson quietly boosted Gardon up and onto the large balcony overhead. The slight burgler pulled himself over the stone balcony and then secured a thin black rope to it, allowing Smithson to climb up next. They pulled up the rope after him.

The balcony door was locked. Gardon, pulling a set of lock picks from his belt pouch, soon rectified that situation. Grinning jauntily in the dark, he pushed the door open. The resulting loud creak wiped the smile from his face. He tensed.

"Quiet," hissed Smithson, entering first. The hall beyond was empty. Gardon breathed a sigh of relief and followed.

Ambient lamplight coming from a stairwell revealed four closed doors against the left wall. The right wall had two doors and stairs going both up and down.

"Where to?" asked Gardon. He closed the door slowly behind him. It creaked again but not as loudly. Their footsteps were well muffled by the thick carpeting in the hall – nevertheless both men stepped softly.

"Could be in the attic, or even the cellar. But I'm thinking this man keeps his treasures close to his bedroom. He sleeps on this floor. We should begin here."

Gardon nodded. "We're going to need a light to search the rooms."

"Some burglar you are," whispered Smithson. "Did you just now think of that?" He pulled a glow-rod from his belt pouch. With a twist and a crack, it flared to life. Smithson held it cupped in his large hand so that only a portion of the stick was allowed to shine.

They tried the first door on the left. It opened easily. The room beyond was a library, tastefully decorated with expensive furnishings.

"Wonder what sort of books his lordship has," said

Jonathan "Wicht" McAnulty

Gardon wistfully.

"We don't have that kind of time," said Smithson. From the stairwell came the sound of a man's laughter. "Business first."

"Try the right side, then. There's fewer doors taking up just as much space. If there's a master bedroom I'm thinking that's where it is."

"Let's be quick," said Smithson, angling the glow-rod to that side, "that guard will 'come to' eventually."

The first door was opened into a linen closet. The second was locked.

"That's your department," whispered Smithson.

"Just a moment," replied his companion. He bent down, lock picks in hand, to work the lock.

"You would think a respectable member of the community could afford better locks," Gardon chuckled as the tumblers fell into place. He turned the knob with a grin and pushed the door open.

Smithson stepped through into darkness; the blinds were drawn. As his partner closed the door behind them, he opened his hand, allowing the glow-rod to fully shine. The size of the bedroom spoke to the great wealth of its usual occupant. The bedclothes on the four-poster bed were red silk. The toilet-set on the mahogany vanity was of gold. Two marble statues were being used as coat racks.

"The man has no taste," said Gardon as he took in the gaudy room.

"No doubt," said Smithson, but his interest was elsewhere. He pointed at the heavy oak door on the left side of the spacious room. "Try that."

Tellingly, this door was also locked.

"I think this is it," said Gardon excitedly. He set to work, but the lock was far superior to the others in the house. Sweat began to bead on the small man's forehead.

"Can you get it?" asked Smithson, after a bit. He watched intently, feeling the passing of time as the other struggled.

"Maybe," Gardon responded, wiping his brow with the back of one hand. A minute later this was amended to, "Maybe not," then, "wait, I think... yes, that does it."

Gardon breathed deeply and pushed open the door. Smithson shone the light within. Both men gazed inside, caught speechless. Smithson handed the light to his partner. There were tears in his eyes.

Just then, the door behind them opened.

"What is this?" began Lord Halsim Bloodwirth II. The stocky gray haired man took in the sight of the two intruders and his face flushed purple with anger. He opened his mouth to yell for his guards. He never got the chance.

"Erastil take you," snarled Smithson. With a fluid motion, he drew an arrow and fired it at the paunchy aristocrat. The flying arrow glowed majestically for just a moment then

lodged itself deep in the man's throat. Gargling in horror, Lord Halsim grasped the shaft of the arrow. His eyes widened as he collapsed to the floor.

"Very diplomatic of you," said Gardon dryly.

"Shut up," said Smithson. He gazed sadly at the dying man for just a moment. Then turning, he walked over to the young girl who lay bound and gagged upon the floor of the windowless antechamber. As Smithson cut her bonds, Gardon fetched a sheet from the bed.

"It's alright," said Smithson soothingly. "He can't hurt you anymore. You're going to be safe now. I promise you." Taking the sheet from Gardon, the paladin wrapped the shivering child with it and lifted her into his arms to carry her home.



Hotspur and the Dragon

WEAL

OR

WOE

HOTSPUR AND THE DRAGON

by Eoin "Vagrant-Poet" Brennan

illustrated by Matthew "The Twitching King" Stilson

No group more exemplifies the lively nature of Absalom and the independent, cosmopolitan nature of the local people than the hotspurs. Guides, guards, messengers, and sell-swords, hotspurs inhabit the docks looking for coin from newcomers or watching the back of a young noble lady in the Ivy district on her way to a rendezvous. Few hotspurs get their fingers in more pies than Hirsen Carras.

A gruesome thieves' guild, the Bloody Barbers, often use barber shops as front businesses. Unfortunately for Hirsen, he interrupted the activities of the Bloody Barbers too often. The guild dispatched a headman to see that Hirsen never intrudes again. A strange, stoic lizard folk, The Dragon uses magical disguise to get close to his targets before unveiling himself to his victims. The Dragon prefers to strike in small winding alleys just off of main thoroughfares. Both range throughout Absalom with a definite preference for the Docks or Coins District.

Weal

Dashing Hotspur, Hirsen Carras

CR 3

XP 800

Male human rogue 4

CG Medium humanoid

Init +2; Senses Perception +5 (+6 vs. traps)

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 13 (+3 armor, +2 Dex, +1 dodge)

hp 18 (4d8)

Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +0

Defensive Abilities evasion, uncanny dodge

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee

Mwk rapier +7 (1d6+1/18-20)

Ranged

Mwk hand crossbow +6 (1d4/19-20; RI 30 ft.)

Special Attacks sneak attack +2d6, surprise attack

TACTICS

During Combat Hirsen talks his way out of combat when possible.

When forced into battle, he drinks his potion of cat's grace and leaps to the fore in a heroic display of swordsmanship and recklessness. Hirsen flanks with allies when possible and uses his Acrobatics skill to reach strategic positions. With prior warning, he uses his oil of magic weapon before combat.

Morale Hirsen will fight to the death if he is defending an unarmed person or woman. Otherwise, he flees if he feels overmatched or is near death.

STATISTICS

Str 13, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 13, Wis 8, Cha 16

Base Atk +3; CMB +4; CMD 16

Feats Combat Expertise, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (rapier)

Skills Acrobatics +8, Bluff +8, Climb +6, Diplomacy +12, Disguise +8, Escape Artist +7, Knowledge (local) +8, Knowledge (history) +3, Knowledge (nobility) +3, Linguistics +6, Perception +5 (+6 vs. traps), Perform (dance) +8, Sense Motive +4, Stealth +7, Swim +6

Languages Common, Halfling, Kelish, Osiriani, Varisian

SQ trapfinding +2, trap sense +1, weapon training (rapier)

Combat Gear 20 bolts, oil of magic weapon, potion of cat's grace, potion of cure light wounds; Other Gear +1 leather armor, golden torc (worth 35 gp), 50 gp



Eoin "Vagrant-Poet" Brennan

Hooks

Hirsen's experienced eye might pick the PCs as wealthy newcomers when they arrive in Absalom at the Docks; he approaches them with a bow and a flourish, offering to guide them through the highs and lows, wonders and sins of the greatest city in the world.

Hirsen might also approach the party in the taproom of a local tavern or bar. He will share his tale and the his fear of retribution from the Barbers. He asks the PCs to tag along on his latest job protecting a young woman on a shopping trip from the Petal District to the Coins and offers to pay them his wage if they ensure his ward's safety, if not his own.

Woe

The Hidden Killer, Dragon CR 6

XP 2,400

Male lizardfolk rogue 3/assassin 3

NE Medium humanoid (reptilian)

Init +7; Senses Perception +9 (+10 vs. traps)

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 13, flat-footed 18 (+3 armor, +3 Dex, +5 natural)

hp 52 (8d8+16)

Fort +7, Ref +11, Will +5; +1 vs. poison

Defensive Abilities evasion, trap sense +1, uncanny dodge

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., swim 15 ft.

Melee

+1 greatsword +10 (2d6+5/19-20)

2 claws +8 (1d4+3) and bite +8 (1d4+4)

Special Attacks death attack (DC 13), sneak attack +4d6

STATISTICS

Str 16, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 8

Base Atk +5; CMB +8; CMD 21

Feats Improved Initiative, Martial Weapon Proficiency (greatsword), Power Attack, Weapon Focus (greatsword)

Skills Acrobatics +15, Climb +12, Disguise +8, Escape Artist +9, Knowledge (local) +8, Linguistics +4, Perception +9, Stealth +11, Swim +20; Racial Modifiers +4 Acrobatics

Languages Common, Draconic

SQ hold breath, poison use, rogue talents (resiliency), trapfinding +1

Combat Gear elixir of fire breath, potion of invisibility; Other Gear +1 leather armor, hat of disguise, 30 gp

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Hold Breath (Ex) The Dragon can hold his breath for a number of rounds equal to 4 times his Constitution score before he risks drowning.

Hooks

The PCs are accompanying Hirsen, when they come across the Dragon, disguised as a destitute man begs. The Dragon may

ambush Hirsen at this time not realizing the danger the party represents.

If the PCs cross the Bloody Barbers, they might dispatch the Dragon to hunt them down.

If the PCs are exploring the Precipice Quarter, they may stumble across the Dragon's hideout. If present the Dragon immediately attacks them.

The city guard could pay the PCs to investigate rumors that a notable assassin lives beneath collapsed buildings in the Precipice quarter.



The Black Mask



THE BLACK MASK

by Larry "Larcifer" Wilhelm
illustrated by Eva Widemann

In the heart of Absalom a costume shop hides under the divine shadow of the Starstone Cathedral. Known simply as the Black Mask, this elaborate store sells a myriad of exotic attire; yet under the veil of its many costumes, a sinister business prevails.

Secrecy and disguise embody the god Norgorber and here, within the Black Mask, his devout followers come to discuss all manner of mayhem. Alchemists seeking toxic dyes, and seamsters stitching grotesque visages: both frequent this shop under the charade of ordinary customer seeking exotic attire. With them are spies looking for their next guise and rogues pilfering the streets of the Ascendant Court, innocently jingling the Black Mask's bells as they cross its threshold. One can never know who is a simple costume hunter, and who is not.

Textured costumes drape from cold, ornate hooks splashing color throughout the scintillating shop. Hectic workers draped in drab brown weave past these multi-hued garments, measuring customers with an efficient precision. In the store's creaky center, a wire mannequin displays an exquisite ebon costume; several shoppers swear they spy it moving from the corners of their eyes. Beside the costume, a man scrutinizes his customers. One day he may appear youthful and handsome, and the next jaundiced and weathered. Never under the same guise twice, he is known only as "the Proprietor".

On the Shelves

Mundane Items

The Black Mask offers all styles of clothing found in the Pathfinder Core Rulebook. In addition, the shop sells disguise kits, costume jewelry, and several prop versions of common weapons. More select clientèle may find poisons, quieting needles, and thieves' tools carefully waiting in the pockets of recently purchased garments.

Magical Items

All manner of magical clothing (boots, cloaks, hats and robes), can also be found here. Any clothing item under 3,000 GP has a good chance (GM's discretion, but typically 75% or higher) of occupying one of the shop's many hooks.

On days dedicated to the worship of Norgorber, several horrific creations – dubbed "skinsaw masks" – fill the store's shelves at discount prices (see PF#2, Rise of the Runelords: The Skinsaw Murders for examples).

New Poison Source: Textile Dyes

Several textile dyes prove poisonous when applied to uses other than fabrics, and many precursors to more refined dyes are well known. For example arsenic (Core Rulebook, page 559) was used to dye fabrics a green hue, whereas bloodroot or hemlock resulted in a red or red-brown tinge. Below are two new poisons, Azalea Leaves and Goldenrod. Azalea leaves created a rich green color and Goldenrod produced a pale yellow shade.

Azalea Leaves

Type poison, ingested; **Save** Fortitude DC 14

Frequency 1/round for 2 rounds

Effect 1d3 Con damage and 1d3 Wis damage; **Cure** 1 save

Cost 300 gp

Goldenrod

Type poison, injury; **Save** Fortitude DC 13

Frequency 1/round for 6 rounds

Effect 1d2 Dex damage; **Cure** 2 consecutive saves

Cost 325 gp

Hazards

Shopping the Black Mask can prove perilous for those unable to keep to their own business, for one never knows whom they shop beside. Many curious shoppers have disappeared only to turn up dead in an alley after recognizing one of Absalom's more nefarious criminals.

Due to the dangerous and larcenous demeanors of the mask's clientèle, several measures safeguard the unassuming costume shop. Well-trained Black Mask tailors (NE human cleric of Norgorber 1/rogue 1) patrol the shop's floor, while strategically placed mannequins (animated objects) spring to life when called on. However, the most unique protector is the elegant costume displayed in the shop's core.

Executioner's Garb

This sinister garment, fashioned from rich ebon fabric and jet sequins, resembles a macabre executioner's uniform complete with a garish hood. Suddenly it sways forward, hungrily dancing as if some invisible menace still occupies its gruesome folds.

Larry "Larcifer" Wilhelm

EXECUTIONER'S GARB CR 3

XP 800
 N Medium construct

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +0

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 13, flat-footed 12 (+3 Dex, +2 natural)
hp 42 (4d10+20)
Fort +1, **Ref** +1, **Will** +1
DR 5/slashing; **Immune** construct traits;
Weaknesses vulnerability to acid and fire

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee
 2 slams +6 (1d6+2 plus grab)

Special Attacks choking collar, constrict (collar, 1d4+2)

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 17, **Con** -, **Int** -, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 1
Base Atk +4; **CMB** +6 (+10 grapple); **CMD** 19

ECOLOGY

Environment urban
Organization solitary, matching pair, or wardrobe (3-10)
Treasure none

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Choking Collar (Ex) When an executioner's garb successfully maintains a grapple it may attempt to asphyxiate its foe, enveloping him and drawing tight around his neck. In addition to the constrict damage, the foe is dazed for one round if it fails a DC 12 Fortitude save. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Grab (Ex) An executioner's garb may attempt to grapple an opponent one size category larger than itself without penalty.

The executioner's garb is a simple construct woven from strong fabric that moves on its own accord. The executioner's garb is typically used as a body guard, or a guardian of treasure.

Less exotic than the executioner's garb, but far more deadly, the real threat within the Black Mask is the Proprietor himself. Under the front of the Black Mask, he brokers illicit deals with Absalom's underworld, specializing in acquiring esoteric lore.

THE PROPRIETOR CR 7

XP 3,200
 Male human cleric of Norgorber 5/assassin 1/black mask 2
 NE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +6; **Senses** Perception +8

Aura strong evil

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 15, flat-footed 18 (+5 armor, +2 Dex, +3 deflection)
hp 57 (8d8+21)
Fort +6, **Ref** +5, **Will** +9

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee
 mwk short sword +10 (1d6+4/19-20)

Ranged
 mwk light crossbow +9 (1d8+2/19-20)

Special Attacks blackfinger's blade 2/day (DC 18), channel negative energy (3d6, DC 12, 3/day), death attack (DC 12), poison use, sneak attack +2d6

Cleric spells prepared (CL 6th; concentration +10)
 3rd - cure serious wounds (2), magic vestment (already cast), nondetection^P
 2nd - delay poison, hold person (DC 16), invisibility^P (2), undetectable alignment

1st - cause fear (DC 15), charm person^P (DC 15), comprehend languages, divine favor (already cast), shield of faith (already cast)

0 - bleed (DC 14), detect poison, guidance, mending

D Domain spell; **Domains** Charm, Trickery

Black mask spell-like abilities (CL 6th; concentration +10)

At will - disguise self

Domain spell-like abilities (CL 6th; concentration +10)

7/day - dazing touch, copy cat (5 rounds)

TACTICS

Before combat The Proprietor casts *divine favor*, *shield of faith* and drinks his *potion of fox's cunning* before stalking his prey.

During combat The Proprietor uses *invisibility* to prepare a death attack, followed by his *copy cat* ability. He will attempt to flank or feint to sneak attack and use his blackfinger's blade ability. The Proprietor prefers hit and run tactics rather than facing a foe head-on.

Morale The Proprietor flees under *invisibility* when reduced to 20 hit points, returning to harass the PCs with assassination attempts.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 14, **Con** 12, **Int** 8, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +4; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 18

Feats Combat Casting, Deceitful, Improved Initiative, Toughness, Weapon Focus (short sword)

Skills Bluff +7, Disguise +10, Knowledge (local) +4, Knowledge (religion) +4, Perception +8, Profession (tailor) +8, Sleight of Hand +6, Spellcraft +5, Stealth +10

Languages Common

SQ aura, mask of a thousand faces

Combat Gear *potion of displacement*, *potion of haste*; **Other Gear** +1 studded leather armor, 10 bolts (goldenrod poison), *potion of fox's cunning*, thieves' tools, quieting needles, 135 gp



The Black Mask

THE BLACK MASK PRESTIGE CLASS

The black masks bridge the gap between Norgorber's four cults, finding reverence with all those who worship the Reaper of Reputation. They infiltrate and execute those who dare reveal lost lore that is dear to Norgorber's faithful.

Role: Master infiltrators, the black masks make excellent scouts and silent killers. Their devotion to their divine patron affords them a wide selection of spells to assist in any task. They safeguard information their sect deems secret, and often accompany adventures to secure forbidden lore.

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

To qualify to become a black mask, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Alignment: Any evil.

Deity: Norgorber.

Skills: Disguise 7 ranks, Stealth 3 ranks.

Feats: Deceitful, Weapon Focus (short sword).

Special: Sneak attack, ability to cast 2nd level divine spells.

Class Skills

The black mask's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Acrobatics (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Int), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (history) (Int), Knowledge (local) (Int), Knowledge (Religion) (Int), Perception (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Spellcraft (Int), and Stealth (Dex).

Skill Ranks at Each Level: 4 +Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the black mask prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Black masks gain no proficiency with any weapon or armor.

Spells per Day: At 2nd and 3rd level, the character gains new spells per day as if he had also gained a level in a divine spellcasting class he belonged to before adding the prestige class. He does not, however, gain other benefits a character of that class would have gained, except for additional spells per day, and an increased effective level of spellcasting. If a character had more than one divine spellcasting class before becoming a black mask, he must decide to which class he adds the new level for purposes of determining spells per day.

Sneak Attack: This is exactly like the rogue ability of the same name. The extra damage dealt increases by +1d6 every other level (1st and 3rd). If a black mask gets a sneak attack from another source, the bonuses on damage stack.

Blackfinger's Blade (Sp): Beginning at 1st level, once per day a black mask who successfully deals sneak attack damage with a melee weapon may poison the target as well. Treat the victim as if they had just been targeted with the *poison* spell. Initiating *blackfinger's blade* is a swift action.

Mask of a Thousand Faces (Sp): Beginning at 2nd level a black mask may use *disguise self* at will.

Skinsaw's Caress (Sp): Beginning at 3rd level, once per day as a swift action a black mask who successfully deals sneak attack damage with a melee weapon may forgo the sneak attack damage to instead target the victim with the spell *slay living*.

The Black Mask in your Pathfinder Campaign

The Black Mask can be introduced into an existing campaign fairly easily, it resides in the magnificent city of Absalom, but the shop can be located in any large metropolitan area that

The Black Mask Class Features

Level	BAB	Fort	Save	Ref	Save	Will	Save	Special	Spells per Day
1	+0	+0	+0	+1	+0	+0	+0	sneak attack +1d6, blackfinger's blade 1/day	—
2	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	blackfinger's blade 2/day, mask of a thousand faces	+1 level of divine spellcasting class
3	+2	+1	+1	+2	+1	+1	+1	blackfinger's blade 3/day, skinsaw's caress 1/day, sneak attack +2d6	+1 level of divine spellcasting class

Class Skills: Acrobatics (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Int), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (history) (Int), Knowledge (local) (Int), Knowledge (Religion) (Int), Perception (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Spellcraft (Int), and Stealth (Dex).



Larry "Larcifer" Wilhelm

better suits your campaign. Below are several suggested seeds on how to use the Black Mask in your campaign:

A series of gruesome murders ravages the city of Absalom, and a quick investigation uncovers the killings intensify on days sacred to the god of secrets Norgorber. Uncovering a grisly mask stitched from human flesh, identified as a sacramental head covering for the worshipers of Father Skinsaw. Using the evidence gathered, the PCs locate the killer, but he knows no more than they. Swearing his innocence he babbles that he recently purchased the head gear from the Black Mask costume shop, and ever since he has suffered from blackouts.

After a PC either commits a robbery within the Ascendant Court, or is accused of such a crime, agents dressed in simple browns demand a tithe to the Black Mask's coffers. Refusal to pay the fee results in repeated attempts on the PCs lives while they stay in Absalom until either the PCs succumb to the assaults, or they pay the demanded fee.

While at the Black Mask purchasing appropriate fashions for a ball, the PCs recognize a familiar NPC, and long time thorn in their side, leaving the shop with costume tucked under her under arm. Suddenly a bundle wrapped in brown paper falls from the costume's folds. Inspecting the package the PCs uncover deadly poison and detailed plans to commit murder. A murder to take place this very night at the same event the PCs had hoped to attend.

To see more of Eva Widermann's art, be sure to visit her website at <http://www.eva-widermann.de/>



Dear Ask a Shoanti

Timba of the Skoan-Quah added Thodoron of the Shundar-Quah as her friend on Facebook and like totally updated her status if you get what I mean. But her BFF is Piffanix of the Lyrune tribe and the whole time she was like totally sexting Piffanix's boy friend with her iPhone. Should I ping her about this or just Twitter it?

Sincere Regards,
Shoanti Girl in the Valley

Dear Shoanti Girl in the Valley

Don't you kids just ever mate anymore?

Yours very truly,
Ask a Shoanti




Psst! Over here. Want some magic?

Voodoo!
Old World Folklore!
Alien Horrors!

Incantations from the Other Side: Spirit Magic





Diamond Academy



THE DIAMOND ACADEMY

THE ART OF MARTIAL MAGIC



by Ryan Costello, Jr.

Cartography by Trevor "Tarren Dei" Gulliver

Exotic and as charmed as its precious stone namesake, Absalom's Diamond Academy is reknowned throughout the Inner Sea. Naturally, the City at the Center of the World has abundant wizard colleges and fighting schools, but only Diamond Academy specializes in both. The Academy earned its reputation as the School of Sword and Spell by training casters and warriors to work together.

All over Golarion, spellcasters understand that despite their mastery of world-altering forces, their neglected bodies remain too frail to adventure on their own. Likewise, warriors may border physical perfection but they are always one spell away from becoming a pile of ash or life as a toad (or worse). In addition to the standard lessons of their chosen field, caster and warrior students at Diamond Academy take special courses on synergizing. A Diamond graduate would never utter "he can survive a *fireball*" or "I can leave her alone for a minute" on a battlefield.

The following courses are part of the Diamond Academy curriculum. Characters with the Diamond Academy Graduate trait (see below) can select special feats for completing these courses.

Conjurer's Gauntlet

Before casters and warriors can rely on one another, they must understand one another. The administrators of Diamond Academy believe the best way to understand someone is to fight them. As a caster will only win a duel if they have time to cast spells first, a warrior fights creatures summoned by his caster opponent. The rules stipulate that a caster can only cast summoning spells and spells that directly target the creatures they have summoned. The warrior wins if more than ten seconds pass without a creature to fight. The caster wins if the warrior "dies." Conjurer's Gauntlet teaches self- and mutual-awareness; there are no degrees of success in a duel to the "death", students either pass or fail.

Caster of the Conjurer's Gauntlet [General]

Your summoned creatures helped you pass the Conjurer's Gauntlet at the Diamond Academy.

Prerequisite: Diamond Academy Graduate trait, caster level 2nd

Benefit: Each creature you conjure with any summon spell gains a +1 enhancement bonus to hit and a +1 enhancement bonus to the DC of its spells and spell-like abilities.

Warrior of the Conjurer's Gauntlet [Combat]

You outlasted the summoned creatures in a Conjurer's Gauntlet at Diamond Academy.

Prerequisite: Diamond Academy Graduate trait, base attack bonus +3.

Benefit: You gain a +1 morale bonus to AC against summoned creatures' attacks and a +1 morale bonus to saving throws against summoned creatures' spells and spell-like abilities.

Juice

To a man with a hammer, all his problems look like nails. Juice exists to get casters and warriors to stop believing that all problems can be solved with magic and violence, respectively.

Caster and warrior pairs face a series of contraptions. At the heart of each device lies an orange. The contraptions are manipulated with a combination of brute strength, physical blows, or delicate fingers and energy, matter manipulation, or intangible components to juice the orange.

The contraptions themselves often include hints about how to overcome them. In Barnyard Squeeze, the warrior and caster must each pull on ropes to one side of the contraption while a harnessed bull pulls a rope on the other side. The bull acts as a hint that the caster should use bull's strength. Other contraptions are anomalous, like Jelly Juicer, where the orange is trapped inside a ballista bolt aimed at a gelatinous cube. The caster must cast protection from arrows on the gelatinous cube so that when the warrior fires the ballista, the orange is juiced by the gelatinous cube's damage reduction.

Ryan Costello, Jr.

Juice teaches teamwork. Students are graded based on how many contraptions they solve, how long it takes them, and how much juice they squeeze.

Tandem Disabling [Teamwork]

You are very effective at disabling devices as a team thanks to your Juice experience at Diamond Academy.

Prerequisite: Diamond Academy Graduate trait

Benefit: You can use the Aid Another action on Disable Device skill checks, even if you do not have any ranks in that skill. When aiding a Disable Device skill check, you can add your Base Attack Bonus or your caster level (whichever is higher) instead of your Disable Device bonus.

Tandem Disabling does not allow you to make Disable Device checks untrained. Tandem Disabling only applies when you are aiding another character's skill check, not when you are making a Disable Device check.

Tapped Target Tag

Magic abides by its own rules, but rumors abound that when the last spell of the day is exhausted, the magic sounds different. Whether *magic missile* or *wish*, the spell's usual noise changes to a drawn out sigh. Most non-casters attribute it to the caster whimpering as their spells run out.

Learning to cope without the use of high level magic serves as an indispensable lesson for casters, and learning to protect their weakened allies equally so for the warrior. In this course, casters are forbidden from casting anything beyond the most basic of spells (cantrips, orisons and the like) and are paired with a martial partner in a controlled environment. The class is confronted with a series of illusions that simulate real threats, the warriors protecting the casters from harm, gradually increasing in difficulty as larger threats and area effects change the situation.

Tapped Target Tag teaches survival and battlefield awareness. Grades are determined by the amount of time that passes until either the warrior or the caster is "killed".

Typically surviving two minutes is considered a perfect score.

A variation of Tapped Target Tag, reserved for finals, grades students with a "last one standing" principle. The earlier a team is eliminated, the lower they grade. This turns the other students from passive players sharing the area to active threats, and makes warriors' tactical choices more difficult.

Tapped Target Defender [Combat]

You earned a perfect score as a warrior in the tapped target tag course at Diamond Academy.

Prerequisite: Diamond Academy Graduate trait, base attack bonus +3.

Benefit: When fighting defensively, you can choose to give the bonus to AC to an adjacent ally instead. You still take the penalty on all attacks.

Tapped Target Survivor [General]

You earned a perfect score as a caster in the tapped target tag course at Diamond Academy.

Prerequisite: Diamond Academy Graduate trait, caster level 2nd

Benefit: When you successfully use the aid another special attack in combat, you receive a +2 bonus to AC until the beginning of your next turn.

Regional Traits

Diamond Academy Graduate: You attended and graduated from the Diamond Academy in Absalom. Your time there brought you a better understanding of how warriors and casters think and interrelate. As a graduation gift, you were given a signet ring with the academy's logo encrusted in diamonds. Whenever you wear this ring, you gain a +2 bonus on Diplomacy checks when dealing with Diamond Academy staff and alumni.



Diamond Academy



Exploring Diamond Academy

Located in Absalom's Ivy District, the Diamond Academy accepts less than ten percent of applicants offered enrolment. Despite demand, Diamond Academy stays relatively small to ensure enough experts can be found to teach the various courses.

The following sites are of interest at Diamond Academy:

1. Commons From the sloped fields of the front yard to the main floor of the administration building, students are free to wander and socialize.

2. Library Diamond Academy's philosophy extends to every corner of the campus, and nowhere is it more obvious than the library. Unlike many other libraries, the noise here is excessive – the clink of weapons against armor and spells being cast are a constant sussurus of sound. Graduates look back on their time in the library as a valuable lesson on respecting their fellow adventurers' space but students consider time in the library more trying than any classroom exam.

3. Classrooms Students are completely segregated only during class time. They learn enough theory outside their field during casual conversation.

4. Heads of Magic and Warfare Office The students are

not the only ones expected to share space. The Head of Magic Dailiamonta Balalasnow (female gnome witch 6/expert 2) and the Head of Warfare Maximillion Fairweather (male half-elf fighter 4/expert 4) share an office. Though luxurious and large, no barriers are allowed to divide the room.

5. Headmaster Office and Residence The Heads of Magic and Warfare are in charge of the individual student bodies, but Headmaster Abigail Fairweather (female human expert 10 and half-sister of Maximillion) is in charge of the school as a whole. Unlike the rest of the staff, the Headmaster is expected to live on campus and be available at all hours, day and night.

6. Staff Room The staff meets in this private room between classes, although they can also be found in the commons and the library.

7. Dormitory Most students live on campus rather than pay the outrageous prices of private Ivy District residences.

8. Simulation Rooms Large magically treated open areas for Diamond's various cross-curricular courses.

9. Diamond Chambers Rather than risk lives, students are crystallized and projections of them appear in the situation rooms. The crystallization uses the same principals of resurrection magic, only students are saved just before death.



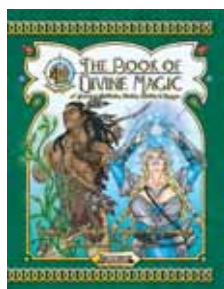
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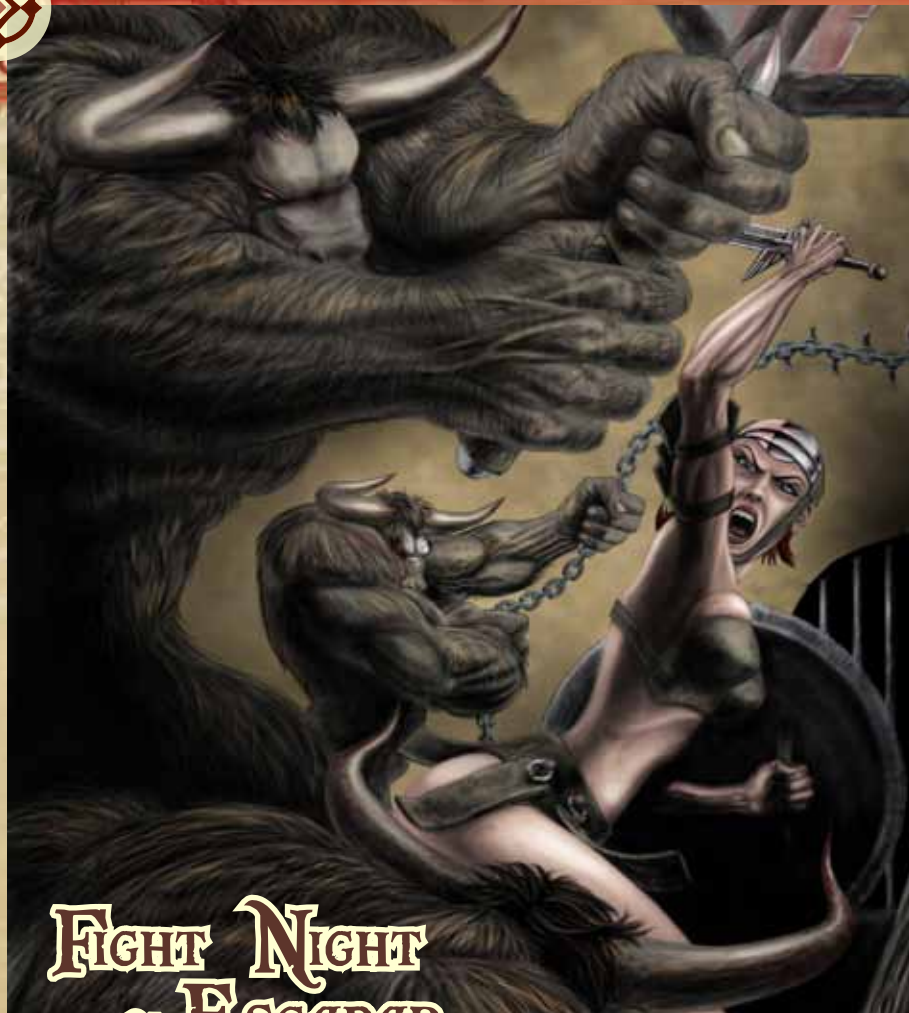
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Fight Night in Escadar



FIGHT NIGHT IN ESCADAR

by Sean O'Connor
illustrated by Kendall R. Hart

Aerik groaned audibly as a quartet of other gladiators carried him down the ramp toward the healer. His barrel chest heaved with each gurgling breath and blood blotted out most of his crag-like features, yet Boudicca was sure there was a look of disgruntlement beneath blood and beard. The dwarf had always been stubborn about his dignity, she thought. “Who was he up against?” she asked one of the other fighters, a lean and sinewy half-elf called Delyn.

“Fedor. I’m surprised he’s still breathing, though I suppose it’d be just about as easy to break an anvil as that one,” he said, bobbing and side-stepping against his shadow to get ready for his match. “Do you know who you’ve got tonight?”

Boudicca shook her head, freshly colored hair brushing her shoulders, leaving traces of the henna tint behind. “No, that fat bag of sausage Miscavige wouldn’t tell me. I’m up after the next

one though. Help me gear up?”

Delyn nodded and slid his wooden sword through the loop on his belt. Pit-fighters weren’t allowed much armor, and what they had was more costume than protective gear. Part of it was simple expedience: their lives were cheap, and you didn’t spend the money good armor cost on easily replaced slaves. But more than that, it was part of the show. Every gladiator in the arena knew that the crowd grew as drunk on blood and flesh as they did the spirits that flowed readily from the concession stalls. They were show animals, to shed blood to delighted shrieks and die to thunderous applause. As such, their equipment was designed to cover little.

In the armory, Boudicca slipped her right arm through the sleeve of overlapping segments and settled the flared shoulder cap properly, then let Delyn buckle the straps properly – loose armor meant a certain death. From above, drumbeats thundered in the arena and the cheers echoed even through the stone. Boudicca examined a few

different belts, chose the one that seemed in the best condition, and pulled it around her waist before buckling it. The wide strip of leather covered her lower abdomen and had a skirt of broad leather strips that protected her upper legs and backside. She had been self-conscious her first few fights, the hoots of men imagining they saw something through the narrow gaps of the strips distracting her. She barely noticed it anymore. Delyn selected a harness while she tugged on her boots, sturdy cross-laced ones that almost reached her knees.

The harness was as simple as the rest of her gear – a leather strap to go over her shoulder and across her torso, with a metal ring to hold her sword until she drew it. Over this went her armor – stiff boiled leather tanned and lacquered to a nearly bronze sheen, it covered only the front of her upper body. It was a reminder never to turn her back on an opponent, lest they be shamming death or defeat. “Hold still,” Delyn said as he buckled the armor securely on.

A roar of surprise burst from the crowd. “It’s almost time,” he said. Boudicca nodded. A deceptive move like that always came near the end of a fight – used too often, a crowd grew angry

at trickery and jeered instead of applauded. Worse, in the eyes of the stable-masters like Miscavige, they might not return for another spectacle. As she tucked her hair into a sturdy leather and metal cap and tightened the straps, they at last heard the roar of the crowd as the fight ended.

Her limited armor complete, Boudicca stepped through the gate separating the armor from the weapons. None of the fighters were allowed live weapons until they were about to enter the arena, to prevent them from cutting their way to freedom. "What've you got for me tonight, Jasper?" she asked, stretching her arms across her body to limber up.

A grunt answered her, followed by the viscous hawking spit customary to the arms master. "Same as every night, and you haven't taken me up on it yet," Jasper said, stepping up to the counter. The grizzled half-orc was broad and formidable, even missing his right arm, left eye, and most of both ears. "It's a red mark, you know."

Boudicca sighed. "I should have guessed." Red marks meant a death fight – no option to yield or accept another fighter's surrender. Too often both fighters perished in the ring. "Who am I up against?"

Jasper took a large metal shield off the wall, handling it easy despite only having one hand to grip it, and passed it to Boudicca. He checked his list, then handed her a bastard sword, the bronze cross-guard shaped like a swooping hawk. "It's Donckerwolke's stable, is all I know," he said. "Could be almost anything."

The wooden portcullis raised and she stepped onto the packed earth, the heat of the crowd in the stadium and the smell of blood thicker than they had been below. She ignored the herald's announcement of her name and the cheers that followed, giving a perfunctory salute as she scanned the crowd with her eyes.

It was a packed house, probably close to 500 off-duty soldiers and sailors between voyages watching the fights. There were even a few water-filled trenches from which the Low Azlanti – the gillmen – watched and splashed in excitement. Finally the other portcullis raised, and Boudicca let herself listen to the announcer.

"And now entering the arena, I am proud to present Islero, Murciélago, and Reventón, the Fighting Miuras!" Three heavy sets of hoofbeats stomped up the ramp and thundered on the arena floor as the trio of minotaurs stepped onto the dirt. All had dark hides, the smallest with a white patch on his face. The largest held a sword that Boudicca estimated to be almost as big as she was, while his brothers held a greataxe and a spiked chain that looked like it could haul an anchor. Boudicca drew her sword and waited for the words that might be the last she ever heard: "Let the battle begin!"

The torchlight gleamed on her sword as she brandished it

over her head, then she shouted her battle cry and ran at the minotaurs. The crowd cheered at Boudicca's bravado as the axe-wielding minotaur lowered his head and charged at her, his thick horns flecked with dried blood. Boudicca didn't deviate from her course to avoid him, but rather ran dead at the minotaur before leaping in an acrobatic arc over his attempt to gore her, a rush of air beneath her as she dove over his broad back. She landed on her shield and rolled to her feet in time to meet the blade of the largest minotaur with her own, deflecting his blade enough for it to sweep past her armored shoulder instead of through her head.

The bellow of the bull-man behind her seemed to shake through her bones and she quickly dove to the side as his axe slashed the air viciously. Before she could regain her feet, the smallest of the minotaurs swung his chain, wrapping the end around her lower leg and pulling her along the dirt toward his brothers. Boudicca swore for not recognizing the threat immediately – while the larger bulls kept the opponent occupied, the smallest Miura would entangle or disarm them with his chain, allowing his brothers to finish the downed opponent. She raised her shield just in time for the greatsword to smack against it, and the splintering sound filled the arena. The crowd was shouting, half exhorting her to rise, the other half baying for her blood, as she struggled against the chain. Her shield took another shattering blow and she felt the small bones in her wrist crumble. She wouldn't be able to withstand another hit like that, Boudicca knew.

She watched the swordsman raise his blade again and as he swung down, she pulled the chain taut with her legs, catching the swinging blade with the iron links. The chain shattered and Boudicca was free, taking the moment to blood her sword across the bellies of both minotaurs as the crowd roared in delight. Before she could strike home again, she was rammed by nearly a quarter-ton of enraged minotaur, thrown through the air and skidding against the dirt. He charged again as she rose and swung his axe madly, foam oozing from his nostrils. Her shield shattered under the blow, barely saving her arm. As he spun to swing again, Boudicca buried her lengthy sword in his chest. His bellow of rage changed to a wet cough of surprise as she pulled her sword free before slashing it across his thigh. As he dropped to one knee, she gripped her hilt in both hands, turned, and spun with a powerful blow. His head came to rest beside his feet as she turned to face the remaining two wounded Miuras. The smaller one dropped the remains of his chain and began pawing the ground with his hooves, the larger circling with his blade.

Boudicca's heart surged with the crowd's cheers as she ran forth, sword held high. This night, she knew, would be talked about for weeks to come. In her world, that was nearly immortality.

Prestigious: Witch Warder

PRESTIGIOUS: WITCH WARDER

by Joseph "Guy Humeal" Scott
illustrated by Johnathan Salazar

Forced to live in fear and hide their nature in many of the great cities and empires of Golarion, witches often turn to warriors to protect their circles and members. Older covens like those found in the frozen winterscape of Irrisen cultivate a special bond with witch warders. Witches view these guardians as equals, not subservient, entrusted to protect their lives. Warriors, fighters, barbarians, and rangers make up the bulk of the numbers of witch warriors. They favor speed and cunning over brawn and steel. Fighting only when necessary to keep their charge safe, they prefer to avoid violence.

Role: Witches master the arcane arts and leave the fighting to warriors. By necessity, witches need a guardian to protect them from violence while weaving powerful hexes. Witch warders combine speed and agility to get between the witch and her enemies.

Hit Dice: d10.

Requirements

Base Attack Bonus: +6.

Skills: Acrobatics 2 ranks, Intimidate 2 ranks.

Feats: Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative.

Special: A witch warder must undergo a special bonding ritual with the witch or coven she wishes to serve before taking levels in this class.

Class Skills

The witch warder's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Acrobatics (Dex), Climb (Str), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Perception (Wis), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Stealth (Dex), and Swim (Str).

Skill Ranks at Each

Level: 4+Int modifier.

Class Features

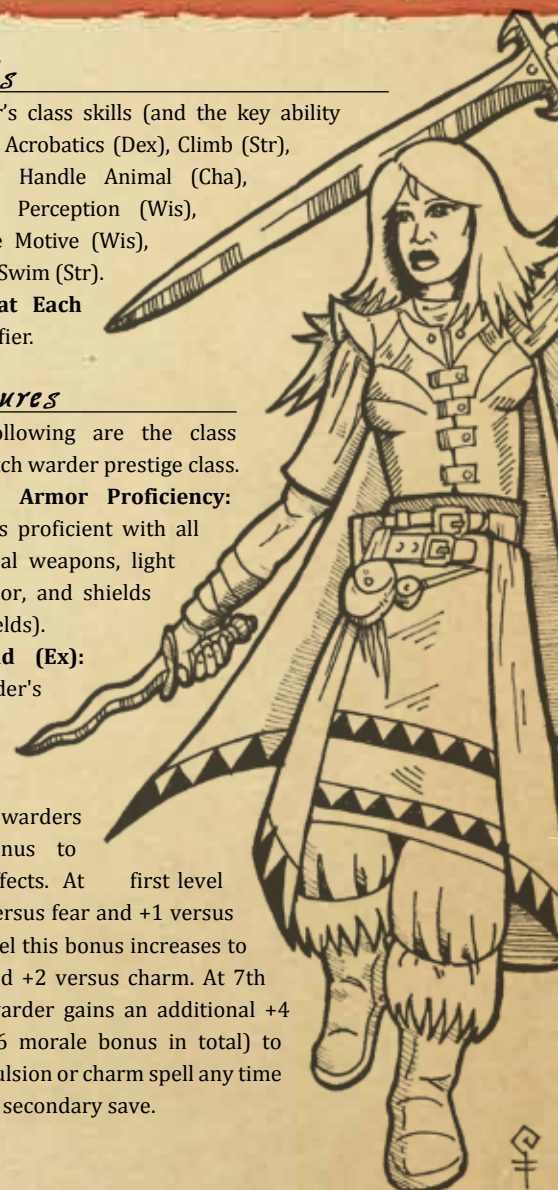
All of the following are the class features of the witch warder prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency:

A witch warder is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, light and medium armor, and shields (except tower shields).

Focused Mind (Ex):

A witch warder's bond grants her a remarkable calm in the face of danger. Witch warders gain morale bonus to fear and charm effects. At first level the bonus is +2 versus fear and +1 versus charm. At 4th level this bonus increases to +4 versus fear and +2 versus charm. At 7th level the witch warder gains an additional +4 morale bonus (+6 morale bonus in total) to overcome a compulsion or charm spell any time that spell allows a secondary save.



The Witch Warder Class Features

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+1	+0	+1	+1	Focused mind (+2 fear, +1 charm), witch bond
2	+2	+1	+1	+1	Uncanny dodge
3	+3	+1	+2	+2	Hekate's defender +2
4	+4	+1	+2	+2	Focused mind (+4 fear, +2 charm)
5	+5	+2	+3	+3	Hekate's avenger
6	+6	+2	+3	+3	Improved uncanny dodge
7	+7	+2	+4	+4	Focused mind (+4 on secondary save)
8	+8	+3	+4	+4	Witch's endurance
9	+9	+3	+5	+5	Hekate's defender +4
10	+10	+3	+5	+5	Baba Yaga's wrath, fearless guardian

Class Skills: Acrobatics (Dex), Climb (Str), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Perception (Wis), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Stealth (Dex), and Swim (Str).



Joseph "Guy Humual" Scott

Witch Bond (Su): As long as a witch warder is on the same plane as a bonded witch, they share an empathic bond. Through this bond the warder can sense the direction and general health of the witch. If the bonded witch is within one mile the witch warder can also sense the basic emotional state of the witch. A pang of fear becomes a call to arms. One final benefit of the Witch Bond is that the witch warder can understand the familiar of any witch to whom she is bonded, provided the familiar has the speak with master ability.

Unlike other bonds death doesn't immediately end the connection. As long as the witch's body or soul remains on the same plane, the witch warder can sense the witch sharing the bond. The bond will slowly begin to fade after the witch's body's complete destruction, disappearing completely after a number of days equal to the total number of character levels of both the witch and witch warder. The witch warder loses all class abilities until the witch warder bonds with another witch.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): At 2nd level, a witch warder gains the ability to react to danger before their senses would normally allow them to do so. A witch warder cannot be caught flat-footed, even if the attacker is invisible. The witch warder still loses their Dexterity bonus to AC if immobilized. A witch warder with this ability can still lose their Dexterity bonus to AC if an opponent successfully uses the feint action against them.

If a witch warder already has uncanny dodge from a different class, they automatically gain improved uncanny dodge (see below) instead.

Hekate's Defender (Ex): At 3rd level the witch warder's senses become honed when fighting beside their witch. While adjacent to a bonded witch in medium or lighter armor the witch warder gains a +2 dodge bonus to her armor class.

When using the aid another special attack to increase the AC of her bonded witch, the witch warder may choose to give part or all of this bonus to their witch.

At 9th level this bonus increases to +4.

Hekate's Avenger (Ex): At 5th level the witch warder gains a +2 morale bonus to attack and damage against foes that have attacked the witch they are bonded to.

Improved Uncanny Dodge (Ex): At 6th level and higher, a witch warder can no longer be flanked. This defense denies a rogue the ability to sneak attack the witch warder by flanking them, unless the attacker has at least four more rogue levels than the target has witch warder levels.

If a character already has uncanny dodge (see above) from another class, the levels from the classes that grant uncanny dodge stack to determine the minimum rogue level required to flank the character.

Witch's Endurance (Su): At 8th level once per day the witch warder may as a swift action gain 2d10 temporary hit points. These temporary hit points last a number of rounds equal to the witch warden's class level + their Wisdom modifier.

Baba Yaga's Wrath (Su): At 10th level a witch warder is able to draw incredible mystic strength from their bonded witch once per day. The witch warder's body appears to glow with an internal light and their eyes crackle with a cold white flame. The witch warder gains a +3 luck bonus to attacks, damage, and saving throws and gains damage resistance 5/-. This mystic strength lasts for one minute and can only be active while the bonded witch is within sight and alive.

Fearless Guardian (Ex): At 10th level the witch warden gains immunity to fear as long as they are in the presence of the witch they are bonded to.

Ex - Witch

Warders: Should the witch warder's bonded witch die the witch warder may not advance in this prestige class until the witch warder bonds to a new witch or has the former witch resurrected. If the witch warder's witch is killed and body destroyed and the bond is allowed to fade the witch warder loses all special abilities associated with the class. Bonding a new witch restores all of these abilities.



Dear Ask a Shoanti

Recently my former off-world pals have been trying to evict my new tribe in order to line their pockets with a mineral called unobtanium. They've gone too far. They even blew up our favorite tree. I think they've really sent us a message here, so I want motivate my new tribe to send them a message. Any suggestions?

Sincere Regards,
Big Blue Marine

Dear BBM

"Send them a message?" A bard you ain't (or a scriptwriter). If you want to inspire your new tribal pals I suggest you try a different tact: Why not impress them by getting yourself a really big mount? That could win them over. Also I have a tip: it turns out simple long bows can fire arrows through the bulletproof glass of pressurized military helicopters. Who knew? Go kick some off-world butt BBM. Tell em' Ask sent you.

Yours very truly,
Ask a Shoanti

Edge of Ruin



EDGE OF RUIN

by Charles Evans

illustrated by Glen Zimmerman

In front of a ramshackle hovel built amidst the debris of the great landslip, an old man sat on a rock watching the sun sink in flaming ruin across the Absalom sky.

Presently two women came to join him, one dressed in silver grays and whites, the other in scarlet and blue silk with an elaborate lace head-covering upon her dark-haired brow. A peculiar ageless quality filled the pair.

The dark-haired woman addressed him in ancient Thassilonian. "So, to quote the poet," she said, "your time is ended, your day is done."

It was more statement of fact than rhetorical question.

"And you would be?" he asked in the common tongue, his voice wavering, though the form of her address had only mildly surprised him. He held himself as proudly upright as his ancient bones would allow.

"Lady Speladrin Kaltharûnîr, of Whisperloft," she replied, switching to the common language in which he had spoken, though her accent was strangely antiquated.

"I was afraid of that," he said, his shoulders slumping.

"I brought Cadrifral, in case you insisted on a formal duel." She indicated her silent attendant in silver and white.

"I'll go quietly," he conceded, grumbling. "I couldn't call upon a second in any case." He gestured toward the city. "For decades... for centuries now... I've been telling them - warning them, even - about certain things, and they've never bothered to stop or to listen. They call me 'that mad toothless old man,' or mock me, or just ignore me. It has been years

since I had an apprentice. What will they do, once I'm gone?"

"Die screaming by the thousands?" the dark haired woman said. "Or maybe not. The future these days is somewhat unpredictable, I gather."

"I don't suppose you'd..." he trailed off meaningfully.

"I?" she elevated a quizzical eyebrow. "I left bothering myself with the business of ungrateful people behind long ago. My principle concern these days is whether I still have somewhere left to stand, a place with a nice view to enjoy with a cup of tea and a plate of scones. I only bother with an exceptionally interesting individual, or, occasionally, take care of the odd bit of business for a friend."

"Hence your presence here with me today," said the old man.

"Just so," the woman acknowledged. "Yhmsilaus the Golden, this being the four thousand, seven hundred and fourth year, to the very hour, since your pact with the Lady Ahnsalvios, do you have anything to say or add before the pact is discharged?"

A shadow passed over the old man's face and his slump deepened.

"Technically, she was right, you know," he said. "Taken as a whole, they are a bunch of worthless screw-ups that the world would be better off without. That much became clear within the first few centuries, and it was rather cruel of Ahnsalvios - in the light of what she took from me - to insist I see out the full extent of the allotted period." He straightened a little and continued, "Still, I hold onto a hope that someday they might



Behind the Scenes

rise above petty concerns and do something truly great.”

“Is there anything else you wish to add?” the dark-haired woman asked.

“Only a mild curiosity. There is a ‘Lost Ghovjafastner’ I’ve heard mentioned in the taprooms recently. Only the latest ‘lost city’ that merchants seeking easy wealth and great secrets chase word of, yet it intrigued me; I could learn no more of it than the nothing that those merchants have found.”

The silver and white attendant opened her mouth to say something, but the dark-haired woman quelled her with a slight shake of her head.

“You really *don’t* want to know about that,” the dark-haired woman said. “I have some regard for your bravery and would rather not discompose your thoughts as your life runs out.”

“Ah, but now you have intrigued me,” said the old man with a slight chuckle. “If it is to be my dying wish, humor me in this.”

“Your foolish merchants chase after that which they neither know nor understand,” the dark-haired woman said. “They seek the seat of rule of Alma the Keeper, Herald of the Seven, Bringer of the Winter Night. The height of her awful sway on Golarion was so long ago that even the elves whose ancestors alongside angels and demons drove it back have forgotten all save a few legends of a holy war decreed by Calistria.

“What elven lore remains says Ghovjafastner was broken, its walls breeched and the city sacked centuries before Azlant had risen. Any horrors that survived the fall lay imprisoned within that lost city. Pray to your god, Yhmsilau, that when your spirit goes now to his halls, that Lost Ghovjafastner remains lost forever, and that those who lust for ancient secrets they comprehend not stir nothing with their idle whisperings.”

“Ah. In that case...” the old man began to mumble and trace his fingers through the air, arcane syllables sibilant in the gathering shadows.

The dark-haired woman snapped her fingers and the other strode forward to wrestle with the old man.

“No, I don’t think so,” Lady Kaltharúnir said, her maid victorious in the tussle.

“What? How?” the old man stared at the maid, taken aback that she had managed to overpower him, disrupting his spell.

“I have *two* natural forms, old one,” said Cadrifral, her voice surprisingly musical.

“I did not wish you stripped of dignity. You chose this path,” the dark-haired woman said. “You asked this knowledge of me as your dying wish. Now I choose not to permit you to dishonor yourself by trying to evade death whilst you spread it. You have one more choice: either to go honorably, or to invite me to allow Cadrifral to do with you as she wishes.”

The old man stared at Cadrifral, who had hold of him by the wrists. At length he dragged his gaze away from her and back to Lady Kaltharúnir. He could not match that pleasantly masked horror.

Little word exists regarding Ghovjafastner, its residents, or religion in the current day. A DC 35 Knowledge (history) check reveals that ‘Lost Ghovjafastner’ was a city somewhere in northern lands said to predate ancient Azlant. A DC 25 Knowledge (religion) check by a cleric of Calistria reveals the same information and that the city was razed by divine instruction of Calistria, its ruins declared taboo. Exceeding the check by five or more lets the PC know that aboleths and other aberrations made up a large portion of the city’s inhabitants.

The protections the city’s builders and later interdictions worked by Calistria’s servants ensure that divinations of any kind regarding Ghovjafastner, when worked outside its boundaries, produce no results. This magic has endured despite the turning ages. At Calistria’s whim, she might reveal information about the hidden city via commune to one of her followers.

The city itself, or what survives of it, is mostly constructed of white quartzite, and inscriptions in the archaic system of squiggles and dots used as a script by the builders can be seen. Imagery of an elven woman with the wings of a butterfly or moth – often in wintry situations – is also common, although many examples have been defaced or mutilated. Occasional accompanying inscriptions on plinths or walls in the ancient squiggles address this woman as Alma.

“You have ruined my death,” he accused her.

“The fewer folk speaking of Lost Ghovjafastner, the better,” the dark-haired woman replied. “The less the mention of it, the greater the hope that it will remain lost with the other horrors of the past, and that nothing else will be stirred up in the seeking of it.”

For a long moment, whilst the evening shadows lengthened, he strove to hold her gaze, searching for something; her emerald eyes were unflinching, her will strong. At last he looked away and drew one last breath of salty air.

Cadrifral released him to topple backwards off the stone as the death rattle filled his throat.

There followed a brief silence, broken by Cadrifral. “What now, mistress?”

“Now,” the dark haired woman flourished a golden symbol which she tossed onto the chest of the old man, an ancient token cast in the shape of the Thassilonian rune of wrath, “we leave night to fall on Absalom, and let the scavengers come.”

Presently, in the wake of their departure, a thunderous crash of exploding fire engulfed the hovel, corpse, and those thieves too eager for enchanted gold to be wise. It echoed, filling the night air, lighting a funeral pyre that burned bright above the Precipice Quarter. Then the fire dwindled and only the ashes remained.

Bestiary: Cairn Folk

BESTIARY: CAIRN FOLK

by Eric "Epic Meepo" Morton
illustrated by Dave "The Eldritch Mr Shiny" Mallon

The cairn folk are a race of fey straddling the shadowy boundary between life and undead. They famously haunt the Cairnlands surrounding the city of Absalom, but also populate countless battlefields and burial grounds across Golarion.

Ancestors of the cairn folk forged a pact with undead shadows allowing them travel between the First World and the Material Plane. Their descendants inherited this ability, as well as a strong sense of kinship with undead of all sorts. To better facilitate alliances with the undead, cairn folk regularly make their homes near known haunted places.

Although cairn folk hold no special power over undead, most undead have a starting attitude of no worse than indifferent towards cairn folk, even if those undead otherwise hate all living things. Cairn folk, meanwhile, usually have a starting attitude of friendly towards sentient undead. They make little distinction between spirits of nature and spirits of the dead, all of whom, in the opinion of cairn folk, are part of nature's balance.

To the cairn folk, life is a dream one experiences while waiting for death. True reality is everything that happens thereafter. Cairn folk are in no particular hurry to awaken from the dream, which they find entertaining, but life is otherwise of little consequence. As a result, cairn folk are largely indifferent to the lives and fates of others.

Cairn folk regularly use other creatures as playthings and tools. Pranks, vandalism, and serial murder are equally acceptable forms of entertainment among cairn folk, especially when the targets are non-fey. Thankfully, pranks are more popular than vandalism and worse things among most cairn folk communities. On the other hand, cairn folk routinely press humanoids into service as midwives for cairn folk children, otherwise neglected by their parents.

Despite their adolescent whims and chronic inability to appreciate the consequences of their actions, cairn folk are not always merciless and destructive. Cairn folk are frequently enamored with entirely harmless pastimes, and can demonstrate amazing compassion when the whim strikes them. Depending upon one's perspective, this juxtaposition of light amongst darkness makes the cairn folk either slightly less monstrous or considerably more so.

Cairn Folk Traits

Cairn folk are a diverse race of fey, including such types as dark lads and green maidens (also known as ghille dubh and glaiastigs, respectively). Other, more powerful types of cairn folk are known to exist, living alongside a preponderance of cairn folk ghosts and other undead.

While cairn folk vary greatly in appearance and powers, each possesses the following traits (unless noted otherwise in its description).

Immunity to fear, paralysis, and sleep.

Damage Limit (Su) Cairn folk treat even the most grievous injuries as mere flesh wounds. Each time a cairn folk would take more than 10 points of damage from a given attack, the cairn folk instead takes only 10 points of damage from that attack. Apply all other effects, modifying the amount of damage dealt by that source before applying this damage limit. Attacks not dealing damage are not subject to this special defense.

Otherworldly (Su) Twice per day, a cairn folk may use shadow walk (self only, CL 12th) to move from the First World to the corresponding location on the Material Plane or vice versa. Travelling between planes with this ability takes only 1d4 minutes. A cairn folk may not use this ability to move between different locations on the same plane.

Cairn Folk, Dark Lad

This gnome-like, green man has carpets of hair-like twigs growing on his limbs and scalp.

Dark Lad (Ghille Dubh)

CR 3

XP 800

CN Small fey (cairn folk)

Init +3; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +15 (+23 in vegetation)

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 15, flat-footed 13 (+3 Dex, +1 dodge, +2 natural, +1 size)

hp 33 (6d6+12)

Fort +4, **Ref** +8, **Will** +7

Defensive Abilities cairn folk traits; **Immune** fear, paralysis, sleep

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee masterwork spear +7 (1d6+1)

Ranged dart +7 (1d3+1)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th)

3/day—blindness/deafness (DC 15), entangle (DC 15), faerie fire, touch of idiocy

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 16, **Con** 15, **Int** 12, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 17

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +3; **CMD** 16

Feats Dodge, Mobility, Weapon Focus (spear)

Skills Bluff +12, Diplomacy +12, Knowledge (local) +10, Knowledge (nature) +10, Perception +11 (+15 in vegetation), Perform (dance) +12, Stealth +16 (+20 in vegetation); Racial Modifiers +4 Perception in vegetation, +4 Stealth in vegetation

Languages Common, Sylvan

ECOLOGY

Environment temperate forest or plains

Organization solitary, pair, gang (1-4 plus 1-8 noncombatant young humanoids), troop (3-12), or host (3-12 plus 1-4 wraiths)

Treasure standard (masterwork spear, 4 darts, other treasure)

Eric "Epic Meepo" Morton Jr.

Named for their nocturnal lifestyle, dark lads are cairn folk with a special fondness for plants. A dark lad will often adopt a hollow in an isolated tree or stump as his own personal "fairy fort," though he gains no special benefit from doing so. Trees and stumps bonded to dryads that have since died are popular choices, as are plants nourished by the blood of fallen soldiers.

Dark lads enjoy the company of humanoid children, but are otherwise territorial. Adults who spend too much time in areas claimed by dark lads can expect to be attacked or harassed, especially after dark. Trespassers may be left alive but blinded and befuddled, or they may simply be stalked and killed, depending upon the dark lads' current whims.

Some dark lad fairy forts are adjacent to makeshift campsites housing humanoid child runaways. The fey living alongside these lost children dutifully defends their young neighbors from parents, concerned relatives, and other interlopers.

Cairn Folk, Green Maiden

This doe-eyed, green-clad maiden has cloven feet and small, knob-like horns.

Green Maiden (Glaistig)	CR 4
XP 1,200	
CN Medium fey (cairn folk)	
Init +3; Senses low-light vision; Perception +13	
DEFENSE	
AC 18, touch 13, flat-footed 15 (+3 Dex, +5 natural)	
hp 44 (8d6+16)	
Fort +4, Ref +9, Will +8	
Defensive Abilities cairn folk traits; Immune fear, paralysis, sleep	
OFFENSE	
Speed 40 ft.	
Melee quarterstaff enhanced with shillelagh +6 (2d6+1)	
Ranged magic stone +8 (1d6+1, 2d6+2 vs. undead)	
Special Attacks captivating song	
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 6th)	
At will—charm person (DC 14), magic stone (up to three stones at any one time), shillelagh	
STATISTICS	
Str 11, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 17	
Base Atk +4; CMB +4; CMD 17	
Feats Deadly Aim, Deceitful, Skill Focus (Handle Animal), Weapon Focus (quarterstaff)	
Skills Bluff +18, Diplomacy +14, Disguise +18, Handle Animal +14, Knowledge (nature) +13, Perception +13, Perform (sing) +18, Stealth +14; Racial Modifiers +4 Bluff, +4 Disguise, +4 Perform	
Languages Common, Sylvan	
ECOLOGY	
Environment temperate plains	
Organization solitary, lonesome pair (green maiden plus 1 shadow), or flock (green maiden plus 3-30 herd animals)	
Treasure standard (quarterstaff, other treasure)	
SPECIAL ABILITIES	
Captivating Song (Su) A green maiden's captivating song functions as the harpy special ability of the same name (see Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary, page 172), except harpies are affected by the song and cairn folk are not.	

Shy by cairn folk standards, green maidens haunt pastoral lands. They often disguise themselves as humans, whose lack of hooves and horns they find attractive. When not entertaining audiences of wild beasts with their enchanting songs, green maidens frequently tend herds of domesticated animals in exchange for gifts of food and milk.

Beneath the surface of every green maiden's gentle demeanor are dangerous, repressed desires. Many green maidens lose themselves from time to time in sprees of deadly mayhem, using their songs to lure travelers into harm's way as a twisted form of entertainment. Others seduce and murder handsome farmhands, sometimes rising as vampires to continue this pattern after death. In combat, green maidens always make use of their spell-like abilities.

Some green maidens found on the Isle of Kortos are noted for their ability to "hop" to other islands. These green maidens have the spell-like ability to teleport (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only, CL 9th), usable at will. They can only use this ability while on an island on the Inner Sea, and their intended destination must be on a different island on that same sea. However, an off-target arrival may deposit the green maiden somewhere other than an island, leaving her stranded without the ability to "hop" back to her starting point.



In Hell's Embrace, part 1



IN HELL'S EMBRACE PART I

by Dane Pitchford
illustrated by Juand Diego Dianderas

27 Rova, 4705 AR

It is with great excitement that I write this entry, for even now my coach travels through the wondrous city of Absalom. It is rare for me to be able to leave the confines of my father's manor in Egorian, but when my elder brother Rhevan requested that I visit him in the fabled City at the Center of the World, I pleaded with Father to let me go. I have not seen Rhevan for nearly... five years, as near as I can remember, and I look forward to seeing his face once more. I will write more later, once I've arrived at his home and settled in.

Setting her quill aside, Ailyn winced as the coach hit a bump in the road, rocking it slightly. She drew aside the window curtain nearest her seat, eyes of violet gazing in awe upon the rising spires and elegant structures that surrounded them, passing by at an even pace. Her father had been furious when she'd asked to travel to Absalom to visit her brother in his self-imposed exile. There had been no love lost between the pair, and even when they were young it had been clear that the old nobleman had preferred his halfbreed daughter over his own, fully human son. Still, such obvious favoritism had not prevented the pair from being close as they grew up. Rhevan was several years Ailyn's elder, and had always been there to protect her, to help her whenever she

needed it. She fondly remembered his bright smile, his own violet eyes sparkling with humor and intelligence. Over the last five years she'd longed to see her dear brother again, and now, finally, she had the chance.

The coach gave another lurch as it hit a pothole, even a city as magnificent as Absalom unable to keep all of its roads in perfect repair. Ailyn barely restrained herself from crying out as her journal tumbled to the coach's floor, quill and ink pot nearly following behind it before she managed to snatch them up. Carefully, the half-elven woman placed the quill and vial of ink onto a square of cloth laid out beside her, wrapping them up cautiously and arranging them with the rest of her belongings before picking up her journal and trailing delicate fingers across the seal embossed on the front. A raven, wings spread, with the emblem of Asmodeus etched above it: the seal of House Dartherian. She smiled wistfully before placing the journal aside as well, returning her attention to the city as it flowed past outside the coach.

Coming to a stop before a set of broad, wrought iron gates, the coach slowed into a cobbled courtyard. Beyond, a manor house rose a full three stories, built in the local style. Ailyn sat back, hands folded in her lap as she heard the driver climb down from the front of the coach, a shadow passing in front of her window before the door swung open to allow her to exit.

"We have arrived, Lady Dartherian..." the older man said, the young woman nodding her thanks as she slipped from the coach and smoothed out the fabric of her skirt. She knew she stood out in a place like Absalom; a pale, half-elven girl of clear Chelaxian descent, her long ebon hair left loose to cascade down her back in silken waves. Her dress, made of the purest crimson silk, was cut modestly, but even so she felt exposed as she walked smoothly through the gates and left her belongings to the driver and the men that were even now passing her in the courtyard. She saw the seal of Dartherian worked onto the front of their polished breastplates, and the men appeared to be Keleshite by the darker hue of their skin. Beyond them, another pair waited by the broad door into the manor, each inclining their head to her as she reached them.

"Welcome, my Lady," one of them men said in heavily-accented common, "Lord Rhevan awaits you within, but has suggested that you take the time to refresh yourself from your journey, if you wish." The words were harsh in tone, and the man's gaze hard as it swept over her, sending a chill down the young woman's spine. She smiled, though, giving a light curtsy and meeting his gaze evenly.

"Thank you, Sir. Would you be so kind as to show me to my rooms, then?" she asked evenly, doing her best to keep her tone friendly. Her brother's men unsettled her, but she did her best not to show it. The man who had spoken simply grunted, beckoned for her to follow, and entered the manor. Ailyn stepped in behind him, the second man falling in as well after a few steps, shutting the door once the three of them were in the entry hall beyond.

They moved in silence, Ailyn truly not knowing what to say to either man, and the pair certainly not seeming the talkative sort. The manor's interior seemed reminiscent of their home in Egorian, the furnishings clearly Chelish, which helped to soothe the woman's nerves somewhat. Upon reaching her rooms, she said a simple 'thank you' before closing the door behind her, exhaling a breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. She felt as if their eyes were still on her, her skin prickling at the thought. Why her brother would employ men of that sort escaped her, but they must be good if he trusted them in his own home.

"I'm sure it's only in my head," she murmured, sighing softly. Her father's men had always been stern, stoic, but she had at least known she was safe with them. These men, however, made her feel decidedly unsafe. Ailyn shook her head, pushing those thoughts to the back of her mind as she took a few moments to explore her suite. The bedroom was large, at least as big as her own back home, the bed easily large enough to fit three or four people with ample room to spare. Adjoining the bedchamber was a smaller room, dominated by a large bathing tub crafted of brass, the outside etched with delicate, swirling designs. It was already filled,

the water steaming, and Ailyn couldn't help but smile as she pressed the door shut behind her.

"Dear brother...you think of everything," she murmured, gently slipping from her dress and moving to take advantage of the fresh bath.

The knock on her door came as she was drawing on a robe of pale, cream silk she'd found hanging in a wardrobe by the bed. Ailyn frowned, letting her towel drop to the floor, her dark hair clinging wetly to her neck and shoulders as she tied her robe closed and padded across the chamber to answer. One of her brother's men stood beyond, his large frame dominating the doorway as an unsettling gaze swept over her impassively.

"If you have refreshed yourself, Lord Rhevan will see you now," the guard said, turning without another word and beginning to stride back down the hallway. Surprised, Ailyn moved quickly to follow behind him, brow furrowing in consternation as she clutched her robe tightly closed. If she had felt unsafe before, she now felt completely vulnerable, as though staring down a cadre of archers with naught to protect her, save her own skin.

The guard stopped outside of a set of double doors worked with the Dartherian emblem, pushing one open and motioning Ailyn through. Hesitating only a moment, the half-elven woman stepped into the chamber beyond, shivering at the chill that hung in the large room. At the far end, a figure stood before an open hearth, the roaring fire within looking inviting. Slowly, she stepped closer, her heart hammering in her chest as she drew up to the slender man before the fire.

"Brother? What is so important that you could not even let me dress properly before seeing me?" Ailyn finally managed, that strange chill only growing stronger despite how close she now was to the flames.

"Forgive me, Ailyn, my dear sister... I thought my men had better manners than that, as I certainly did not instruct them to bring you here unprepared," Rhevan replied, voice calm, measured. He sounded much as Ailyn remembered, save his voice lacked the warmth it once had when they were young. There was a coolness to it now, lacking any real emotion. "I simply wished to see you. It has been so long, and we have so much to talk about..."

Rhevan turned, and Ailyn gasped as she met his gaze. His eyes, once violet like her own, were now as black as pitch. Not even the whites could be seen, nothing but black, yawning emptiness dominated his eyes, like icy pits. Her lips parted, jaw working as if trying to speak, but no words seemed to come. Rhevan merely smiled at her reaction, the expression never reaching those empty orbs.

"I feel it's time we had a talk about our father..."

Jingling Coins



by Elizabeth Leib

illustrated by Ashton "N'wah" Sperry

They say anything that can be bought is for sale in the Coins district of Absalom. From arms and armor to exotic food to unique pets, it's all available in the City at the Center of the World, providing you have the gold. Four shopkeepers and their wares are presented below.

Absalom's Candyman

No one knows the real name of "The Candyman" (NE male gnome rogue 1/ sorcerer 1). Popular with children, he sells sugary treats from all across Golarion. It's common knowledge in the streets that this candy shop is actually a front for illegal drug sales. To gain access to the gnome's illegal wares, one only needs to ask for "the good stuff."

The drugs of Golarion are described in multiple sourcebooks and adventure paths. For your reference, all the drugs sold by The Candyman are listed below, along with the book where you can find the drug's effects:

Pathfinder #7: shiver

Pathfinder #16: vayav

Pathfinder Chronicles: Cities of Golarion: heathensnuff

Pathfinder Chronicles: Guide to Korvosa: flayleaf, pesh

Wayfinder #2: aitaif, deadeye, jollygum

Characters with a sweet tooth might pass up the drugs in favor of some actual candy. The shopkeeper takes just as much pride in this half of his business. Here are some unique treats sold in this shop:

Chelaxian devil mints: strong red and white mints

Darkland apples: apples dipped in dark chocolate

Darkmoon truffles: wrapped in foil bearing pictures of the Darkmoon Forest

Frosted jawbreakers: blue candy from snowy Irrisen

Wild fey plums: colorful fruits dipped in chocolate

The Guardian Hippocampus

A swimming hippocampus graces the sign of this armor and shield shop. Run by Aldrin Pirae (LN male human fighter 5), a retired Wave Rider, the Guardian Hippocampus is famous for its high quality shields. PCs can purchase any masterwork quality suit of armor or shield listed in the Core Rulebook from Aldrin, but he also has a few magic shields.

Bones of Warding

Aura faint necromancy; **CL** 5th

Slot shield; **Price** 16,180 gp; **Weight** 40 lbs.

DESCRIPTION

A heap of bones forms this ghastly +1 *tower shield*. While carrying the *bones of warding*, you appear skeletal. Non-intelligent undead will not attack you. You gain a +5 bonus on all Charisma-based checks made to interact with intelligent undead, but you take a -5 penalty on such checks when interacting with living creatures.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *hide from undead*; **Cost** 8,180 gp



Buckler of Beasts

Aura moderate enchantment and transmutation; **CL** 9th

Slot shield; **Price** 19,405 gp; **Weight** 4 lbs.

DESCRIPTION

This +1 *wild buckler* is made out of oak and leaves. Once per day, the wielder can soothe 2d4+9 HD of animals up to 70 ft. away, rendering them docile for nine minutes. Any animal with an Intelligence score of 1 or 2 can be affected and animals need not be of the same kind. Any threat against a calmed animal breaks the spell.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *baleful polymorph*, *calm animals*; **Cost** 9,620 gp

Heavenly Glamer Shield

Aura faint illusion; **CL** 5th

Slot shield; **Price** 14,153 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.

DESCRIPTION

This +2 *light wooden shield* feels as weightless as a cloud. While carrying the *heavenly glamer shield*, all glamer spells cast by you or targeting you gain a +2 save DC bonus.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *disguise self*, *feather fall*; **Cost** 7,153 gp

Witch Queen's Frost Shield

Aura faint evocation [cold]; **CL** 5th

Slot shield; **Price** 3,859 gp; **Weight** 6 lbs.

DESCRIPTION

The metal which forms this +1 *light steel shield* has a bluish tint. Tiny spikes, resembling icicles, surround its edges and the image of an Irrisen witch is painted onto the center. Once per day, the wielder can shoot a barrage of 1d4+1 icicles from the shield at a target up to 50 ft. away. Each icicle requires a ranged touch attack to deal 1d3 cold damage.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *ray of frost*; **Cost** 2,009 gp

Osirioni-Themed Art Objects

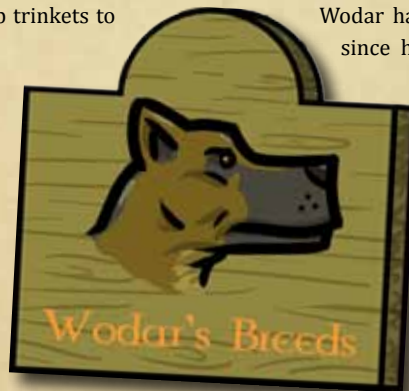
Value	Average	Examples
1d10 x 10 gp	50 gp	Mummy bracelet, stone sphinx statuette
3d6 x 10 gp	90 gp	Bronze sun amulet, sacred beetle earrings
1d6 x 100 gp	300 gp	Garnet dung beetle necklace, jade torc of coiled serpents
1d10 x 100 gp	500 gp	Moonstone-studded ankh, silver dagger engraved with asps
3d6 x 100 gp	900 gp	Gold sphinx amulet, solid gold statuette of the Ruby Prince
4d6 x 100 gp	1,200 gp	Gold scarab ring, gold-plated scorpion scepter
5d6 x 100 gp	1,500 gp	Emerald cobra talisman, golden sun diadem set with yellow topaz
1d4 x 1,000 gp	2,000 gp	Bejeweled lotus necklace, ruby-studded headscarf
1d6 x 1,000 gp	3,000 gp	Black pearl and scarab beetle necklace, serpent tiara topped with pink pearls
2d6 x 1,000 gp	6,000 gp	Diamond ring of the four pharaohs, headdress of sphinx feathers set with sapphires & emeralds

Jewels of the Desert

A colorful banner welcomes you into a small jewelry shop. The proprietor is Laranna Ahnkamen (CG female human expert 2), a woman of Osirioni heritage and a member of House Ahnkamen, an influential family in Absalom. She sells art pieces ranging from cheap trinkets to exotic, bejeweled treasures.

Wodar's Breeds

Ishel Wodar (NG male half-elf druid 1) comes from a family of dog breeders. His grandfather's shop has been passed down through the generations. Wodar's Breeds is much more than just a pet store. The dogs sold here are trained companions useful for riding, tracking, and combat. Refer to the dog stats on page 87 of the *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary*.



The best-selling breeds are bulldogs, shepherds, and other guard dogs (25 gp). These combat-ready animals know the following tricks: attack, defend, down, and guard. They excel at protecting bases and campsites.

The huskies for sale are trained as sled dogs or riding dogs (150 gp). Bred to carry a halfling, gnome, or other Small rider, these dogs know the following tricks: come, heel, and stay. They won't hesitate to serve their rider in battle, but aren't especially tough.

Intimidating orcish war dogs (300 gp) are trained for battle and covered in war paint. They are large enough to accommodate a Medium-sized rider and are truly frightening when charging. Orcish war dogs know the same tricks as smaller riding dogs plus attack. Use the advanced riding dog stats.

Kept far from the kennels of the bloodthirsty war dogs are the majestic elven hunting dogs (75 gp). These canines are masters at tracking down prey and often accompany rangers. Elven hunting dogs know the following tricks: attack, down, fetch, heel, seek, and track.

In addition to the common dog breeds, Wodar has two unique canines for sale. One is a worg named Fire Eye (1,500 gp). The shopkeeper is eager to be rid of this frightening, evil

beast and can be talked down to a price of 1,000 gp. The worg is unpredictable, aiding the PCs during one encounter and turning on them during the next. It refuses to obey Wodar's commands. The second unique canine is not a dog at all, but a dog-shaped construct called a war machine (4,800 gp).

Wodar has been fascinated with the machine ever since he bought it from an elderly wizard. The construct's stats are listed below. It was created using the war machine template (*Advanced Bestiary* 250).

Canine War Machine – CR 4

N Small construct (augmented animal)

Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; **Perception** +16

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 15, flat-footed 17

(+4 Dex, +6 natural, +1 size)

hp 15 (1d10+10)

Fort +2, **Ref** +6, **Will** +3

Defensive Abilities hardness 10; **Immune** construct traits, electricity; **Resist** acid 10, cold

10, fire 10

OFFENSE

Spd 80 ft.

Melee bite +5 (1d8+4)

Special Attacks body blades, sprint

STATISTICS

Str 19, **Dex** 19, **Con** –, **Int** –, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 2

Base Atk +0; **CMB** +3; **CMD** 17 (21 vs. trip)

Feats Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Acrobatics +14 (+18 jumping), Climb +14, Perception +16, Survival +3 (+7 scent tracking); **Racial Modifiers** +10 Acrobatics (+14 when jumping), +10 Climb, +10 Perception, +4 Survival when tracking by scent

SQ metal body

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Body Blades (Ex) Spikes and blades cover the war machine's body. When another creature attacks it with handheld or natural weapons, the attacker takes 1d8 points of slashing and piercing damage. Incorporeal creatures and creatures using reach weapons do not take this damage. In addition, a war machine deals 1d8 points of slashing and piercing damage to a grappled opponent with each successful combat maneuver check.

Metal Body (Ex) Beneath its skin, a war machine is largely composed of metal. It counts as a ferrous creature for *rusting grasp* and other spells that have special effects on metal.

Sprint (Ex) Once per hour, a war machine can move up to 10 times its normal speed when it charges.



Ships of the Inner Sea Region



SHIPS OF THE INNER SEA REGION

*by Dain "zylphyrx" Nielsen
illustrated by Crystal Frasier*

The ships sailing the Inner Sea region are as varied as the nations that put to sea. The arrasars of Andoran patrol the waters along their coastline on constant lookout for any who would dare attempt to invade their shores. The black-hulled Chelaxian infernal barges, ships that fill superstitious sailors with a sense of dread, haul goods with a far smaller crew than their banks of oars should need. Sargavan timber ships clumsily make their one-way journey from their home port to distant markets, if they survive the rough waters and escape "reunification" with Chelixa. Opulent and exquisite, the royal papyriform ships of Osirion lend an air of majesty to the array of sail and oar that populates the waters of the Inner Sea.

While most ships fall into the existing generalizations of gallery, warship and the like, the sheer variety of ships sailing the Inner Sea and surrounding waters makes it hard to use simple generalizations. To fully classify these vessels would be a truly monumental endeavor—one far too large for these pages. Instead, several unique ships to the Inner Sea's waters have been described, their purpose and use outlined and their general statistics laid out to expand the understanding of the variability among the host of ships one is bound to encounter.

Andoran Arrasar

The Andoran arrasar is among the fastest warships on the Inner Sea. Its speed is achieved by reducing the number of decks a ship its size would normally have, thereby reducing

its mass while maintaining its sail size. This increase in speed, however, comes at the cost of cargo capacity. As a result, these ships are not suited to extended voyages with a large number of passengers or soldiers on board. They excel, however, at intercepting ships in Andoran territorial waters and hunting slaver vessels.

The arrasar is a sight feared by those aboard slaver ships or those relying upon slaves for oarsmen. When on the hunt for slavers, arrasars usually sail in groups of three, referred to as a "cete." This allows them to take on larger vessels than could a single vessel and, if successful, enables them to carry more of their enemies' captives to freedom.

A typical arrasar is armed with a forward-mounted ballista on a swivel platform and a force of fifteen soldiers, in addition to the standard crew. While most do stick close to the Andoran coast, they are not an uncommon sight farther south, escorting Andoran merchant vessels or hunting those who would enslave others.

Chelaxian Infernal Barge

By far one of the most disturbing sights seen on the Inner Sea in recent years is the Chelaxian infernal barge. Unlike most ships on these waters, the vessel utilizes magic as its means of locomotion. And unlike all other ships relying on magic, this ship derives the magical force needed by drawing on the life force of captive beings.

Initially developed as an alternate means of imprisonment for criminals sentenced to extended prison terms, the infernal barge was first used to transport goods along the rivers of

Dain "Zylphryx" Nielsen

Cheliox. On these first vessels, prisoners were given the option of imprisonment for their full sentences or of serving as crew aboard these vessels for half their sentence. These early barge crew members were typically common criminals or people of interest.

In the last few years, however, a larger, seaworthy ship has emerged, crewed by captured members of the Free Captains of the Shackles. These captives are not volunteers and the ship is used, in essence, as a means of execution and as a deterrent against future piracy. As of this time, however, it does not seem to be working as a deterrent, since the Free Captains have continued preying upon Chelaxian shipping.

An infernal barge is powered by a dozen prisoners who are locked within specially crafted cages. These cages keep the prisoners alive much the same as a *ring of sustenance* but at quite a cost. The life force is slowly drained from anyone held within the cage, causing the victim to age at twice the normal rate. Their life energy is transferred to the infernal mechanisms within the barge, which power 20 pairs of oars.

While the base speed of these barges is about one mile per hour (10 feet per round), it can reach two miles per hour (20 feet) for periods of no more than 24 hours over the course of a week. This drains the ship's captives more quickly, however, causing them to age at five times the normal rate. Most barge captains' desire to get their cargo to port as quickly as possible, but know that they must conserve their resources. As a result, those who serve aboard these vessel typically age two to three years for each year as crew.

Sargavan Timber Ships

Isolated by both the Eye of Abendego and ongoing tribute to the Free Captains of the Shackles, Sargava has certainly seen better days. In an effort to make the best use of limited resources, and to hopefully improve their lot, the Sargavans developed the timber ships.

The timber ships are ships in the sense they are seaworthy, but they are just barely so. The vessels are assembled by crudely securing timbers together, allowing for relatively quick dismantling after reaching their destination. These vessels effectively double the cargo for timber shipments, with

the ship itself being sold to shipbuilders in a piecemeal fashion.

The added benefit, and most helpful to the coffers of Sargava, is that these ships offer a means to bypass many of the tariffs levied on timber by some ports. While the cargo of timber still has tariffs and fees levied against, it the ship itself does not. This effectively increases the profit margin for the sale of the wood.

The down side to these vessels is their slow speed and the increased chance of damage or loss during heavy seas. Indeed, on more than one occasion a timber ship has sailed too close to the ever-present maelstrom of the Eye of Abendego, where the rough seas and high winds have shaken the vessel apart. At least one timber ship is known to have been "reclaimed" by the Chelaxian navy as it passed the Arch of Aroden.

These ships do not usually sail independently, however. A Sargavan timber ship is typically escorted by one or two caravels or tartanes to lend some measure of defense. These escorts also provide a means of a return journey to the timber ship's crew and the payment received for the cargo and vessel.

Osirion Papyriiform Ships

The papyriiform ships of Osirion trace their evolution to the close ties of its people to the River Sphinx. Similar in shape to the papyrus reed craft that ply the currents of the Sphinx, the papyriiform ships of Osirion are of wooden construction. Powered by sail or oar and lacking a keel, these ships are able to navigate the Inner Sea as well as the Sphinx and other large rivers. This versatility is a boon to trade, opening additional markets for Osirion merchants where other nations' vessels cannot easily reach.

These vessels range in size from smaller cargo and passenger transports to large cargo vessels capable of hauling in excess of 120 tons. Ships of the royal court differ from the more common variants only in appearance and the level of luxury available to their passengers. Royal ships are gilded with precious metals and gemstones and boast extended stem and stern posts bearing the symbol of the Dawnflower.

Ships of the Inner Sea

Type	Length	Crew	Cargo/Passengers	Speed	Sail/Oars
Arrasar	75 ft.	50	30 tons / 60 passengers	40 ft. (4 mph)	1 sail / 16 oars
Infernal barge	70 ft.	20 (+12)	120 tons	10 ft. (1 mph)	40 oars
Timber Ship	90 ft.	50	90 tons	10 ft. (1 mph)	2 sails
Papyriiform Barge					
Small, common	40 ft.	10	30 tons / 50 passengers	15 ft. (1 1/2 mph)	1 sail / 6 oars
Medium, common	65 ft.	20	55 tons / 100 passengers	15 ft. (1 1/2 mph)	1 sail / 12 oars
Large, common	100 ft.	50	120 tons / 150 passengers	10 ft. (1 mph)	2 sails / 20 oars
Large, royal	120 ft.	70	50 tons / 75 passengers	15 ft. (1 1/2 mph)	2 sails / 30 oars



MAGIC OF THE INNER SEA

ARCANAMIRIUM BOND MASTERS

Written and illustrated by Marc Radle

The Arcanamirium in Absalom is the oldest, largest, and most prestigious arcane academy in Golarion's entire Inner Sea region. Many fascinating and innovative magical talents can be learned within the school's hallowed halls. One such area of arcane study unique to the Arcanamirium is taught by a group of instructors known informally as the Arcane Bond Masters. These powerful spellcasters have fully embraced the wizard's arcane ability to bond with a specific object. Over countless years of research and magical experimentation, they have discovered ways to both improve and expand the power of this special, magical bond.

It is even rumored that these Arcane Bond Masters have unlocked the secrets to imbuing their arcane bond objects with portions of their own magical life force in order to give their bonds actual magical intelligence!

As can be expected, many wizards are willing to travel vast distances in order to come to Absalom in hopes of learning these secrets from the fabled Arcane Bond Masters of the Arcanamirium.

Improved Arcane Bond

This feat allows you to enhance your arcane bond object, allowing it to grow in magical power as you do.

Prerequisites: Arcane caster level 5th, must have an arcane bond object

Benefit: Your arcane bond object gains additional powers as you gain levels in your arcane class, according to the following table. Unless otherwise noted, the wizard must be in physical contact with his bond object in order for these powers to function.

Improved Arcane Bond Progression

Arcane Caster Level	Arcane Bond Powers
5 th	The wizard may add his INT modifier as a bonus to his CMD vs. attempts to disarm or sunder his bonded object. Bond object grants +2 bonus on concentration checks made to cast a spell or use a spell-like ability when casting on the defensive or while grappled. This bonus stacks with the Combat Casting feat.
7 th	Bond object grants a +2 bonus on caster level checks made to overcome a creature's spell resistance. This bonus stacks with the Spell Penetration feat. Bond object imparts magic protection to the wizard in the form of a +1 resistance bonus on all saving throws. This bonus increases by +1 for every 3 additional arcane caster levels, to a maximum of +5 at 19th level.
9 th	The wizard may cast one additional spell per day that he has in his spellbook and is capable of casting, even if the spell is not prepared. If the Wizard specializes in an arcane school, this second spell must come from that school. This additional spell otherwise follows all the rules of the standard arcane bond ability.
11 th	Bond object grants spell resistance, as the spell of the same name, to the wizard equal to 12 + arcane caster level.

Awakened Arcane Bond [Item Creation]

You cause your arcane bond object to gain sentience, making it an intelligent magic item.

Prerequisite: Caster level 13th, Improved Arcane Bond

Benefit: You can imbue your arcane bond object with a tiny spark of your own intelligence, force of will and arcane power. Awakening your bond object in this way causes your bond object to become a specialized form of intelligent magic item. This process follows the standard Intelligent Magic Item Creation rules. However, because you are, in essence, imbuing your bond object with a portion of your own magical life force in order to awaken its intelligence, there are a few important exceptions:

The alignment of the bond object must match that of the Wizard exactly.

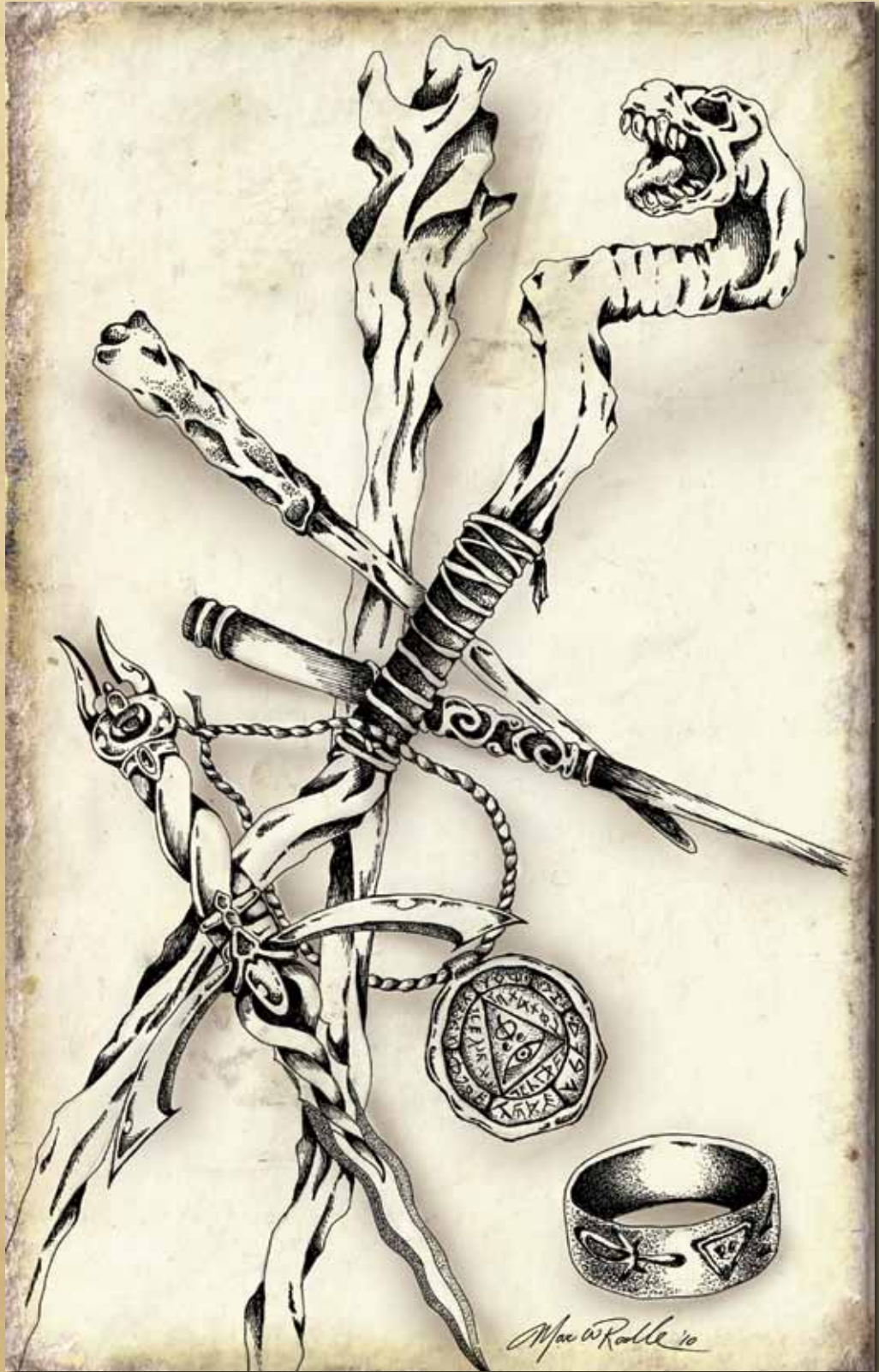
An arcane bond object that is a wand may become an awakened, intelligent magic.

The awakened arcane bond item may never, under any circumstances, have an Ego score higher than 19.

The total gold piece cost must be calculated as normal using the Intelligent Magic Item Creation rules. The wizard must only pay 50% of that cost however.

Senses and magical abilities the arcane bond object gains specifically due to becoming an awakened, intelligent magic item continue to function as long as the item remains within 30' of the wizard. This in no way changes the rules for any other arcane bond ability or granted power (such as those gained from the standard wizard arcane bond class ability or the Improved Arcane Bond feat - the bonded object must still be worn or in hand for any of these abilities to function).

If an awakened bond item is destroyed, the wizard immediately takes 1d6 points of ability damage to each of his three mental ability scores (Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma).



A Simple Warrior

A SIMPLE WARRIOR

Written by Guy "ulguloth" Fox

The moon lit the deck in a depressing blue light; five figures lay relaxed staring at the sky. The eerie music of the violin was filling the air with an excruciating yet beautiful song. Each note plunged a cold dagger straight into Kemon's heart. He wished he had not asked Lord Evigo to play the saddest song the masked bard knew; it had already made him burst into tears and, unsurprisingly, only him. It wasn't that he was a cry baby or anything, quite the contrary, but his companions were...different. Very different.

First was Lord Evigo, who wore more gold on his person than what was in the pockets of the rest of the crew, his fine clothing an obscenity to them. He was skeletally thin, his dark tan skin almost a purple shade of sickly gray, and always was his face covered by one of his masks. Kemon had never seen Lord Evigo eat, not once, and every now and then worried for the bard's health.

Lord Evigo's friends were even more mysterious than the bard himself; three mysterious and hauntingly beautiful ladies, yet each could not be more different than the other. The closest to Lord Evigo was Lady Pivedra, the most inscrutable of the lot. She always wore a white dress and a white hood that forever hid her face. She seemed to be a priestess of some sort, but Kemon could never place what religion she was a practitioner of and he never had the guts to ask. She had a presence that frightened Kemon, but nowhere near as much as Lord Evigo's second companion.

Lady Deryn was a brutal creature. Kemon didn't know enough to name what type of creature she was, but she was an exotic beauty with her black feathered wings folded up behind her. He had yet to see her fly, though it was plain she was the most competent fighter of the entire group. After witnessing her take down six of the sailors without even trying, he hoped never to see her in a more serious fight. The very thought that she could unleash much more destruction scared him, her temper always near the surface.

The last of Lord Evigo's companions was the blindingly beautiful Lady Violet. She was as beautiful as a nymph or a goddess, and knew it well. Every other day she would flirt with one of the sailors. None knew what

she did to them, but they always left changed. Kemon thought it must be they knew she would take a new playmate soon, and their heartbreak was so great that they became empty shells of their former selves. At least, that's what they looked like.

Kemon himself was nothing more than a simple warrior. He grew up fighting and now he had been hired to see these strange companions safely across the sea. Kemon couldn't remember where they were headed and no one seemed to care, so he never asked. Kemon couldn't understand many things about this voyage, much was lost to him; he had so many questions but could never bring himself to ask his patrons.

They were most active at night, almost shunning the sun like some form of anathema. They were never bothered when the ship was under attack from some strange monster or other from the bottom of the sea; if anything they seemed bored. He had only once seen Lord Evigo fight, his swordsmanship had stunned Kemon, it was decades better than his, that of a master swordsman at least. Lord Evigo claimed that he wasn't a fighter, yet he sliced through two damnable fish-men in a single step. Lady Deryn had been furious that day, almost turning on the crew because she had missed the fight; the gods only knew what Lord Evigo told her to calm her down.

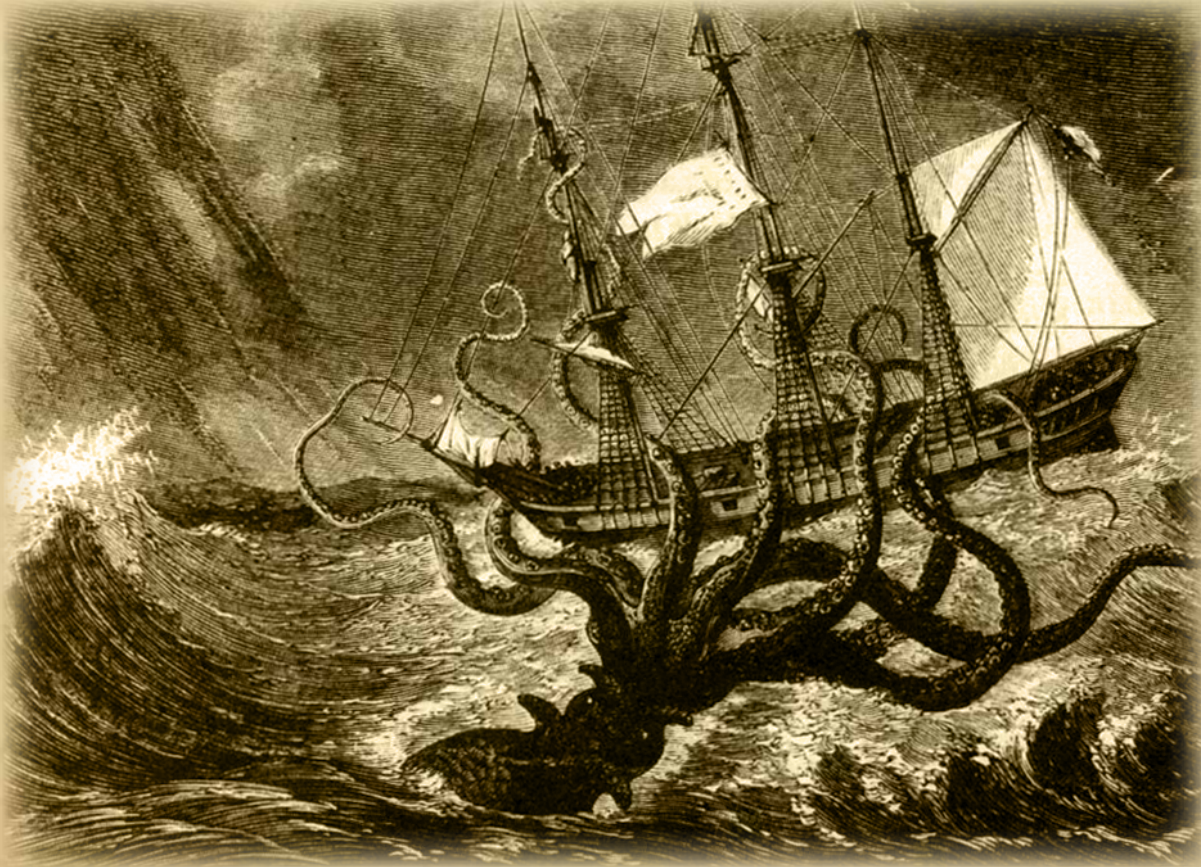
Kemon now sat uncomfortably between Lady Pivedra and Lady Deryn, opposite Lord Evigo and Lady Violet. Kemon couldn't stand the musical torture any longer.

"Lord Evigo, I can not withstand your great talent any longer."

"Too sad for you Kemon?" replied the bard with only a bare hint of sadistic pleasure.

"It twists my heart into a great sadness, I fear I shall perish from it."

Silence engulfed the ship for the first time. Kemon noticed that there hadn't been any wind for hours now. If it didn't pick up soon the ship would be stranded in the open ocean, something he didn't want to think about. Kemon merely stared at the moon - it was beautiful - replaying in his soul the melody he had heard only moments before. An eternity passed in



a single perfect moment. Ruined only by a giant tentacle obscuring the moon just before it came crashing down on the ship.

Before Kemon could react the ship was surrounded by immense shivering tentacles from a squid-like creature. He heard someone shout, "Kraken!", and Kemon's heart sank like a stone. Desperately he drove his sword at the kraken's tentacle only to see it bounce harmlessly off the creature's thick rubbery flesh. Frantically he turned, and saw Lady Pivedra touching the tentacle of the great beast, which withered and melted from the magical onslaught.

He'd lost sight of Lord Evigo and Lady Violet but he saw the deadly volley unleashed by Lady Deryn. Seven arrows flew straight into the monster's body, each exploding into a small inferno, eating away chunks of the mighty kraken.

Kemon managed another hit on the creature's tentacle, this time cutting it slightly. He cried out and raised his blade again, only to see the kraken start to float from the sea up into the air, covered by

an infernal swarm of leeches that were eating away at the creature's flesh. Lady Deryn crashed down to the deck, a flaming sword in her hands. Above her the tentacle that Kemon had slashed split in two, half landing on the deck, charred but still wriggling.

Kemon was dumbstruck. The leeches jumped onto the deck seconds before a lightning bolt struck the floating Kraken, which burst into flame. Its burning carcass finally fell into the sea a few moments later. When Kemon turned from the sight to the swarm of leeches he saw Lord Evigo standing over where the infernal insects had been, a trace of foul slime being the only record of the creatures ever existing. Lord Evigo sat down, followed by his comrades, and started playing a different tune on his violin.

Kemon was petrified, he had just seen these warriors slay a kraken without so much effort as a man would slaughter a pig and now they were sitting as if nothing had happened. Kemon was afraid of his new companions. He could only guess at why they had hired him, but whatever the reason was it certainly was not for him to safeguard them from the perils of the sea.

On the High Seas

WEAL

OR

WOE

ON THE HIGH SEAS

by Dain "zylphryx" Nielsen

illustrated by Matthew "The Twitching King" Stilson

Born into slavery, Groval Thurson was purchased as a youth, and grew up at sea. His owner, Bayliss Kurn, was a brute of a man and captain of the trade ship *Periphale*. After almost five years of abuse from Bayliss, Groval found freedom aboard the *Gallant Swine*, the pirate vessel that captured and scuttled the *Periphale*.

Over the next nine years, Groval rose amongst the ranks of the crew due to his unusually charismatic personality and his willingness to tackle any task put before him. The captain, Bradon Vartilli, quickly took a shine to the young half-breed and made sure the lad learned all he could about sailing and the art of piracy.

After a particularly spirited raid during his second year on board, Groval took an active role in the attack on the elven diplomatic ship, *Autumn's Kiss*. Bradon, knowing the youth was intrigued by the elven curved blade carried by the diplomat and appreciating the irony of one of orc blood wielding an elven weapon, included it in Groval's share of the haul with the condition he learn to wield the weapon as well as an elf.

Bradon ultimately met his end three years ago during an attack on the Taldoran Pleasure ship, *Divine Nectar*. The crew of the *Gallant Swine* made quick retreat from the magical onslaught and Groval witnessed his captain fall on board the enemy's deck.

Without a captain, the crew unanimously voted Groval into the position. They set for port and after two months of repair and refitting, they set sail once again, no longer on the *Gallant Swine*, but on board the *Burning Ram*.

The flip side of Groval's coin is found in the life of Felden Gwynn. His teacher was an elven wizard with a desire to see the world. As they traveled from city to city, Felden found he preferred sea travel to all other forms. The act of the crew working together as one unit to accomplish its goal always enthralled him.

After his teacher sent him on his way to continue his studies where his life path would take him, Felden immediately sought out a ship in need of a spellcaster for its crew. For the next eight years, Felden sailed the Inner Sea with numerous crews and acquired an apprentice of his own, Taylin Sower.

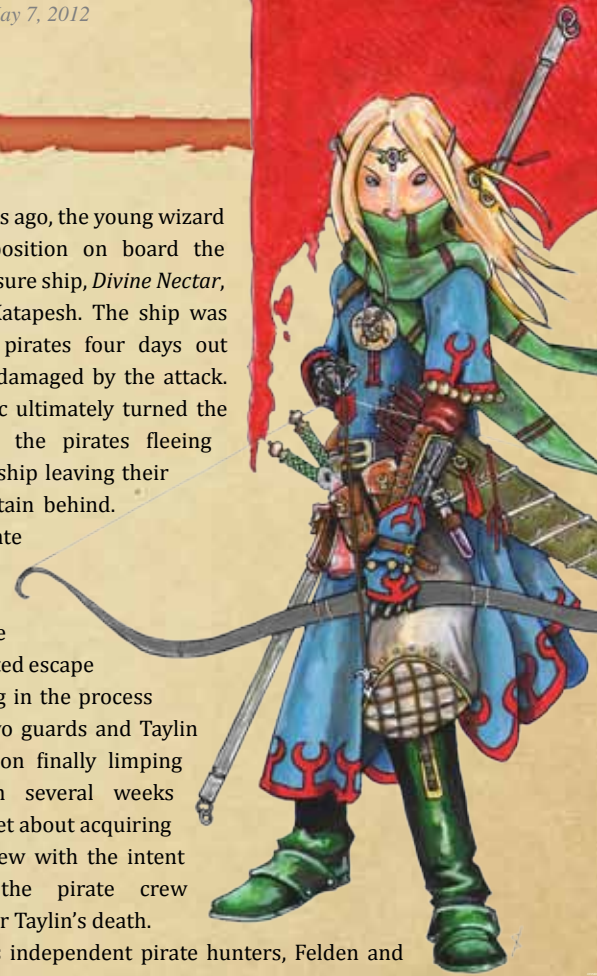
Three years ago, the young wizard accepted a position on board the Taldoran pleasure ship, *Divine Nectar*, en route to Katapesh. The ship was set upon by pirates four days out and severely damaged by the attack. Felden's magic ultimately turned the tide, sending the pirates fleeing back to their ship leaving their wounded captain behind.

As the pirate captain was being secured he made an ill-fated escape attempt, dying in the process and taking two guards and Taylin with him. Upon finally limping into Absalom several weeks later, Felden set about acquiring a ship and crew with the intent of finding the pirate crew responsible for Taylin's death.

Starting as independent pirate hunters, Felden and the crew of *Calistria's Hand* quickly came to the attention of the Lesser Council of Escadar. He now carries a letter of marque and he and his crew have begun to make a name for themselves amongst the merchants that sail the Inner Sea and the pirates who hunt them.

Weal: A Goddess's Hand

FELDEN GWYNN	CR 7
XP 3,200	
Male half-elf wizard (evoker) 8	
CG Medium humanoid (half-elf)	
Init +4; Senses low-light vision; Perception +6 (+9 in bright light)	
DEFENSE	
AC 16, touch 15, flat-footed 11 (+4 Dex, +1 natural, +1 dodge)	
hp 38 (8d6+8)	
Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +5; +2 vs. enchantment	
Immune magic sleep effects	
Weaknesses light blindness, light sensitivity, vulnerability to x	
OFFENSE	
Speed 30 ft.	
Melee	
quarterstaff +5 (1d6+1)	
Ranged	
mwk composite longbow +9 (1d8+1/x3)	
Wizard spells prepared (CL 8 th ; concentration +11)	
4 th – <i>icestorm</i> ^E , <i>scrying</i> (DC 17), <i>stoneskin</i>	
3 rd – <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>fireball</i> ^F (DC 17) (2), <i>fly</i> , <i>lightning bolt</i> ^E (DC 17)	
2 nd – <i>gust of wind</i> ^F , <i>scare</i> (DC 15), <i>scorching ray</i> ^E (2), <i>web</i> (DC 15)	
1 st – <i>feather fall</i> , <i>mage armor</i> , <i>magic missile</i> ^E (2), <i>shield</i> , <i>true strike</i>	
0 – <i>detect magic</i> , <i>prestidigitation</i> , <i>ray of frost</i> ^E , <i>read magic</i>	
E evocation spell; F forbidden schools enchantment, illusion.	



Dain "Zylphryx" Nielsen

Spell-like abilities (CL 8th)

At will – *elemental wall* (8 rounds/day)
6/day – *force missile*

TACTICS

Before Combat Felden casts mage armor on his hawk familiar, Spindle, and stonkskin on himself.

During Combat Felden stays behind his allies relying on his spells and his bow. He begins any naval combat with a fireball to the enemy ship's top deck, followed by a lightning bolt to either the mast or the oars, depending on the vessel type. If forced into close combat, he casts true strike during the first round. Morale Felden calls a retreat if his crew suffers more than 25% casualties. His aim is to regroup and hunt down the target at a later time.

STATISTICS

Str 12, Dex 18, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 11, Cha 14

Base Atk +4; CMB +5; CMD 19

Feats Arcane Strike, Dodge, Enlarge Spell, Leadership, Scribe Scroll, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Spell Focus (evocation)

Skills Bluff +5, Climb +4, Diplomacy +8, Fly +10, Knowledge (arcana) +9, Knowledge (geography) +8, Knowledge (history) +8, Knowledge (local) +9, Knowledge (nobility) +9, Perception +6 (+9 in bright light), Profession (sailor) +5, Sense Motive +2, Spellcraft +11, Swim +3

Languages Common, Draconic, Elven, Infernal, Sylvan

SQ intense spells

Combat Gear 20 arrows, 3 *potions of cure moderate wounds*; **Other Gear** *amulet of natural armor* +1, *belt of incredible Dexterity* +2, belt pouch (contains gems worth 800 gp), spellbook, spell component pouch

Hooks

- The PCs are sailing to a distant port city, having acquired inexpensive passage. Unfortunately, the ship they are sailing is a vessel known by Felden and his crew as belonging to a notorious smuggler. The ship is intercepted by *Calistria's Hand* during their voyage.

- An officer of *Calistria's Hand* approaches the PCs with an offer of employment. The ship is in need of repair and lost crew needs to be replaced after a run in with the *Burning Ram*. Felden wants extra firepower on board to finish this task once and for all.

Woe: Fire on the Sea

GROVAL THURSON CR 8

XP 4,800

Male half-orc fighter 9

LE Medium humanoid (half-orc)

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; **Perception** +5

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 13, flat-footed 16 (+6 armor, +2 Dex, +1 dodge)

hp 68 (9d10+14)

Fort +6, **Ref** +5, **Will** +3

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee

+1 *elven curved blade* +14/+9 (1d10+5/15-20)

Ranged

mwk composite longbow (+3 Str) +12/+7 (1d8+3/x3)

TACTICS

During Combat Groval uses his bow as soon as his target is within reasonable range. Once the *Burning Ram* locks with its target, Groval wades into the thick of battle, calling for the captain of the enemy ship to face him or surrender.

Morale If Groval meets his better in combat, he calls for his loyal first mate (male halfling fighter 4/rogue 3) and his crew to aid him against his foe. He uses the full defense action until aid arrives, then withdraws to consume his healing potions. If his boarding party suffers losses of 50% or more, he calls a retreat and signals the crew who remained on board the *Burning Ram* to heave a volley of alchemist's fire as they make their escape.

STATISTICS

Str 16, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 18

Base Atk +9; CMB +12; CMD 24

Feats Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (elven curved blade), Improved Critical (elven curved blade), Improved Initiative, Leadership, Toughness, Vital Strike, Weapon Focus (elven curved blade)

Skills Climb +8, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (engineering) +7, Perception +6, Profession (sailor) +8, Sense Motive +6, Survival +5, Swim +9

Languages Common, Elven, Orc

SQ orc ferocity

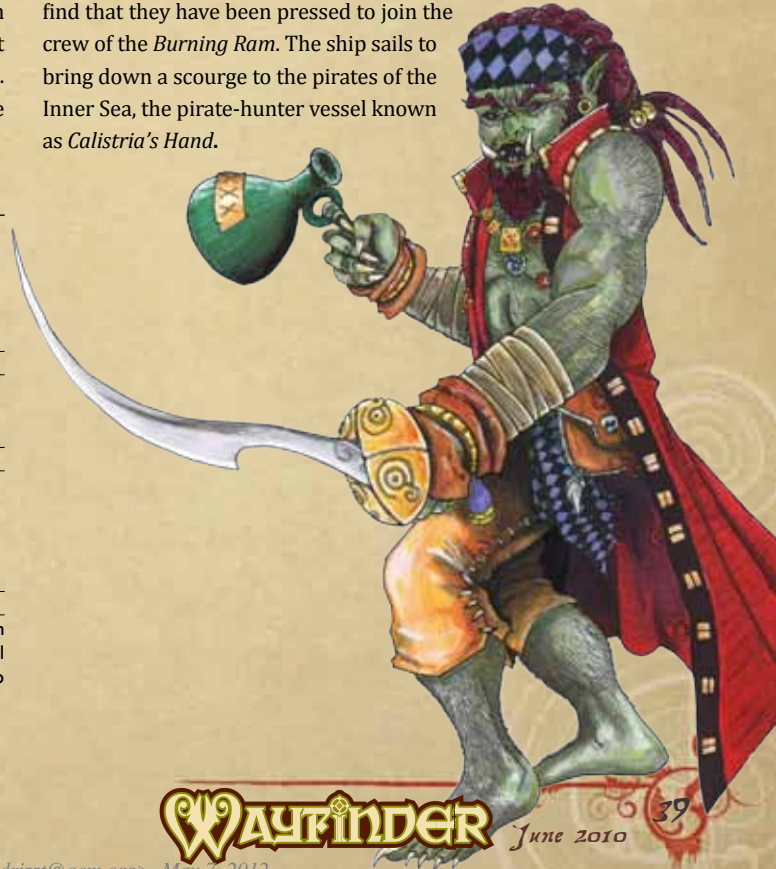
Combat Gear 20 arrows, 2 *potions of cure serious wounds*; **Other Gear** belt pouch (contains gems worth 750 gp), elven chain, headband of *alluring Charisma* +2

Hooks

- A wealthy merchant on his way to Absalom hires the PCs as marines. En route to their destination the ship, *Crescent Moon*, is intercepted by the *Burning Ram*.

- An elven noble approaches the PCs. The blade Groval carries is the hereditary blade of her noble house. Two previous attempts to recovering the blade failed miserably. The elven noble is willing to pay the PCs up to 2,500 gp each (up to 10,000 gp total) if they can reclaim the blade.

- After a night of carousing in a port city, the PCs awaken to find that they have been pressed to join the crew of the *Burning Ram*. The ship sails to bring down a scourge to the pirates of the Inner Sea, the pirate-hunter vessel known as *Calistria's Hand*.



The Black Mantis

THE BLACK MANTIS

by Theodore V. Thompson

illustrated by Kevin "Callous Jack" Coleman

"Don't kill me, please!" the old man begged. Violins played loudly in the next room, nearly drowning out his pleas. Above the kneeling man stood a fearsome visage in black leather, wearing two saw tooth swords and a helmet shaped like an insect head.

"Get up, Judge. It's me," the ominous figure offered his hand to help the old man up.

"You gave me a start. How did you get in here?" The judge laid his trembling hand in the glove of the daunting warrior.

"I told you not to leave the theater until the show was nearly over. It's going to happen tonight. The assassin is poised to strike. Don't give her an opportunity." The man took off his bug-like helmet, revealing a mask covering his upper face.

"So sure? This is a dinner party in Maggie Manor, not a dive in the Puddles District. The richest of Absalom don't keep buffoons for guardians, you know." The old man made an effort to appear more dignified and turned to the mirror.

"They may be rich, but their bodyguards won't stop her. It is because they are rich that your assassin has chosen to kill you before them, tonight. Stick to the plan and she won't succeed. When the show ends, get out of the theater before the actors take their final bow."

The old man still stared at the mirror, fixated on something. "How do you know it's a woman?" he asked.

"I saw her. It's unmistakable." The man put his helmet back on.

"Really? Where? What does she look like?" The judge turned and looked out the door excitedly.

The black figure moved to a window. "If I tell you what she looks like," he said, "she'll know she's been identified." Without another word he leapt through the open window into the night.

The judge ran to the window, but the man was gone. "You better be worth the price they paid you," he muttered.

>>>>>><<<<<<<<

The opera performance plodded, slowly, dreadfully—a bore. Leto would rather have been in court slamming his hammer down on the trespassing meek. Watching his wife's wealthy friends bask in their self-indulgent limelight only made it worse.

"Can't they be satisfied with just being rich?" he grumbled to himself.

His secret protector was most astute; a cheering crowd, its attention fixed on a theater stage would be an opportune moment for an assassin.

The curtain fell. Leto stood up with the crowd in expectation of the curtain call. His wife moved from her seat to the aisle and headed to the stage to be seen cheering her friends. After a few minutes the curtain raised. On cue, he moved out of his seat and down the row of people, making his way to the aisle to head for the exit doors out of the small theater. From there he walked down the hall. Even here the crowd's boisterous cheers could be heard. He hurried to the side door, an exit to the botanical gardens.

There, feeling finally safe, he stopped and pulled out his pipe. He struck a tindertwig and puffed as he lit his sweet mint tobacco. As Leto continued to draw in the calming smoke, he began to stroll towards a nearby bench.

"Judge Leto?" a called a woman's voice from behind him.

"Yes?" Leto responded automatically, forgetting himself. He turned toward the voice only to be stunned by the speaker's beauty. Her sumptuous red dress only accentuated her exquisite curves.

"Why didn't you stay in the theater?" she asked, moving closer. "I had to chase you all the way out here just so I could talk with you." The woman's eyes shined in the scant light of the gardens, her grace captivating Leto.

"I am so sorry m'lady. Had I known you had an interest, I would have..." Leto stopped talking and began to stare into the woman's face. A veil of red mist surrounded the two as the woman's dress transformed into tight red leather. Seemingly from nowhere, she pulled two jagged blades, which she twisted in a circular motion. Enraptured by her beguiling performance, Leto could only watch as the blades moved closer. Their vivid patterns comforted him. As they neared the point of hacking him to pieces, Leto felt no more afraid than he would be receiving a shave. He prepared himself to welcome the blade's touch, but as the swords reached their crescendo, the twirling stopped, abruptly. Shock and panic filled the woman's face as she turned a ghastly white. Her mouth quivered for just a moment, and then she let out a horrid scream.

A menacing black shape arose from behind her, taking a fighting position. Terrified, the woman turned to face her attacker. She reached behind her to feel the dagger lodged deep in her back. The judge wanted to run, to scream, but overwhelming vertigo filled him and he could only watch, helpless on the ground as the two engaged.

"You!" the woman said.

"Yes, Maritha Blood. I have come for you." The black figure pulled out a serrated sword of his own.

"They told me you were dead. They said your hold here had ended."



Milani, The Everbloom

MILANI, THE EVERBLOOM

by Jesper "Kajehase" Haglund
illustrated by Carlos "Celurian" Torreblanca

Freedom, Equality, and Justice for all!

The Everbloom

Goddess of Devotion, Hope, Uprisings

Alignment: Chaotic Good

Domains: Chaos, Good, Healing, Liberation, Protection

Favoured Weapons: Morningstar

Centres of Worship: Galt, River Kingdoms

Nationality: Azata

Originally, Milani was a priestess of Aroden in Absalom during the 6th century AR, where she served in the poorer quarters of the city, helping the inhabitants there against dishonest landlords and traders, thuggish criminals, and corrupt city officials. After her death at the hands of a local gang of bullies, she was declared a saint by Aroden's church and continued to serve her old master faithfully even in death. This continued for more than a millennium, until after Aroden's death, when she rose to prominence, bringing hope to many of his former worshippers who had begun to despair about the fate of the world. Milani may not have the most widespread worship on Golarion, but she is no longer a mere saint, and her faith is stronger than ever. The faithful of Milani have a strong urge to right wrongs and do good to the world. Her clergy is well-loved among the poor of Inner Sea region, but more established folks often see them as agitators or dangerous radicals. Milani appears either as a mild-mannered woman of indeterminate ethnicity, or as a serious-looking guerilla-fighter in worn, red and orange leather armor and armed with a bow.

Milani is a principled freedom-fighter. To her, the end does not justify the means. Killing or torturing someone just because he has done so to others only serves to lower you to his level, making you just another oppressor. Milani believes all tyrants need to be removed, by argumentation or – if all else fails – a careful and minimal use of force. She despises oppressors of all kinds, be they bullying demons, devils spinning lies, or anyone using their power to tread on the back of others.

Milani makes her presence known in the form of flowers growing up through seemingly solid stone or metal, red halos around the head of a person speaking in a way to her liking, or black auras surrounding those speaking in a manner opposing her ideals.

The typical follower of Milani is a skilled orator, always ready to use her eloquence to raise hopes in those who feel lost, or to inspire people with the passion for freedom necessary to take part in an uprising against an immoral or corrupt ruler. Milani's faithful are rebels at heart, and rarely swear allegiance to one leader. When they do, she is usually a charismatic and good-hearted person with a good sense for what other people need to sustain their devotion to the cause.

Milani's avatar is that of a seemingly ideal human woman of noble bearing, with a radiant morningstar called *Tyrantsbane* in one hand, and a white rose in the other. Her herald is Guribast, an azata with a crown twined from laurel and roses, which creates an *entangle* effect that she uses to block the path of oppressors pursuing their fleeing victims. The church is known for its many martyrs, who are remembered but not sanctified, as it is commonly held by the clergy that a true believer in Milani who is martyred will be reincarnated to take up his cause again (with some priests claiming to be the fourth or fifth incarnation of such a martyr). Some notable servants of Milani are Grenoli (a celestial lion with a red pelt and a mane that seem to be made of fire), Honoured Sister Herniba (an aasimar cleric), and Striker of Shackles (a half-celestial stone giant).

Milani has good relations with many deities who share her ideals, such as Abadar, Erastil, Sarenrae, and Shelyn, though she often finds Abadar and Erastil to be rather too staid and set in their ways. She is closest with Cayden Cailean, with whom she has shared many adventures, and has a sisterly relationship with Iomedae, too strong to be broken by the occasional spat caused by Milani's impatience or Iomedae's more conservative approach. She refuses to deal with deities who would shackle the minds or bodies of mortals, in particular Asmodeus whom she considers to be the greatest threat to her mortal followers; Ahriman, Lord of the Divs, whose appetite for destruction would threaten to quench even the brightest flame of hope if allowed to run unfettered; and Zon-Kuthon, whose sadistic followers have tortured many a righteous rebel.

Priests, Temples, and the Church

Milani's priests are usually clerics, rangers, or bards, although there are also a few wizards and sorcerers among their ranks. A priest of Milani should be a supporting pillar of her community, while at the same time keeping an eye on those in positions of authority for signs that they are abusing their power. She should at all times strive to maintain a position of respect in the society she lives in, for the priest of Milani who spent yesterday helping an infirm farmer plough his field, may find herself tomorrow's rebel leader. Most priests of Milani have ranks in Diplomacy, Knowledge (local), Knowledge (nobility), and Perform (oratory) in order to know when to make this transformation, and to be able to bring their people with them in it.

The church of Milani today is mainly occupied with setting up resistance movements against oppressive governments, such as in Cheliox, but its current centre of activity lies in Galt and certain River Kingdoms. The church is by no means limited to these areas, and can be found in such diverse locations as the native villages of Sargava, where they oppose the machinations of both Chelaxian settlers and the followers of the Silverback King; the slums of Katapesh, where Milanaran agitators rail against the way the city's rich merchants earn their golden coins on the back of the country's common labourers; and even the palaces of Taldor's nobility, where they speak for change in the way the decadent and derelict empire is run. The church of Milani is always ready to fight oppression in any shape or form and bring the light of hope to the common folk.

As a church that is often in opposition to the local government, the congregations of Milani's faithful tend to avoid drawing attention to themselves by erecting ostentatious temples, and instead usually gather in the largest domicile available to them. Some exceptions to this are three former chapels to Aroden in Absalom, which all claim to be built on the site where the mortal Milani's abode once stood. The cult has many holy sites, though. These can be the birth- or death-places of famous martyrs or battlefields where Milanaran rebels persevered or were

gloriously defeated. A shrine on the road between Gurat and Shadun in Qadira commemorates where, 68 years ago, one of the faith's most celebrated leaders had an epiphany and left his former life as a slave-trader to instead lead a short, bloody, and failed uprising against the then satrap in Katheer.

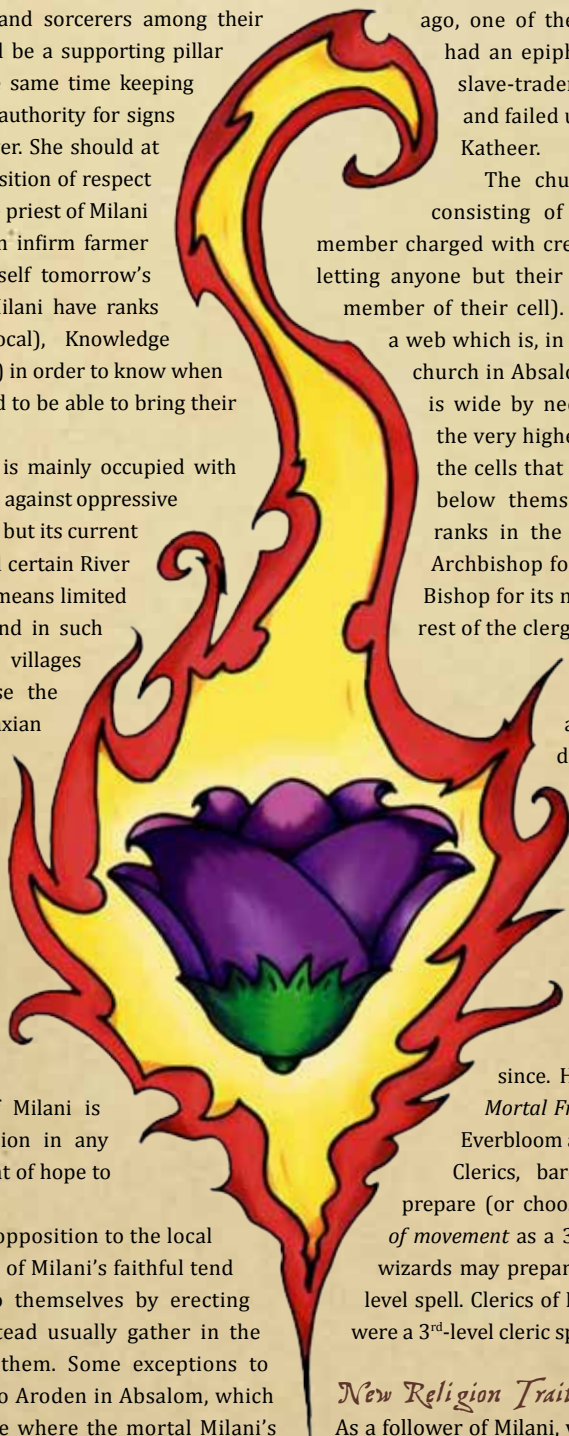
The church is organised in cells, often consisting of a family group, with each cell member charged with creating cells of their own (without letting anyone but their own cell leader know who is a member of their cell). These cells interconnect to form a web which is, in theory, centred at the head of the church in Absalom, but the autonomy of each cell is wide by necessity, and it is only rarely that the very higher-ups of the church can influence the cells that are more than three or four steps below themselves, and vice versa. The only ranks in the church's hierarchy are those of Archbishop for the church's pontiff in Absalom, Bishop for its national leaders, and Priest for the rest of the clergy.

Priests of Milani usually pray for an hour in the morning, and another hour after the fall of darkness. They celebrate the Birth of Hope on the 14th of Sarenith, which marks the start of the overthrow of the Chelaxian tyrants in Galt, with prayers, games-of-arms (such as archery contests or fencing tournaments), and, by sunset, vigils for those who have fallen victim to the excesses of the red revolution since. Her holy text is *The Declaration of Mortal Freedoms*, in which the ideals of the Everbloom are laid out.

Clerics, bards, and rangers of Milani may prepare (or choose as one of their spells) *freedom of movement* as a 3rd-level spell. Bards, sorcerers and wizards may prepare (or choose) *false vision* as a 2nd-level spell. Clerics of Milani may prepare *glibness* as if it were a 3rd-level cleric spell.

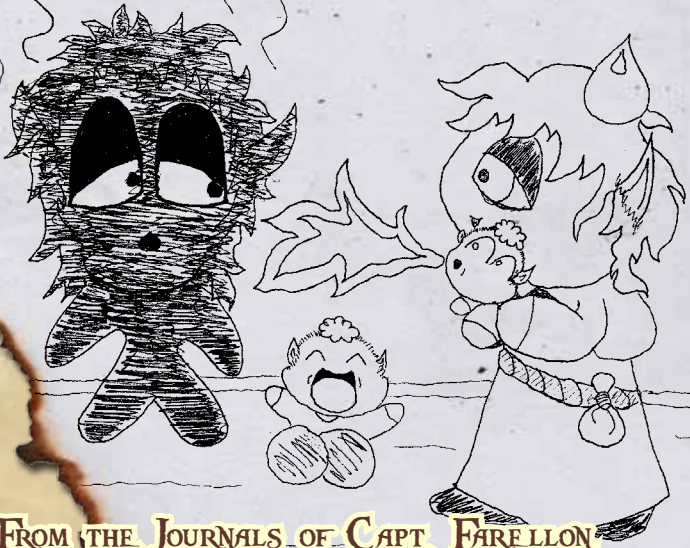
New Religion Trait: Spycatcher

As a follower of Milani, you are used to being on the lookout for spies and other informants. You gain a +1 trait bonus on Sense Motive and Perception when involved in clandestine dealings of some sort.



From the Journals of Capt. Farellon Aear Bereth

TALES FROM THE FRONT



FROM THE JOURNALS OF CAPT. FARELLON AEAR BERETH, PATHFINDER

by Truly "I. Malachi" Clark

illustrated by Lisa "Destrel Grange" Cavalear

The Aearelen reached Absalom at dusk, and I left Sigheri in charge of the ship. I decided to forgo reporting to the Lodge that night; messengers had reached me in Sedeq with news from my father, and I hurried through the Ivy District towards home. As I stepped inside, I drank in the smell of the honeysuckle vine that grew alongside the garden wall. The place never changed much. Torvald was puttering around in his study. He smiled brightly at me and his eyes twinkled with a light I hadn't seen since my twin brother disappeared years ago. His beard was grizzled and slightly scorched.

"Farrell, my girl!" His characteristic bear hug nearly cracked my ribs. "You staying here or with the ship?" he asked. It had become my custom to remain on board the Aearelen rather than return to the home where my brother, Godvynus, and I had grown up.

"Here," I answered. "Tomorrow I have to report to the Lodge." My father grunted his dislike for the Pathfinder Society. I ignored him, helped myself to a particularly fine Taldan brandy from his cabinet, and sank into the chair closest to the fire. My father filled his pipe and lit it while gathering his thoughts. I waited him out, enjoying the brandy, and taking in the heady feeling of home. Finally, he stumped over to his chair, sat, and sighed.

"I've been to see him. Your brother."

This startled me. Countless rumors of Vyn's whereabouts had reached our ears since his disappearance and none had proved true. Many had put him in Irrisen at the behest of the Decemvirate, attempting to reclaim the Pathfinder Lodge there, but the Venture-Captains wouldn't comment, and sightings of him eventually ceased. My father tossed a scrap of paper towards me. "It's his address; he asked me to visit, so I went. He's back." This effort seemed to exhaust him and he lapsed into silence, scowling. I knew better than to say anything and left him to go to bed.

In the morning I trudged to the address my father had given me. It was halfway across town down in the Puddles. Though I was excited to see Vyn again, it seemed odd that my brother would seek lodging in the most decrepit part of the city instead of simply coming home, though that might explain my father's attitude last

night. My brother had always troubled him. From a young age, Vyn had displayed powerful magical tendencies. As his abilities grew, so too did my father's agitation. The day he discovered the two of us conversing in a language neither of us had ever been taught, he slunk away muttering. We later discovered the language was Celestial, and was related to both the source of my brother's power and our father's disquiet.

The water was halfway up my calves by the time I reached the small, soggy shack my brother had apparently claimed as home. It was out of the way of the main roads, tucked into the shadow of the city walls. The door opened to my timid knock, and Vyn stood before me for the first time in seven years. His smile was warm, but brief, and he ushered me inside hurriedly and shut the door to the influx of water. His long hair was pulled back into a pony-tail which accented his hollow cheeks and the dark circles below his blue eyes, but his face looked more ethereal than ever. He smiled, and pulled me into a hug that rivaled our father's. I didn't want to let go of him and stood for a long moment crying on his shoulder as though I were ten years old again.

"Hello, Farrell," he greeted me in Celestial as he'd always done. "You look well." I smiled through the tears. I wanted to tell him how much of my life had been missing without him, but before I could reply the wailing of a child cut the air. I jumped and scanned the archipelago of furniture. My brother sighed and trudged through the water to a basket

Truly "I. Malachi" Clark

perched on one of the chairs. Inside were two infants. One was yelling his head off, and his familiar blue eyes told me these were my brother's children. He picked up the wailing one and cradled him in his arms, muttering words of comfort. Vyn must have read the questions in my face; he looked at me, and dropped his gaze. I peered into the cherubic face of the child he cradled.

"This is Baeyn." He nodded towards the sleeper. "His brother is Vaylen." I gulped, swallowed, and found my voice as it slowly dawned on me that I was an aunt.

"They're beautiful," I said. Vyn smiled faintly at me and caressed his son's cheek. I held out my hand and the boy gripped my finger. Baeyn grinned at me, screwed up his face, sneezed, and promptly burned off my eyebrows. My brother grimaced.

"Sorry. He's allergic to something; I haven't figured out what it is yet." He shifted the child to his other shoulder. "He did that to Father too, and set his beard on fire. I've never heard Old Torvald scream before." I nodded. Through my shock I realized that my brother's choice of the Puddles made sense. Soggy buildings are harder to burn.

My brother offered me one of the chairs and perched himself on the edge of a sofa that had seen better days. He offered Baeyn a small chunk of cheese from his rucksack. Baeyn frowned at it so Vyn fed him a slice of dried meat instead. He was marshaling his thoughts; Vyn was much like my father when choosing his words.

"I need your help, Farrell." His eyebrows creased into a frown. "You may have heard that I was in Irrisen, but I can't tell you why." I nodded. He stood and started pacing, rocking and patting little Baeyn as he did so. "I met someone there. She was beautiful, everything I'd ever dreamed." He turned, and Baeyn stared at me over Vyn's shoulder. "But she wasn't who... what I thought she was." I could hear the sorrow in his voice. He had stopped pacing and lost himself in memory for a moment. Then he sighed and resumed his perambulation. "She spelled me, I guess. I woke up inside a dragon's hoard. It took me a moment to find my bearings and when I did she was suddenly standing there. Laughing. She was the dragon. Red."

"She's their mother?" I asked though I knew the answer. He nodded, "I was found by a band of adventurers who had slain her, and used a scroll from her hoard to teleport to Janderhoff and then came home." Vyn was walking so quickly he was causing a wake. "I suppose it would have been better just to dispose of the eggs. Pretend I didn't know they were mine. But I couldn't."

"I don't blame you," I said. Eggs. I had thought the two boys were twins like Vyn and I, but it turned out they were a clutch. Same thing really. "But...they don't look half-dragon." In my

experience, half dragons were more dragon than human, or in our case, half-elven, and were nearly twice the size of a human at birth. I could discern no noticeable draconic characteristics in these two aside for the pyrotechnic sneezes and exceptional diet. They even had cute little pointy ears. "Especially red dragon," I added. The implications of my nephews' parentage made my head hurt. Our celestial connections made both of us unable to comprehend or tolerate evil, and red dragons were arrogant, hateful, and as evil as they come. I wondered how my nephews would turn out.

"I know," Vyn shrugged. "The eggs were exceptionally small. I'm surprised she didn't destroy them herself." He shook his head. "I wondered if she was conducting some kind of experiment.

Or perhaps our background overrode—" Baeyn interrupted my brother with a burp and exhaled a puff of smoke. Vyn ignored it. "All I know is that these

are my sons..." his voice trailed off. I sat for long moments in silence taking in just how overwhelmed Vyn really was.

"What do you need me to do?" I finally asked. He stopped suddenly and sat back down on the sofa.

"Find Aurexellius. Last I heard he was somewhere Osirion. He stays mostly in human form these days," he said. I nodded. The Pathfinder Society had sent me all over Osirion lately, and whispers had reached almost every corner of it that a gold dragon was living amongst them. It would be a difficult undertaking, but my brother and I had met Aurexellius before and knew a few of his habits. He might be wary of Baeyn and Vaylen, but he would know what was best for them.

I took Baeyn from my brother and cuddled him – carefully in case he sneezed again – and looked into my brother's face.

"I'll start tomorrow."



Dear Ask a Shoanti

Our focus group has determined that you would be the ideal sponsor for our new Hero's Feast brand cereal. Can you put me in touch with your agent? We'll do lunch!

Sincere Regards,
Ten Levels in Marketing

Dear Ten Levels in Marketing

I'm flattered, but I'm no corporate shill. I'll only endorse a product I can truly get behind. Is it true that your cereal is made with real chunks of aurochs meat?

Yours very truly,
Ask a Shoanti

The Registry: A Paladin in Sandpoint

THE REGISTRY: A PALADIN IN SANDPOINT

by Tim "Timinius" Nightengale
illustrated by Hugo "Butterfrog" Solis

Back in August 2009, I was following the Tuesday night chat in the DM Tools chatroom. A few people were asking James Jacobs why no one was posting anything in the messageboard thread for his office campaign, *The Shadow Under Sandpoint*. "Because everyone is really busy" was the response. I then joked, "Well, James, just invite me to join, and I'll post the updates for the game!" Imagine my surprise a few days later, when I received an email titled, "Looking for a game?" My response? "Yes, yes, yes!"

So, on September 3, 2009, my paladin of Abadar joined a mighty strange group of adventurers, deep in the pit up on the Devil's Platter outside of Sandpoint. Now, the likes of Kirin, Ostog the Unslain, Styrian, Velmarius, Vorn and Zandu can all be found in *Pathfinder Chronicles: NPC Guide*, but alas, there was no room for Howell; yet, he is mentioned. Go ahead, look. There, on page 54. See?

So, to rectify this egregious omission, here he is.

Howell B. Talbot III

Howell Backus Talbot III is a rich, royal Taldan hailing from a family that was elevated from the senatorial class nearly a century ago. The Talbots own significant shares in the country's most prominent trading companies, thereby holding a large influence in the commerce and trade of Taldor. His wealthy upbringing in Oppara has allowed Howell the finest training money can buy, yet Howell showed little interest in "the family business," and found the life of royalty rather dull. No, Howell yearned for something more... exciting.

On the advice of his family priest, Howell sought to serve the Church of Abadar in Oppara. However, he utterly failed the basic tests to join the priesthood. The church leaders were loath to assign basic guard duties to a royal member, so it was decided that Howell might serve as one of the Judge's paladins. After rigorous training in the Tempering Hall in Absalom, Howell was assigned to the Brotherhood of Abadar under Bor Dralfo, who oversaw Howell's final lessons while patrolling the Ivy District.

Howell served with the Brotherhood for a full year before he was given orders to travel to the church in Magnimar and serve justice to the frontiers of Varisia. It is here that Howell can be found, pursuing smugglers, embezzlers, thieves, murderers, and all manner of uncivilized folk... all the while investing in local businesses and commercial ventures. His first assignment upon arriving in Magnimar was to investigate some shady dealings involving a local businessman and noble, Kaleb Valdemar. Several weeks of interviews, interrogations, and diligent searching brought up indications that Valdemar was smuggling drugs, specifically one called "midnight milk," for a mysterious figure named Kanker. Upon learning that Valdemar returns to his family's home estate in a quaint little town called Sandpoint to meet in secret with this Kanker, Howell set off in pursuit.

Upon his arrival, Howell found that Valdemar came to Sandpoint monthly, visiting an area known as the Devil's Platter to apparently sacrifice young men and women. Howell hurried to apprehend Valdemar, climbing up to the Devil's Platter and finding a large open pit lined with cave entrances. Upon witnessing Valdemar and a drugged young woman leap into the pit, Howell was immediately attacked and poisoned by unseen assailants, and imprisoned in one of these caves. Days later, he was freed by Ostog and company, who were hired by the local lawman, Balor Hemlock, to clear the caves of evil inhabitants. Recounting their adventures, Howell discovered that this group was also investigating the midnight milk and the mysterious Kanker. Thanking Abadar for this blessed turn of His Key, Howell joined his liberators, vowing to help them uncover the source of this strange drug. Since then, his journal entries have become far more interesting.

In appearance, Howell is a young man, with short, neatly cropped dark brown hair. As a member of the Bearded in Taldor, he sports an immaculately trimmed beard, in the style of Abadar. Bedecked in the finest gear to be had, Howell wears highly polished and magically imbued gold-banded mail, a steel shield emblazoned with the Key of Abadar, and a thick cloak of rich golden-yellow hue. Normally armed with a magical longsword crafted by the masters in Maheto, he also carries a crossbow in honor of Abadar. From his adventures in Sandpoint, Howell came into possession of *Thundergütter*, the magical battleaxe of Girt Bear-wearer. Although he is slightly embarrassed to be actually wielding such a rustic weapon, he recognizes its value, and is actually impressed by its utility and its quality.

Having been raised in an upper-crust society, he is stereotypically arrogant, and somewhat naïve to the common-day struggles of the average man. Howell believes that appearance is everything, as it influences how you are

Tim "Timitius" Nightengale

New Trait: Missionary

perceived and treated. He takes great pains to "do good, and look good doing it," but also tends to look down on those who take less care of their appearance. However, his training as a paladin of Abadar has begun to open his eyes to how the rest of world lives, and while he typically exudes a somewhat patronizing demeanor to others, those that come to know him begin to understand how hard he tries to overcome these attitudes instilled in him due to years of privileged upbringing.

While he understands the "dance of nobility," he has a low opinion of the whole matter, due to all the graft, corruption, and general laziness that is considered "the norm". He views the current state of ruling classes as "inefficient" and a hindrance to the greatness of Taldor. Instead, Howell prefers those who are men and women of action. As such, he is privately a supporter of Princess Eutropia, and believes that her leadership could be what Taldor needs.

Howell's devotion to Abadar is relatively new, but his faith grows stronger with each passing day he is in service as a holy warrior to the Church. Currently, he serves as a regional enforcer for the Varisian branch of the church. The rustic life, unpredictable days, and the opportunity to bring a modicum of civilization to the rural areas of Avistan are a thrill to Howell, and he enjoys noting the details of his new life of adventure and service in his journal, which he hopes one day will become an inspiration to others to serve the Judge.

Boon Howell is always looking for new investments in the local economies of Varisia. A worthwhile business proposition will convince him to invest up to 100 gp in the venture with a modest interest rate, or a small share of the profits, to go to the local church of Abadar, of course.

HOWELL B. TALBOT III CR 3

XP 1,200

Male human paladin of Abadar 4

LG Medium humanoid (human)

Init +1; Senses Perception +0

Aura moderate good

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 20 (+8 armor, +2 shield, +1 Dex)

hp 35 (4d10+8)

Fort +9, Ref +6, Will +8; +2 vs mind effects

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.

Melee

Thundergütter +7 (1d8+3 plus 1d6 electric; +2 vs animals plus 2d6 dmg)

+1 longsword +8 (1d8+3)

Ranged

Mwk light crossbow +6 (1d8/19-20)

Special Attacks channel positive energy (DC 16, 2d6), smite evil 2/day (+4 to hit and AC, +6 dmg)

Paladin spells prepared (CL 1st; concentration +5)

1st – *protector from evil* (DC 15)

Spell-like abilities (CL 4th; concentration +5)

At will – *detect evil*

With all of the new blood surging into Varisia, they'll need religious guidance for sure! You have come to see about expanding the presence of your chosen faith after having received visions that told you your faith is needed in Varisia—what that need is, though, you're not quite sure. You gain a +1 trait bonus on Knowledge (religion) checks, and Knowledge (religion) is a class skill for you. If you cast divine spells, pick three spells on your spell list—you are particularly adept at casting these spells, and they function at +1 caster level when you cast them and their save DCs (if any) gain a +1 bonus.

STATISTICS

Str 15, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 18

Base Atk +4; CMB +6; CMD 17

Feats Extra Lay on Hands, Shield Focus, Weapon Focus (longsword)

Skills Diplomacy +12, Handle Animal +8, Heal +4, Knowledge (nobility) +4, Knowledge (religion) +6, Sense Motive +5

Languages Common

SQ aura of courage, divine grace, divine health, lay on hands (8/day, 2d6), mercy (sickened)

Combat Gear 20 bolts, alchemist's fire (2), holy water; **Other Gear** +1 banded mail, mwk steel shield, Thundergütter (+1 shocking mithral battleaxe of animal bane), ring of swimming, bottle of air, backpack, bullseye lantern, oil (2), silver holy symbol, silk rope, 323 gp

Traits Rich Parents, Missionary

To find out more about The Shadow Under Sandpoint campaign, be sure to visit the campaign journal on Paizo's Messageboards: <http://paizo.com/paizo/messageboards/community/gaming/campaignjournals/>

theShadowUnderSandpoint

Oh, and if you are curious as to my inspiration for Howell, just do an online search for "Howell Backus III"



The Joys of Fatherhood

THE JOYS OF FATHERHOOD

by Aaron "deadly_puddingcup" Phelps
illustrated by Derrick Cook

Being "the bait" was Thomas Softtoes's least favorite part of his job. But today, the threat of being mauled, poisoned, or eaten wasn't going to get the halfling down.

Thomas Evan Softtoes was going to be a daddy.

His wife, Mimosa, broke the news earlier this morning. She giggled when his jaw dropped. He instantly ushered her to their softest chair and placed her feet up on a cushion. "You have to walk softly," he told her. "I heard it's bad to jostle the baby." Thomas wouldn't let her lift a finger while he prepared for his latest job. He even made the morning tea. Before he left, Thomas poured Mimosa an extra large mug, kissed her forehead and belly, and set out the front door.

Mucking around the sewers beneath The Coins wasn't exactly the way he wanted to celebrate the good news, but they needed money now more than ever. Moving his wife and their monster hunting business, Sword and Claw Creature Capture, to Absalom wasn't cheap.

I'm going to be a daddy!

He had to tell the guys as soon as they finished this job. There were reports of a large creature carrying off people in the night. The Token Guard of course turned their heads. Not until the nephew of a merchant was dragged into a hole did someone contact Sword and Claw.

When Thomas arrived at the site of the most recent attack, he attempted to announce his family growth, but it didn't go exactly as planned. "Guess what? I'm going to be a gdathe!" The last word was muffled as Catcher stuffed a large sausage into the halfling's mouth.

"One for bait and one for THE bait, right Tommy?" Catcher laughed loudly at his own joke and slapped the halfling's shoulder. The giant Taldan's job was to subdue monsters before they ate Thomas. If the monsters broke free of Catcher's snares, their other partner, the monk, Tang, would finish them off. Before Thomas could spit out the sausage, Catcher and Tang began to encase the halfling in a dented suit of armor.

When they were done, Thomas resembled a small potbellied stove with arms and legs. Lashing a rope around his waist, they secured the other end to a winch and pulley

system and pushed him into the creature's freshly made hole which led into the sewer. Catcher yelled down after him, "Try not to get eaten, smithy bills aren't cheap!"

Thomas's only source of light was a lump of candle melted onto his helmet. A variety of meats--sausages, hams, brown crusted lamb--decorated the armor. They hoped these were the monster's favorite treats, next to the fresh meat it had been securing from the streets at night. So here he was, as he had been many times before: the bait.

Thomas would make contact and lure the creature out of its lair and into the hands of Catcher and Tang. He would never learn to love his job, but somehow the threat of being eaten was always trumped by the right price. *Two thousand silverweight is nothing to sneeze at. If we take this thing alive, we might even be able to sell it for the gladiator games in the Irorium. I'll be able to buy my boy anything he wants!*

The sound of water splashing a few feet away brought Thomas out of his thoughts. Gripping the rope tied to his waist, he reflexively clenched and unclenched his fingers, listening to the slithering of what could only be his quarry. *My quarry. Ha. I'm the Bait! Why me? Why am I "the only one who can fit?" I have a little one coming, I shouldn't be down here.*

Thomas brought the crossbow up slowly and watched as an insect head twice his height crept forward into the candle light. The beast's antennae twitched and its large mandibles slowly opened and closed. *Centipede. Definitely better than those giant crabs in Puddles last week. Nothing too dangerous about a centipede.*

Slowly the beast skittered forward, compound eyes studying the funny metal creature with a light on its head. The centipede's mouth exuded the smell of rotting meat, much fouler than the sewer or the old lamb on his armor. Thomas could feel the brushing of the pinchers as it ate one of the sausages.

Readying his hand, Thomas watched the giant centipede work free a ham. *Calm and steady.* All he had to do was tug the rope lightly and ring the attached bells. Catcher and Tang would haul him out instantly. *No need to panic. Pincers aren't so scary when you're encased in iron.* Calm melted away as Thomas noticed the wisps of smoke rising from his breast plate each time a rivulet of spit would drop from the creature's mouth. *Acid!* Thomas's arm became a blur and he could hear the distant bells ringing wildly.

Startled by the sudden motion, the centipede reared up, ready to sink its mandibles into Thomas's head when the halfling let a bolt fly from his crossbow, striking the creature's face. It reared and shrieked in pain and suddenly Thomas's was yanked backwards. *Praise Erastil, the fools aren't gone and drunk!*

Aaron "deadly_puddingcup" Phelps

Thomas's breath almost fled his lungs as he was slammed into the wall. The heavy armor protected him from his companions as much as monsters. Metal screeched as he was dragged vertically. The centipede was able to grip the sides easily and scurried after him. Thomas watched as sausages tumbled down, landing in the creature's open maw, probably whetting its appetite for fresher meats.

Thomas cranked the winch on his crossbow and was ready to take aim when he slammed into a rock, jarring the crossbow from his hands. The weapon tumbled away to join the smattering of meats in the creature's belly.

Suddenly, the creature's long, tubular tongue snaked out and wrapped itself around Thomas's waist. He could feel it slide through a gap in his armor. Thomas screamed as he felt a sharp sting in his chest and something moved under his skin. At that moment, both he and the centipede reached the exit.

With Thomas taking up part of the hole, the creature struck rock, widening the exit and sending both rock and halfling flying into the air. Thomas watched as the street soared up to meet him. Then everything went black.

When Thomas came to, the large carcass of the centipede was sprawled in the street. Debris from cobblestones, crates, and pieces of his armor littered the area. Tang stood on top of the creature, wiping off his hands. Catcher stood below, laughing loudly.

I'm alive! When I tell my son about today's job, I'll have to leave out the part where daddy blacked out. A handful of young boys clustered around Catcher as he pointed to the centipede, identifying the parts and describing their usage.

"This here is a variation of your common giant centipede. Please refrain from touching." Catcher slapped the hand of a boy reaching for a mandible. "These powerful jaws are designed for the biting and rending of flesh." Thomas began to unbuckle the remaining armor.

"This here is an acid gland. Very useful for digesting, eating through rock, and dissolving small boys who have no business trying to touch something that clearly does not belong to them!"

Seeing the children standing around made Thomas's paternal instincts swell up inside. Now would be the perfect time to share the news of his family, especially after such a great catch. Casting aside the last bit of armor and his sweaty shirt, he ignored the pain in his chest and joined the group surrounding Catcher.

"Now this tube here," continued Catcher, "is not a tongue."

"Catcher," Thomas began. "I'm..."

"It is in fact used to inject eggs into living creatures."

"Going ..."

"Upon hatching, the young will burst violently from the host. An egg deposit is easily identifiable by—" Catcher's eyes settled on Thomas's bare chest and the newly formed bulge beneath his skin. His voice dropped to a whisper. "Oh, Tommy..."

Thomas's eyes followed Catcher's gaze. Beneath the skin on his chest, a purple, apple-sized lump protruded. With tears forming in his eyes, he looked up slowly to meet Catcher's stare. He said weakly, "I'm going to be a daddy."

Catcher raised an eyebrow. Lowering himself to one knee, he gently placed his hand on Thomas's shoulder, looked him in the eyes and in a very low and solemn tone replied, "Yes, you are. But we'll get you to a cleric."

The two left Tang to handle the carcass, and began making their way north to the Ascendant Court. Catcher patted Thomas on the back and laughed, "Don't worry, I won't tell little Mimosa you were with another woman. Make sure to walk lightly, though. I heard it was bad to jostle the eggs."

Thomas Evans Softtoes was going to be a daddy.



Echoes of Prophecy

WEAL OR WOE ECHOES OF PROPHECY

by Eric "Epic Meepo" Morton

When the human god Aroden died, prophecy died with him. But the Isle of Kortos which Aroden raised from the depths of the Inner Sea still stands, and the city of Absalom which Ardoen established thereupon still prospers. For some, these are signs that not all omens are lost, and not all prophecies are destined to fail.

In the city of Absalom, and on the Isle of Kortos in general, there are still many amongst the population who believe in various forms of prophecy. Some of these believers are sustained by true faith, others by desperation. Either way, ample opportunities exist in and around Absalom for would-be prophets to make names for themselves.

Many self-proclaimed prophets are mere charlatans, but others do catch faint glimpses of signs and portents from time to time. Though the great prophecies of old have failed, even the most cynical observer must concede that divination magic is still a powerful force in the world. In this sense, the spiritual successor of prophecy lives on in certain gifted individuals.

Weal: Alexandria Phix

"The changing seasons have a certain subtlety that keeps them from growing tedious."

While other citizens of Absalom occasionally seek advice from freelance seers and prophets, the wealthy residents of Absalom's Petal District can afford their own personal soothsayers. Some aristocrats consider it a mark of prestige to have a mystical advisor on hand at all times: the more exotic the advisor, the more fashionable her presence.

Currently, the most fashionable soothsayer in the Ivy District is Alexandria Phix, a sphinx native to the wilder reaches of the Isle of Kortos. She was recently lured to the city by the promise of a pampered life in the home of a wealthy patron. Some of Alexandria's kin scoffed at her willingness "to serve as a human's pet", but Alexandria was too enamored with the perks of the job to turn it down.

Not that Alexandria considers herself to be anyone's pet. If anything, she is the true ruler of her patron's household. Her suite, originally a mere handful of rooms, has since grown to dominate the majority of her patron's manor. Alexandria spends her days lounging on pillows amidst sprawling galleries, libraries, and a custom built aerie, waited on by a legion of assorted valets.

Between lengthy feasts and even lengthier naps, Alexandria answers questions about various obscure legends for her patron and his assorted houseguests, but only when the mood strikes her. These days, she answers questions only to stave off boredom and only if the individual seeking an audience is sufficiently entertaining.

ALEXANDRIA PHIX		CR 8
XP 4,800		
Female gynosphinx		
N Large magical beast		
Init +5; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +21		
DEFENSE		
AC 21, touch 10, flat-footed 20 (+1 Dex, +11 natural, -1 size)		
hp 102 (12d10+36)		
Fort +11, Ref +9, Will +10		
OFFENSE		
Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (poor)		
Melee		
2 claws +17 (2d6+6/19-20)		
Space 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.		
Special Attacks pounce, rake (2 claws +17, 2d6+6)		
Spell-like abilities (CL 12 th)		
Constant – comprehend languages, detect magic, read magic, see invisibility		
3/day – clairaudience/clairvoyance		
1/day – dispel magic, locate object, remove curse, legend lore		
1/week – any one of the following: symbol of fear (DC 18), symbol of pain (DC 17), symbol of persuasion (DC 18), symbol of sleep (DC 17), symbol of stunning (DC 19); all symbols last for 1 week maximum		
STATISTICS		
Str 22, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 22, Wis 19, Cha 15		
Base Atk +12; CMB +19; CMD 30 (34 vs. trip)		
Feats Alertness, Combat Casting, Hover, Improved Critical (claw), Improved Initiative, Iron Will		
Skills Bluff +8, Diplomacy +8, Fly +8, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (arcana, geography, history, local, nature) +14, Perception +21, Sense Motive +18, Spellcraft +14		
Languages Common, Draconic, Kelish, Osiriani, Sphinx		

Hooks

- PCs in Absalom attempting to obtain information about legendary topics can learn about Alexandria Phix with a successful DC 15 Knowledge (local or nobility) check or with a DC 20 Diplomacy check to gather information. Gaining an audience with Alexandria requires an invitation to the house of her patron, which the PCs can get if they somehow earn that aristocrat's favor.
- Upon meeting the PCs, Alexandria may decide to provide them with information, possibly even using her *legend lore* ability on their behalf, but only if the PCs provide entertainment by matching wits with her in a game of word play.

A Game of Word Play (EL 4)

When Alexandria Phix makes small talk, she uses metaphors based on obscure trivia to weave playful innuendo into the conversation. Anyone expecting to receive information from Alexandria must entertain her by competing in this game of word play.

The game takes place over the course of a three minute conversation. Each minute, Alexandria makes a Bluff check opposed by each listener's Sense Motive skill. She also makes an opposed Knowledge check of her choice against each listener. (Listeners who are not trained in that Knowledge skill fail this opposed check.) If a listener succeeds on both opposed checks in the same minute, he gains the upper hand for the remainder of Alexandria's game of word play.

Once per minute, a listener who has gained the upper hand may attempt a Bluff check to provide hints to another listener. The assisted listener may use this Bluff check result in place of his Sense Motive check for that minute, and automatically wins the opposed Knowledge check against Alexandria for that minute if the assisting character also wins that opposed check.

After three minutes of this verbal sparring, Alexandria is willing to consider requests for assistance. Characters make requests of Alexandria using the Diplomacy skill. Her starting attitude is friendly towards anyone who gained the upper hand in her game of word play and unfriendly towards anyone else.

Whether or not Alexandria provides assistance, award experience for this encounter only if half or more of the PCs involved gained the upper hand in Alexandria's game of word play.

Woe: The Oracle of Kortos

"A thousand eyes to watch the wise
Heed a thousand whispered voices."

It is said that the nameless Oracle of Kortos resides within a remote cave somewhere on that island's unexplored interior. It is said that she trades in doom and despair, providing council to those whose hearts are sufficiently black. It is said that her influence is a dark stain upon Absalom, if not the whole of the Inner Sea.

Few believe that the Oracle of Kortos exists, but words and symbols attributed to the Oracle frequently appear in graffiti throughout the tougher neighborhoods of Absalom. Such tags are the work of criminal gangs making fanciful but frightening claims of association with their island's ominous boogeyman.

Though not associated with these gangs, the Oracle of Kortos does exist. An eldritch being that once moved freely through higher dimensions, the Oracle fell into normal time and space when Aroden's death wounded the fabric of reality. The remains of her scarred body take the form of a gibbering moulder, while her mind remains caught between the present and the future.

The Oracle's brain constantly burns with visions of heroic deeds yet to be performed. She can only find reprieve from these painful

visions by preventing them from happening. Towards these ends, the oracle provides guidance and material support to the adversaries of various heroes, hoping to destroy said heroes before they achieve their destiny.

THE ORACLE OF KORTOS

CR 9

XP 6,400

Female gibbering moulder cleric 7

N Medium aberration

Init +3; **Senses** all-around vision, darkvision 60 ft.; **Perception** +22**DEFENSE****AC** 19, touch 13, flat-footed 16 (+3 Dex, +6 natural)**hp** 115 (11d8+66)**Fort** +12, **Ref** +6, **Will** +13**Defensive Abilities** amorphous; **DR** 5/bludgeoning; **Immune** critical hits, precision damage**OFFENSE****Speed** 20 ft., swim 20 ft.**Melee**

6 bites +12 (1d6+1 plus grab)

Special Attacks blood drain, channel negative energy (6/day, 4d6, Will DC 16), domain powers (lore keeper, vision of madness 7/day), engulf (6d6+6 damage plus 2 Con damage, AC 13, hp 13), gibbering, ground manipulation, spittle (+11 ranged touch)**Spells prepared** (CL 7th, concentration +11)4th – air walk, discern lies (DC 18), divination^P3rd – dispel magic, invisibility purge, locate object, speak with dead^P2nd – augury, detect thoughts^P (DC 16), enthrall (DC 16), owl's wisdom, status1st – comprehend languages^D, deathwatch, detect good, obscuring mist (2), sanctuary (DC 15)

0 – detect magic, guidance, read magic, stabilize

D Domain spells. **Domains:** Knowledge, Madness.**Spell-like abilities** (CL 7th)

At will – clairaudience/clairvoyance (up to 6 rounds/day)

TACTICS**Before Combat** The Oracle of Kortos uses frequent divination spells to anticipate and avoid direct confrontations with her foes. She casts air walk when expecting non-hostile visitors, as she find that floating in the air adds to her mystique.**During Combat** The Oracle rarely prepares combat-related spells. When cornered, she channels negative energy or resorts to the combat tactics of a common gibbering moulder.**Morale** The Oracle has little interest in combat. She attempts to flee if confronted, using obscuring mist and sanctuary to cover her retreat.**STATISTICS****Str** 12, **Dex** 17, **Con** 22, **Int** 6, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 16**Base Atk** +8; **CMB** +9 (+13 grapple); **CMD** 22 (can't be tripped)**Feats** Fleet (2), Improved Natural Attack, Selective Channeling, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (bite)**Skills** Bluff +14, Perception +22, Swim +13; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Perception**Languages** Aklo**Other Gear** elixir of truth, eyes of the eagle, figurine of wondrous power (silver raven)

Hooks

- The Oracle of Kortos actively seeks to thwart up-and-coming heroes. Though unwilling to confront the PCs directly, she provides free advice and divination magic to their foes. The Oracle also casts spells for various paying clients, lying about the results of any given divination if doing so might turn a client against the PCs.

On the High Seas

WORDS FROM MANY ROADS: ABSALOM

by Russell "Soricel Minoi Mousefeet" Estes

This Sarenith, Soricel travels to Absalom, the jewel of the Inner Sea. When one thinks of Absalom they think of its beauty, its wondrous diversity, and the many splendors they can experience. Soricel on the other hand goes to capture more interesting aspects of the city: the dirt, the grime, and the sleaze of the back alleys. Absalom is truly the city of wonder and the city of danger. It has enough inspiration for Soricel to fill a tome.

Aroden

On the hill,
To the heavens we gaze,
Awaiting the one
That promised return,
You give no sign
Just weeks of calamity.
What would impress you,
What would warrant
Your presence?
Is it the evil that plagues us?
If defeated
Would you grant us
Your protection?

False god!

Our town
In chaos,
It lies in ruin.
We sought above,
Now we look below.
We seek answers,
And the devils,

They will guide us.

Soricel's Troubles

Cayden's Hall
I go to worship.
More and more it seems
I'm doing it each day.
I ask for peace,
For rest
From the ghosts,
They haunt me so.
To you,
I raise my tankard
I hope these spirits
Soothe yours.

The Test

To take the test,
Your drunken boast.
Over drinks
We laugh,
Over more
I dare.
Off you go,
Prove me wrong.

Site of the Seventh

They stormed
To the streets,
Under rain,
Under wave.
They hid,
The guards blind,
The people deaf.
Iomedae called,
The Starstone,

It answered.
Blue fire raged.
Stars shone the way,
In every alley,
In every house,
Ghouls from the sea,
Alas found,
Cannot be.

The Drownyard

Playing in the schoolyard,
Looking for new friends,
Come,
Play with us
Down in the yard,
One breath,
Two breath,
They all sink down.

Solider of the Cairnlands

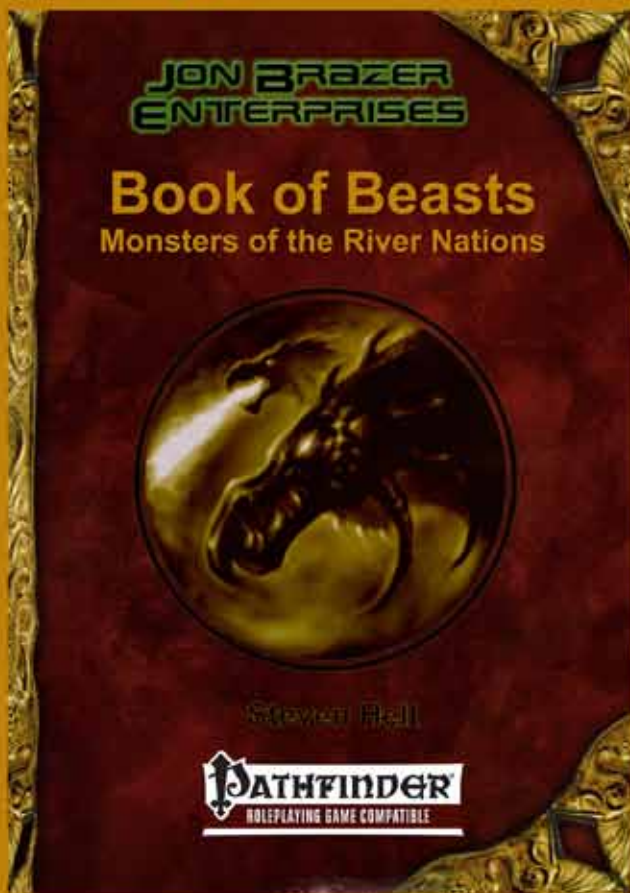
Nightly
I awake,
Risen
To the call,
I am ready.
My sword
And armor,
They answer.
But the battles
Of a millennia
Make one weary.
My armor
Grows heavy,
My sword
No longer thirsts,
Its appetite is sated.
Still, I march.
Over broken bone
And broken shield,
I march onward,
To battle,
To victory.

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Dances with Mantis

DANCES WITH MANTIS

by Joseph "Guy Humkal" Scott

Let me reassure you that I am quite alright! The attempt on my life damaged my property more than my person. I assure you that I have suffered far worse injuries in my lifetime. My years in the cavalry were quite unforgiving: I've been thrown from horses, trampled, even had a horse killed out from under me. Later as a duelist I fought a Qadiran dervish who left me with more cuts than my manservant could sew shut. I almost died from infection and fever. These current scrapes are nothing by comparison. I'm already back to work. The most surprising thing about this whole affair was that word reached you in Absalom so quickly. Your little organization has quite the intelligence gathering network!

I should share the details. It would be impolite for you to pry but were the roles reversed I'd be most curious. Late last Starday I was out playing cards as is my routine. I returned to my apartments in the wee hours of the morning. My manservant Gadzby retires early on these nights as I am never certain at what hour I will be returning. I had just stumbled in though my apartment door—I say stumble because I had a few drinks, which is also my routine—when I noticed something amiss. It was dark. Gadzby always leaves a lamp on for me. I'd sooner believe that the sun refused to shine than Gadzby could have been derelict of his duties. It was only because of this that I paused. I caught a glint of steel just in time to react.

My time in Jalmeray wasn't all apes and addresses. I spent weeks studying the local fighting style but I was amazed at how easily the throws I learned came back to me. My attacker raised his weapons but I caught his wrist by instinct, thrust my hip, and watched as he flew across the foyer and into the darkness.

I knew by the great smash that I'd inadvertently tossed him into my liquor cabinet. I could only hope that it was the bottles of brandy and not my precious gin that I'd heard shattering on the floor. I cautiously followed, loosening my sword as I approached him. The door slammed shut behind me leaving the room pitch black. There were two attackers, and now one of them stood behind me in the darkness. The distinctive sound of steel against leather told me that I had little time to react.

In my mind's eye I saw my foyer. I knew the angle an attacker would choose, and I spun, drawing my sword and slicing through that space as I did so. I felt my sword make contact. Not a direct hit, but my attacker now knew I was there, and armed. The counter attack came high, as I suspected, but I also felt a sharp bite to my leg. My attacker had two weapons! I backed up past the great wooden closet, switched my sword to my left hand, and lunged once more but found nothing but air. My attacker had moved into the opening to avoid my lunge, as I had expected and I reached up and tipped the cabinet onto him with my now free right hand. The cabinet crashed upon him, making a great clatter, but it wasn't heavy. He would have no problem pulling himself free, but it would stall him.

I kept backing up into the front room. A large window allowed the street's light to reflect up from the city below. Fighting in twilight was preferable to complete darkness. I had a box of tindertwigs for my pipe in my jacket, but lighting a lamp would take too long. One of my attackers stepped into the room and I finally got a good look at him. He wore an insect-like mask and had two saw-toothed blades clutched in a downward reverse grip. The Red Mantis was known for this style, one well suited to blind, close quartered fighting. As a student of swordplay, I felt well versed in the style's strengths and weaknesses. I admit that I was actually pleased with the opportunity despite his advantage. I would dance with the famed Red Mantis. I smiled at this, and my opponent seemed to hesitate, but confidence means little to a professional.

I should explain something about the sawtooth sabre: it is not a strong thrusting weapon. It excels as a slashing weapon, provided the teeth don't get snagged, but with his swords in that reverse grip his reach was limited. Without the ability to make a strong thrust or lunge their attacks would always be a little better than arms length. Superior reach wasn't a great advantage though. My attacker had two weapons. If he got close enough, those blades would inflict horrible wounds. Logic dictated that he would need to block my strike to get inside my defenses. He probably thought of this as he adopted a low side stance that minimized my choices. I, in turn, opened myself up by taking the high guard. This stance would be inviting, but I could generate more power with it, and an upward block was a liability with the downward grip.

My opponent took the bait. He lunged. He was fast, as fast as I'd once been, and he understood basic swordplay. He kept his right sword high and prepared

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to slash with his left. Perhaps it was the alcohol, perhaps it was adrenaline, or perhaps it was the pesh /qat solution coursing threw my veins, but I felt exhilarated; I couldn't help but put on a display in spite of the danger. It had been too long since I crossed swords with anyone. I sliced around his defense, clipping him here and there, and then when both his swords were high searching for that block, I reminded him of the importance of footwork. It wasn't very sporting of me, resorting to the low blow, but the man had busted into my home with the intent to kill me. The least I could do was to make him regret it.

Then second assassin stepped into the room.

I attempted to keep them both in front of me. My original opponent was no longer putting up much of a fight, but the other seemed full of beans yet. He tried to out flank me a couple of times with little success, but then he jumped over an end table to get behind me. This was bad. I snatched up a chair in lieu of a shield. I wish I could tell of more eloquent swordplay but the tussle ended rather anti-climactically. The second attacker squared his body to me. I still can't imagine what he was thinking but I leveled the chair and charged. His swords cut into my arm and shoulder but I caught him dead center. I lifted him off his feet and put my shoulder into it as I drove him through the great glass window.

As the first assassin fell, I made a haphazard blind swing at his companion behind me, mainly to keep him from following

too closely, but my arm stiffened as I chopped unexpectedly into bone. The dead weight of dead assassin bowled into me, almost knocking my out the shattered window. The first had dropped three stories onto the spikes of the wrought iron fence on the street below, the other I had inexplicably caught just above the eye socket by pure luck. I would like to think that both died almost instantly.

The noise alerted the neighbors and servants and soon the entire block was awake. Gadzby came rushing up from the servants quarters downstairs and quickly surveyed the damage: the front window was busted out, the rug and walls were spattered with gore, furniture was smashed and knocked over, and those fiends had shredded a fine jacket, doublet, and shirt. I knew what Gadzby was thinking: 'who is going to clean this up?'

"You know," I said to my faithful manservant, "this is hardly the worst mess I've made after a night of cards, and for once not entirely my fault."

"My lord," he said, "why didn't you use your pistol?"

I glanced down at the revolver I always carried. Cleaning and loading it was my nightly ritual. I glanced back up at my manservant.

"That, Gadzby," I said, "is for emergencies."

Yours,
Boswic C. Hamptin

WAYFINDER June 2010 55

To Wield a Golden Pin



TO WIELD A GOLDEN PIN

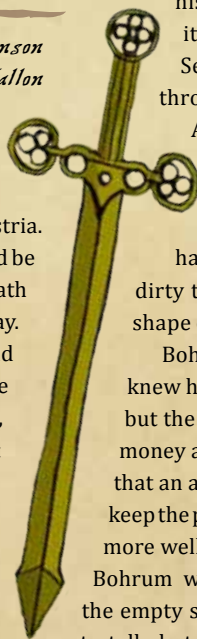
by Matthew "The Twitching King" Stinson
illustrated by Dave "The Eldritch Mr Shiny" Mallon

It had been a long voyage, and after sharing his small halfling-sized cabin with a drunk and his stinking canine, Bohrum Fournaps made his way straight to the public baths at the Pleasure Salon of Calistria. Bohrum was here to start over, to be somewhere he could be important, to not be pushed around by his father, and a bath was a good way to start that. Wash all that had been away. Bohrum had never been to Absalom. It was as grand as all the stories said, but he was sure too that the locals, as in all cities, had no love for foreigners, just their gold. As he walked through the district known as the Coins, he was overlooked and often knocked aside by those in a rush. One man actually spit on his foot when Bohrum asked if he was on the right street. «So much for feeling important and not being pushed around,» he thought. The Ladies of Calistria were very nice however, though there was some misunderstanding when he asked for a private bath. Apparently 'private' did not mean 'alone'. Bohrum just wanted to be away from all the noise for a while. Downstairs he had to wait for his copper tub, the last user just now getting ready to leave. So with only a towel around his waist, and his hairy chest out for all Absalom to see, Bohrum sat on a bench feeling uncomfortable. Then the door opened letting soapy steam into the hall. The shirtless man that emerged was the largest man Bohrum had ever seen with thick scars covering much of his body. Bohrum just sat there as the man kissed one of the two robed elven women that followed him out of the room. Then the man produced a hand full of coins for each girl. He didn't even count it.

As the man left and the tub was washed and refilled, Bohrum wondered what it must be like to be that big, with that much money. No one would knock him aside; or spit on his foot! Now in a sour mood, and mad at himself for being in a sour mood, Bohrum asked the servants to leave even though the room's floor was still wet and littered with towels and buckets. Bohrum was in the tub for some time. He couldn't help but wonder if he had done the right thing leaving home. He knew his father was only doing what he thought was best, but Bohrum cared nothing for wagon trading. So what if he was the oldest, let his brothers handle the business, they love it for some reason. "Besides,» he thought, «New love said I was one of the most skilled apprentice tailors he'd ever had."

Bohrum felt bad about hiding his work, but he knew his father wouldn't understand. He had what it took to be the greatest tailor in the Inner Sea, but he couldn't do it while hauling whiskey through the Varisian backwoods. He could here in Absalom, though. He had just enough money to do it. He would be important, at last. Feeling better now, he hopped out of the tub and immediately fell over in pain. Something had stabbed his foot. Hidden within one of the dirty towels on the floor was a small gold pin in the shape of a sword. The halfling pulled it out of his foot.

Bohrum knew that it must be the giant man's. He knew he could have found the owner and given it back, but the man seemed well off enough, just throwing his money around. Besides, there might be expenses ahead that an aspiring tailor couldn't foresee. So he decided to keep the pin. He even attached it to his collar hoping to look more well-to-do for his meeting with his future landlord. Bohrum was very surprised at how nice the owner of the empty shop was. At first, the man didn't seem to want to talk, but once Bohrum removed his coat to display his workmanship, the man seemed very eager to help. The young tailor was amazed that a stranger could have so much faith in his work that he would give him the keys to the empty shop right there at half the normal rent! Overjoyed by this good fortune, he decided to run right out and purchase the silks and clothes he'd need to get started. With his father being a shipper of goods, Bohrum had seen his fair share of haggling. He knew he was going to have to go around the market to all the different cloth dealers in the Coins, and maybe even down to the docks to secure some incoming goods from the shipping captains themselves. Over the next couple of days he would have to play the vendors off of one another to acquire the best price possible. Just because he didn't like his father's work didn't



Matthew "The Twitching King" Stinson

mean he couldn't do it.

As excited as he was, though, after his rough experience fighting the crowds that morning, the little halfling wasn't looking forward to dodging all those people for the next week. Surprisingly, however, most people got out of his way. It was so odd, they saw him coming and stepped aside to let him pass. It was like a different place. The first silk dealer Bohrum met was Mik Cammliton, also known as 'Silkpurse' by the other merchants. Cammliton's warehouse received over half the silk coming into Absalom. The small tailor didn't expect to get a meeting with the merchant lord right away, but sure enough when he went to make his appointment the clerk just swallowed hard and escorted him to the back office. Seven guards then followed him inside and stood at the back of the room. They all must have been new because they were sweating and appeared nervous. Bohrum guessed there was going to be a lot of money changing hands soon; why else would Cammliton need so many guards? Mr. Cammliton didn't look up from his ledger, at first, but rudely told the young tailor he had two minutes. Bohrum quickly stated what he wanted and what he wanted to pay, starting far too low as any good haggler would. By Mik's deep frown, Bohrum could tell this conversation was not going to end well. He thought maybe he had started too low.

The merchant lord first insulted Bohrum and then started yelling, «Who in the hells do you think I...»

At this point, Mr. Cammliton finally looked up, but he did not look Bohrum in the eyes. He looked, instead, at his shirt. The halfling was certain the merchant was inspecting his needle work, the lay of the cut, the style of the cuff, and curve of the collar with its gold sword pin. Bohrum stayed quiet, as he could see the merchant was considering everything deeply.

Mik then told his clerk; «Give Master Fournaps what he wants at the price he stated.» He then faced the halfling. «Good day Master Fournaps,» he said, then went back to his work. With a half audible 'thank you' Bohrum left Silkpurse's offices, giving the clerk his address on the way out. The tailor was in a daze as he walked back slowly to his shop. His shop! What good fortune! He never would have believed it. He expected to take months to get started, and years before it would all come together. Now, he would have his first dresses for sale within the month and he still had a good amount of money left over.

Then, out of the corner of his eye, Bohrum saw the giant man from the baths walking the street with an entourage of well-dressed sycophants. After a moment of thought the young tailor decided he didn't need the

extra money after such a blessed day.

Walking over, the tailor held out the pin, «Good sir, I believe you dropped this at the baths earlier today.» The scarred man looked down at the halfling then took the pin from his tiny hands.

«Thank you,» he said with a voice like gravel. «Are you seeking a reward?» The man's followers looked nervous at the comment, but Bohrum did not notice.

«No, my good master. So many have done me kindly today, that I would feel ill to belittle my own good deed by taking your money.» But as Bohrum thought on the day's events he began to wonder if maybe that the pin had been his good luck charm. Maybe.

Looking around at the expensive, fashionable outfits the group was wearing, the haggler's son got an idea. «But the next time you or friends are looking for a fine tailor, please stop by my shop on Wheeler's Alley.» And with his thoughts still on his lucky charm, he named his shop. «The sign will say 'The Golden Pin'.»

A year later Bohrum learned the Golden Sword was the sign of the Ironium's great warriors, gladiators who are respected as dukes.



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Side Treks: Absalom and the Isle of Kortos

SIDE TREKS:



ABSALOM AND THE ISLE OF KORTOS

by Thomas "Aurelius" Morrison, Michael "Kurgon" Kelley, and Matthew "Fris" Wagner
illustrated by Liz "Lilith" Courts

Birds, Bulls and Body Snatchers

Plot Hooks

- Merchants hire the PCs to eliminate a harpy band attacking caravans and ships, or to retrieve valuable stolen cargo.
- While searching for an artifact in the Cairnlands, the PCs find the undead harpy Cyrenaica racing to beat them to it.

Backstory

Ancient enemies of both the centaurs and minotaurs of the Kortos highlands, harpies rarely attack Absalom's citizenry due to internal strife and fear of reprisals. However, Cyrenaica, the self-proclaimed Lich-Queen of Kortos, recently began robbing the graves of both the centaurs and minotaurs and raiding shipping lines to acquire food, magic and weapons. A cleric of Urgathoa, Cyrenaica is locked in a bitter six-way struggle for the harpy crown.

Cyrenaica has the Death and Magic domains, the Leadership feat and a horde of undead at her command. Though cruel and selfish, Cyrenaica values her harpy underlings: a sorcerer cohort and several followers, many of whom have levels in adept, cleric or warrior.

Cyrenaica discovered tantalizing clues as to the whereabouts of five powerful artifacts:

- *Aegis of the Corpse Eater*, a curious shield made of the rib bones of ghouls and ghosts, potentially lies within one of the many collapsed buildings in the centaur-held regions of the Cairnlands.
- *Banshee's Heart*, lost at sea off the northeast coast of the Isle. Four waves of undead sent to retrieve it failed to return.

- *The Eye of Calysh*, an insight-granting amethyst geode in the possession of a rival harpy that does not recognize its value or power.
- *Ring of the First Servant*, a heavy gold and ruby ring once owned by Urgathoa's first undead servant arrives soon on a ship of Ustalav origin.
- *Vexing Nail*, a magical scythe made from the claw of some enormous beast, lies entombed with its owner near the Cairnlands, possibly in centaur territory.

Potential Resolutions

If the PCs kill Cyrenaica, she respawns and creates another undead horde. Without her living harpy followers, however, she will have no chance at becoming the Harpy Queen of Kortos.

Losing the items she has boasted of to her peers to the PCs causes Cyrenaica to lose face, weakening her claim to the crown. Cyrenaica could become a recurring villain for the PCs as she seeks to regain face – a task that her undead state is well suited for.

Cyrenaica's research into the five artifacts has attracted the attention of other Urgathoan followers, some of which may pick up where she left off.

Labyrinths of Sivanah's Crag

Plot Hooks

In the Merchants Quarter of Absalom, the PCs are tasked by Keleshite gem trader Daras Napharic to investigate a break in shipments of rare golden gems originating near the base of Sivanah's Crag, a mountain in the southern region of the Kortos Mounts. Daras supplies the PCs with directions to the secret mining base location.

Reaching the camp requires the PCs to travel along a seldom-used northern Absalom-Diobel trade route. When the PCs reach the base camp, they find it deserted with a nearby ascending mountain path.

Background

Sivanah's Crag is named for its nearly vertical peak, permanently clothed in mirror-like sheen of glacial ice. The upper portions of the mountain have not been explored due to high impassable terrain, but travelers tell rumors of winding caverns filled with treasure.

The path from the base camp leads to the mine through terribly harsh terrain, requiring several days of travel. Unfortunately for the miners, they broke into a maze constructed by a minotaur tribe. The twisting nature of the mines make it a natural expansion for the minotaurs, who have claimed it as their own. Strangely, they have not slain

Thomas Morrison, Michael Kelley, and Matthew Wagner

any of the miners – most are held captive, while others are lost in the labyrinth.

Potential Resolutions

The PCs can attempt to clear the mines of the minotaurs, to which the minotaurs respond by striking against the miners. If the passage between the two sections remains open, members of the tribe will return.

Daras is a greedy man and cares little for the miners' plight – he is only interested in the precise location of the mine. If any miners are rescued, they accompany the PCs back to Absalom to speak with Daras, who grudgingly agrees to help with negotiations with the Taurean Embassy. Nuar Spiritskin takes a dim view of wanton violence against his people – the PCs actions will weigh heavily in his decisions.

Things Left Unfinished

Plot Hook

Dozens of Copperwood residents have left the town over the last two weeks, all heading north towards the mountains, never returning from their mysterious journey. Hired by a group of concerned family members, the PCs make the trek north to discover what is happening. Only a day's travel into the journey they hear the rumbling of massive wheels churning up the soil. An immense siege engine rolls towards Copperwood under its own power, surrounded by the blank-faced missing townsfolk.

Background

Centuries ago, when sieges were a common occurrence for the denizens of Absalom, Spellmaster Kelintor Cavamin, a general in one of the many invading armies, was overseeing construction of an arcane siege tower. Before it could be completed, he and his men were attacked by a minotaur tribe and all slain. Recently, Kelintor's spirit has begun to stir, awakened by the inadvertent exploration of the locals. Still obsessed with attacking the city, he began enchanting the minds of the townsfolk, calling them to his side to complete his tower. The decrepit siege tower churns

under the power of the animated skeletal remains of his men, defended by the bewitched citizens and lurching inexorably towards Absalom.

Potential Resolutions

Defeating Kelintor Cavamin before his tower reaches the outskirts of Absalom is no mean feat, but the bewitched townsfolk still attempt to stop those who try and destroy it. Kelintor and his tower are intertwined, though – as long as one remains intact, no matter the size, Kelintor returns to rebuild his siege engines anew.



Paved with Good Intentions

TALES FROM THE FRONT



PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS

by Ernesto "Montalve" Ramirez
illustrated by Hugo "Butterfrog" Solis

It had been a trap since the beginning. She had felt it, but being among strangers she had not been sure they would have listened to her advice. Besides which, time being of the essence, they could spare no delay due to doubt.

Now standing in the midst of mountains of grain they were surrounded by creatures out of some nightmarish Ustalavian folktale: gaunt, skeletal men; their eyes burning with blue fire and their bodies shrouded in black cloth, armed with wicked scythes of clear Keleshite design. Dark fog clouded the air and stole the sound from around them. The creatures' numbers doubled their own.

Jordan found it ironic that she had to travel so far from Canterwell, all the way to Absalom, in order to confront her first undead, but as she drew her longsword she decided that she wouldn't allow them to be her last.

Jordan had been ecstatic when her father told her about the pilgrimage to the Starstone Cathedral, the second holiest place for her faith, just after the Cathedral of Sancta Iomedae in Vigil. But she wasn't expecting to spend her time in Absalom, the fabled city at the center of the world, cloistered inside First Harbormaster Goodman Hugden's residence. Jordan was bored and restless. Three days had passed since her arrival and yet

she hadn't been able to see anything beyond the port. Not that the port wasn't impressive, it was absolutely marvelous. She had traveled often to Vellumis, but she had never seen so many different ships from so many nations from all around Golarion; she could easily believe every banner in the Inner Sea had seen its way to Absalom's harbor and possibly had at least one of their representatives anchored in port right at the moment.

She shouldn't complain: Hugden Manor was a big place to explore with lots of antiques and trophies, each one with a story. The man was a Lord; though it was clear he despised the title and lived more spartanly than many others who possessed equal money and resources. Still, what she really wanted was to explore the streets, to visit the Starstone Cathedral, the Irorium and every other place of note. The few stories she heard from the gossiping servants made her feel like a country girl as she stared through the window. The busy and chaotic streets teased her, inviting her to explore them. But she stayed. Her

father's orders were clear: "Wait until I finish here." And so she did.

Hugden and her father were old comrades in arms, and she loved listening to the tales of their old exploits. But every time the young Andoren captain, Colson Maldris, arrived, the men's conversation moved behind closed doors.

There was something mysterious about Captain Maldris. He was a gentleman, a knight of some stature, and handsome, too. But there was a lot more to the man. Schemes and power games, most likely, given the way her father intently kept her away from said conversations.

Both Jordan's father and Mister Hugden were already in the study when Captain Maldris arrived. The young Eagle Knight bowed to her before taking her hand and kissing it.

"Greetings, Priestess, you are a sight for sore eyes. I would love to stop and chat, but I am already late to my appointment. Could you do me a favor, dear?"

Jordan blushed at the captain's unintended flattery, but smiled nonetheless, "I am but a mere initiate Captain...."

"Call me Colston. And I apologize. I wouldn't know the difference... not after observing your piety," said Maldris with a smile.

The girl's smile widened and her blush deepened. "Thank you, Cap... I mean Colston. What can I do for you?"

The man offered her his arm, "Hugden and your father, while interesting, sometimes tire me. Why don't you come to our little interview? I am sure you would make it a lot more enjoyable."

Jordan smiled and took the captain's arm, walking on clouds

Ernesto "Montalve" Ramirez

as he guided her to the study. Both Hugden and her father stopped talking and stood when they saw them entering. The displeasure in her father's face was clear, but he said nothing. Jordan lowered her eyes; she knew she was due for a reprimand as soon as they were alone.

The awkward silence lasted only a few seconds, and then Hugden began talking once more. The captain sat in a divan and motioned Jordan to follow.

"Lastwall is neutral. You know that. I am willing to help you with any personal resources I have, but not here. You have grown blind, Goodman; Absalom is a paradise of freedom compared to Westcrown or Egorian," said Jordan's father pointedly. Aerodus Fenix was no stranger to schemes, but he had expected Hugden to be above them by now.

"Yet, everything and everyone crosses through Absalom. We even dictate the weight and value of gold coin along the Inner Sea. Absalom is necessary for what you want, old friend," was Hugden's reply.

"And Andoran would be more than happy to support both your personal cause and that of Lastwall once we are better positioned," intervened Colston Maldris.

But before her father was able to answer, a man—a bard, was Jordan's guess based on his attire—entered the room in a hurry.

Hugden stood, "What is the meaning of this?"

"Sir, my apologies... I was told Captain Maldris was here." He turned toward Maldris. "I was asked by the Society to recover a certain book of codes from Yargos Gill, the man from the Puddles you were interested in recruiting. But he has gone missing."

Colston's expression changed to one of worry as he stood. "We need to do something... yet your friends in the Society, they can't know you work with us...they all have too many loyalties...sadly, I don't have anyone at hand to help you."

"Is the book that important?" asked Jordan.

"Not to us... but it has historical information regarding an ancient Taldorian invasion attempt," said the bard.

"But Yargos is very important to the people in the Puddles. He is an educated man living among them for the mere purpose of helping them. Such men are scarce and valuable," finished Colston.

Jordan stood, "I will help him." She just wanted to help Colston and get his approval, but then she turned to see her father. He was angry, but he would not stop her. He had raised her to think for herself and to make the right decisions. Prohibiting her from going would be treating her like a child. He wouldn't do that. "Go for your armor, then. And Godspeed, daughter!"

The moment Jordan and the bard left the room, Aerodus Fenix's eyes turned toward Colston Maldris. The look would have frozen an Osirian fire elemental, but the captain just tried to ignore it.

"This is the last time you play with my daughter, Colston. Your petty games are not my concern, but if something happens to her, I will

make sure justice is rained down upon those responsible.» The lomedian Sword Knight stood and swept from the room, leaving behind an awkward silence and two worried men.

So here Jordan stood in one of Absalom's granaries, surrounded by dreadful enemies, fighting beside people she hardly knew. Not the best odds. Nor the worst either. Her enemies were many, but they were clearly already dead.

Jordan prayed and, as the undead operatives charged toward them, she stood firm and pointed her sword to the heavens, calling forth the power wielded by her goddess. "For victory, for the heart!"

And Iomedae answered her call. Her divine image reflected for a moment on the sword's blade, which then shone brightly as the sun. As the gaze of the goddess swept across the undead, they burst into flames and were soon no more than cinders.

Jordan smiled proudly, her faith was strong and her prayers had been answered by the power of her goddess. The bard, Keldan Fendric, briefly checked that each of her companions was unwounded and then moved forward to scout further into the granary.

"All clear," he called back.

Jordan knelt beside the ashes of one of the undead. She took up the monster's ancient weapon, admiring its manufacture. This was to be her first trophy against the undead.

It was but a moment of respite. Yargos made noises to encourage them to hurry. The old man was right. Time was of the essence and Absalom was still in danger. Jordan hefted the scythe and hurried along with the others.

Jordan was clear on her path; she would stop the ghost invasion and then take Yargos Gill to Colston. Maybe then he would offer to show her the rest of Absalom.



Dear Ask a Shoanti

I am an unmarried Chelaxian with capital losses exceeding my gains for this year's reporting period. But I also have real estate dividends in excess of 50,000 gp from the ill-gotten sale of Shoanti lands in the Storval, which I used for strip mining but mostly as a *Tensor's magnificent tax shelter*. Which federal form should I use to complete my return?

Sincere Regards,
Maximized Meta-Magic Refund

Dear MMR

A DPFS -5768: "Dead Person Filing Singly."
Yours very truly,
Ask a Shoanti

A DARK STAR FELL FROM THE SKY BRINGING WITH IT THE END OF ALL THINGS!

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AN UNDEAD WORLD RULED BY FEAR AND HORROR. UNDEAD NIGHTMARES PROWL THE DARKEST FOREST WITH MALEVOLENT GHOULS, GRIM DEMONIC FIENDS AND HORRIFIC VAMPIRES PREY ON A FEARFUL POPULACE. THE WORLD IS DOMINATED BY THE MONSTROUSLY POWERFUL IMMORTAL VAMPIRIC LICH LORD KNOWN AS CALIX SABINUS REIGNS SUPREME OVER THIS WORLD. AND WITH ALL THIS THE MYSTERIOUS FORCE KNOWN AS NIGHTWALL. EVIL DOMINATES THE WORLD TO BE CHALLENGED BY NOBLE HEROES FIGHTING TO TAKE BACK A WORLD THAT SHOULD BELONG TO THEM.

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Bestiary: Mawgetebab'dly

BESTIARY: MAWGETEBAB'DLY

by Justin "Black Fang" Sluder
and Joseph "Guy Humual" Scott
illustrated by Michael Jaecks

Dozens of giant angry snake heads with hungry gapping mouths rise from the massive, muscular serpentine body. Many more tentacles constantly grasp for anything to shovel into its multitude of mouths.

Mawgetebab'dly CR 30

XP 9,840,000

N Colossal magical beast (kaiju)

Init +14; **Senses** blindsight 500 ft., low-light vision, scent, see in darkness, true seeing; Perception +53

Aura frightful presence (500 ft., DC 49)

DEFENSE

AC 57, touch 12, flat-footed 57 (+10 Dex, +45 natural, -8 size)

hp 1,020 (40d10+800); regeneration 35

Fort +42, **Ref** +34, **Will** +25

Defensive Abilities improved evasion, improved uncanny dodge; **DR** 25/epic; **Immune** ability damage, acid, bleed, critical hits, disease, energy drain, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, petrification, poison, polymorph, sneak attack; **Resist** cold 20, electricity 20, fire 20; **SR** 41; **Weakness** electricity vulnerability

OFFENSE

Speed 200 ft., burrow 50 ft., climb 100 ft., fly 400 ft. (perfect), swim 100 ft.

Melee 2 bites +49 (4d6+15/17-20/x3 plus grab), 5 tentacles +44 (2d8+7/19-20 plus grab) (*see Focused Assault and Writhing Mass below)

Space 100 ft.; **Reach** 200 ft.

Special Attacks constrict (tentacles, 2d8+15), focused assault, grab, pounce, rend (2 bites, 4d6+22), retributive riposte, superior flanking, swallow whole (8d6 plus 10d6 acid, AC 32, 102 hp), trample (2d8+22, DC 45), writhing mass

STATISTICS

Str 41, **Dex** 30, **Con** 50, **Int** 20, **Wis** 31, **Cha** 49

Base Atk +40; **CMB** +63 (+65 to bull rush, +67 to disarm, sunder, trip and to start and maintain a grapple); **CMD** 83 (85 vs. bull rush, 87 vs. sunder, can't be tripped)

Feats Awesome Blow, Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat

Reflexes, Great Cleave, Greater Disarm, Greater Sunder, Greater Trip, Hover, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (bite, tentacle), Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Improved Trip, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Wingover

Skills Bluff +59, Climb +23, Fly +53, Intimidate +59, Perception +53, Sense Motive +50, Stealth +57, Swim +66; **Racial Modifiers** +20 Stealth

Languages telepathy

SQ death throes, mawgetebab'dly traits, regenerate head, savage criticals, spawn, telepathic network, tenacious grapple

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization solitary, or horde (1 plus 3d4+4 mawgetebab'dly spawn)

Treasure none

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Death Throes (Ex) When killed, a mawgetebab'dly explodes dealing 250 points of damage to anything within 1,000 feet (Ref DC 50 half). Anything killed by this damage is disintegrated completely, leaving not even dust. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Focused Assault (Ex) As a full-round action, a mawgetebab'dly can sacrifice its attacks against other opponents to make 4 bite and 10 tentacle attacks against a single foe. This attack treats tentacle attacks as primary weapons.

Mawgetebab'dly Traits (Ex) A mawgetebab'dly can be killed by severing all of its heads or slaying its body. Any attack that is not an attempt to sever a head affects the body, including area attacks or attacks that cause piercing or bludgeoning damage. To sever a head, an opponent must make a sunder attempt with a slashing weapon targeting a head. A head is considered a separate weapon with hardness 10 and hit points equal to double the mawgetebab'dly's HD. To sever a head, an opponent must inflict enough damage to reduce the head's hit points to 0 or less. Severing a head deals damage to the mawgetebab'dly's body equal to the mawgetebab'dly's current HD. A mawgetebab'dly can't attack with a severed head, but takes no other penalties.

Regenerate Head (Ex) When a mawgetebab'dly's head is destroyed, two heads regrow in 1 round. To prevent new heads from growing, at least 50 points of fire damage must be dealt to the stump (a touch attack to hit) before they appear. Fire damage from area attacks can affect stumps and the body simultaneously. A mawgetebab'dly doesn't die from losing its heads until all are cut off and the stumps seared by fire.

Regeneration (Su) Only damage dealt by a creature of demigod or greater status deals lethal damage to a mawgetebab'dly. They regenerate even when failing a saving throw against a *disintegrate* spell or death effect. If a mawgetebab'dly fails its save against a spell or

Justin "Black Fang" Gluder and Joseph "Guy Humual" Scott

effect that would kill it instantly, the effect instead deals nonlethal damage equal to its full normal hit point total +10 (1,030 points of damage).

Retributive Riposte (Su) Any creature coming into physical contact with a mawgetebab'dly against its will suffers 5d6 points of damage as a free action for each time contact occurs.

Savage Criticals (Ex) Mawgetebab'dly's bite attacks threaten a critical hit on a roll of 19-20 (and with its Improved Critical feat, these attacks threaten on a 17-20) and deal triple damage on a successful critical hit.

See in Darkness (Ex) A mawgetebab'dly can see perfectly in darkness of any kind, even that created by a deeper darkness spell.

Spawn (Ex) In the event one of a mawgetebab'dly's heads is cut off, it grows to be a mawgetebab'dly spawn in 1d4 rounds unless it is subjected to 102 points of damage. Particularly annoyed mawgetebab'dly have been known to rip a few of their own heads off. Mawgetebab'dly spawn are controlled by the nearest mawgetebab'dly.

Mawgetebab'dly Spawn resemble more powerful hydras with a variable number of heads (2d6+3). They possess the advanced simple template, fast healing equal to double their base number of heads, electricity vulnerability and can have up to three times the number of heads the base hydra had.

Superior Flanking (Ex) Due to the reach of a mawgetebab'dly, they always gain a +2 flanking bonus to melee attack rolls. When flanking an opponent with another creature, but not another mawgetebab'dly, this bonus increases to +4. When flanking an opponent with another mawgetebab'dly this bonus increases to +6.

Swallow Whole (Ex) If the mawgetebab'dly begins its turn with an opponent grappled in its mouth, it can attempt a new grapple check (as though attempting to pin the opponent). If it succeeds, it swallows its prey, and the opponent takes bite damage. Swallowed creatures take damage each round. In addition to cutting one's way out, the swallowed creature has the option of escaping through the mouth or through the creature's bowels. Creatures escaping through the mouth are subjected to another bite attack and creatures escaping the other route are subjected to another constriction attack and ridicule by friends and companions. The mawgetebab'dly may choose to expel swallowed creatures as a free action.

Telepathic Network (Ex) A creature swallowed by a mawgetebab'dly has a cumulative 10% chance each round to gain a telepathic bond with all others who have survived being swallowed. This bond is permanent and cannot be removed by anything less than divine will. This bond functions across planes and allows communication regardless of languages known. All creatures sharing the bond choose as a free action what to communicate across it.

A bonded creature has a 50% chance of becoming a new mawgetebab'dly upon death.

Telepathy (Ex) A mawgetebab'dly can communicate telepathically with any creature it is aware of regardless of their location or languages spoken.

Tenacious Grapple (Ex) A mawgetebab'dly does not gain the grappled condition if it grapples a foe with its bites or tentacles.

Writhing Mass (Ex) As a full attack a mawgetebab'dly may use 2 bite attacks and 5 tentacle attacks against each opponent within reach, regardless of the number of foes present.

What the titans are to ogres, the mawgetebab'dly is to the hydra. Creatures of immense size and ability, the mawgetebab'dly were once the greatest of the spawn of Rovagug, but all were thought slain in the cataclysmic battle that imprisoned the mighty Rovagug within the Pit of Gormuz. The spawn of Rovagug are not always so easily slain though. One of the great mawgetebab'dly survived somehow, its body destroyed but its incredible hunger unquenched. The horrific event known as Earthfall opened a crack in reality large enough to allow the beast to escape.

The mawgetebab'dly were always hungry. Their desire to feed was a need that burned eternal and no amount of eating would ever satisfy or even lessen that craving. The mawgetebab'dly were extremely effective at feeding, they were able to swallow virtually anything smaller than themselves, but digesting was another matter though. Anything capable of surviving the constriction and acid might soon find themselves forced the length of the digestive tract as the monster searches for something more palatable to devour. Living creatures escaping the beast gain the ability to communicate with other sentient creatures that somehow managed to survive digestion. If a bonded creature focuses, they can sometimes hear the thoughts of the mawgetebab'dly itself. No one is sure of the exact nature of this bond, but scholars have speculated that the monster's design stemmed from a chaotic collective.

The mawgetebab'dly didn't work well with those of its kind. The monsters saw others as threats to its food source, but unfortunately the mawgetebab'dly doesn't need to mate to reproduce. Spawn of mawgetebab'dly continue to grow until they too gain the unquenchable hunger of their sire. The beasts then go their separate ways.

Prestigious: Wave Rider of Absalom

PRESTIGIOUS: WAVE RIDER OF ABSALOM

by Jason "darklingz" Boyko

The Wave Riders are an order of hippocampus-mounted knights who patrol the harbor of Absalom and the waters around the Isle of Kortos. Despite the intense mockery their mounts suffer amongst the entertainers of the land, the knights who join this order take a great measure of pride in their position, as they are an important line of defense for the city-state and island.

To maintain status as a Wave Rider, an individual must provide five days of service per week, either patrolling, teaching new Wave Riders or helping to train new hippocampus mounts. This makes them unlikely player characters, but makes them likely NPC's with which PC's may have to deal with.

Not all Wave Riders met will be members of the Wave Rider prestige class, but most of them are. To advance in the order's hierarchy, one must take Wave Rider levels. A patrolling Wave Rider is always armed with a masterwork spear, masterwork light crossbow and most of them wear +1 leather armor of water walking. This gear is considered owned by the order and members do not get to use this gear unless they are patrolling with the exception being high ranking members of the order, who tend to own their own gear.

The leader of the Wave Riders is Knight Captain Iolidric. His mount is a hippocampus named Raydancer that he's been paired with for twelve years- ever since he was a new recruit. He moved through the ranks slowly but surely, and has been in charge of the Wave Riders for five years now, since the former leader died fighting smugglers. He has no plans on retiring any time soon, and he commands great respect amongst his knights.

New Prestige Class: Wave Rider

Becoming a Wave Rider requires one to be sponsored by a current member of the order during a time when the Wave Riders are in need of recruits. Once one is accepted into the

order, they must spend several weeks in training. During training, they are instructed in the ways of the order and are introduced to their mount- a pairing that is kept as long as either the rider or hippocampus lives.

Hit Die: d10.

Requirements

To qualify to become a wave rider, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Alignment: Any lawful.

Base attack bonus: +5.

Skills: Handle Animal 3 ranks, Ride 5 ranks, Swim 5 ranks.

Feats: Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat.

Class Skills

The wave rider's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Handle Animal (Wis), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Survival (Wis) and Swim (Str).

Skill Ranks at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Wave riders have proficiency with all simple and martial weapons. They are proficient with light armor, but not with shields.

Hippocampus Rider (Ex): Wave riders receive a bonus to their Ride skill when mounted on hippocampuses.

Mounted Warfare (Ex): Skilled with weapons designed to take advantage of their unique mounts, wave riders gain a +1 bonus to hit with crossbows, spears and tridents. This bonus increases to +2 at 3rd level and +3 at 5th level.

Ride Defensively (Ex): At 2nd level, wave riders learn how to maneuver their mounts effectively in the water. If they ride defensively, the rider and the mount gain a +2 bonus on

The Wave Rider Class Features

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+1	+1	+0	Hippocampus rider +2, mounted warfare +1
2nd	+2	+1	+1	+1	Ride defensively
3rd	+3	+2	+2	+1	Hippocampus rider +4, mounted warfare +2
4th	+4	+2	+2	+1	Saddle stand
5th	+5	+3	+3	+2	Hippocampus rider +6, mounted warfare +3

Class Skills: Handle Animal (Wis), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Survival (Wis) and Swim (Str).



Jason "darkling23" Boyko

Reflex saving throws and a +4 dodge bonus to Armor Class.

Saddle Stand (Ex): At 4th leve, a wave rider can stand in their mount's saddle by making a DC 20 Ride check each round, even if the hippocampus is in combat or moving. The wave rider incurs no penalties for making a ranged attack when their mount is taking a double move or running while standing in the saddle (see Mounted Archery, *Core Rulebook* page 131).

KNIGHT-CAPTAIN IOLIDRIC CR 12

Male human fighter 8/wave rider 5
LN Medium humanoid (human)
Init +3; Senses Perception -1

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 13, flat-footed 15 (+4 armor, +3 Dex, +1 natural)
hp 84 (8d10+5d10+13)

Fort +12, Ref +10, Will +5; +2 vs. fear

Defensive Abilities bravery +2

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee

+1 longspear +21/+16/+11 (1d8+6/x3)

Ranged

+2 light crossbow +24 (1d8+6/19-20)

STATISTICS

Str 16, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 12

Base Atk +13; CMB +16; CMD 29

Feats Animal Affinity, Combat Reflexes, Deadly Aim, Far Shot, Greater Weapon Focus (light crossbow), Improved Vital Strike, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Point Blank Shot, Ride-By Attack, Vital Strike, Weapon Focus (light crossbow), Weapon Specialization (light crossbow)

Skills Bluff +6, Handle Animal +21, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (local) +4, Profession (sailor) +6, Ride +23 (+29 with hippocampus), Swim +19

Languages Common

SQ armor training +2, hippocampus rider +6, mounted warfare +3, ride defensively, saddle stand, weapon training (crossbows)

Combat Gear 20 bolts, *potion of cure light wounds* (3); Other Gear wave rider's armor, *amulet of natural armor* +1, *cloak of resistance* +2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Ride Defensively (Ex) See the wave rider prestige class below.

Saddle Stand (Ex) See the wave rider prestige class below.

HIPPOCAMPUS CR 4

XP 1,200

CG Large magical beast (aquatic)

Init +2; Senses blindsense 60 ft.; low-light vision, scent; Perception +7

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 13 (+2 Dex, +4 natural, -1 size)

hp 34 (4d10+12)

Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +2

OFFENSE

Speed swim 60 ft.

Melee

bite +7 (1d4+4) and tail slap +7 (1d6+4) and head butt +7 (1d4+4)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.

STATISTICS

Str 18, Dex 15, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10

Base Atk +4; CMB +9; CMD 21 (23 vs. trip)

Feats Alertness, Endurance

Skills Stealth +0 (+4 when submerged), Perception +7, Swim +18;

Racial Modifiers +4 Stealth

Language Aquan

ECOLOGY

New Gear: Wave Rider's Armor

Aura moderate transmutation; CL 6th
Slot torso; Price 8,375 gp; Weight 20 lbs.

DESCRIPTION

Dyed a deep blue-green and engraved with a subtle wave pattern radiating out from the crest of Absalom, this +1 studded leather armor grants its wearer the ability to cast water walk once per day. This effect lasts for one hour.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Magic Arms and Armor, water walk; Cost 4,188 gp

Environment temperate aquatic

Organization Solitary, pair, or herd (3–8)

Treasure none

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Water Dependant (Ex) Though they are unable to move on land, a hippocampus can breathe air (such as if it surfaces from the water). It can survive out of the water for 1 minute per 1 point of Constitution before it begins to "drown."

Skills A hippocampus can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

Often called a merhorse or sea horse, the hindquarters of a hippocampus resemble that of a large fish. Covered in scales varying in color between ivory and deep green and shades of blue and silver, aquatic races often tame these animals. They make fine steeds – highly intelligent, strong, swift – and are affectionate creatures given to acts of bravery. Normally docile, they only fight if they or an ally is threatened. They never willingly serve evil races, such as sahuagin.

Hippocampuses grow to be about eight feet long and weight around 600 pounds. Most speak Aquan, though some also speak Common – these are usually found among the Wave Riders of Absalom.

Training a Hippocampus

A hippocampus requires training before it can bear a rider in combat. To be trained, a hippocampus must have a friendly attitude toward the trainer (this can be achieved through a successful Diplomacy check). Training a friendly hippocampus requires six weeks of work and a DC 25 Handle Animal check. Riding a hippocampus requires an exotic saddle. A hippocampus can fight while carrying a rider, but the rider cannot also attack unless he or she succeeds on a Ride check. Hippocampus eggs are worth 1,500 gp apiece on the open market, while young are worth 2,500 gp each. Professional trainers (usually tritons) charge 1,000 gp to rear or train a hippocampus. The hippocampuses that the Wave Riders train are especially bred for them, and the Riders believe they are of the highest quality hippocampus stock. The hippocampuses tend to agree, and they do not like associating with their wild counterparts. Many of them, also, tend to veer towards the Lawful alignment, rather than Chaotic, due to their upbringing and training.

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THE GREENHORNS

PART III



INTO THE UNDERTOMBS

by Trevor "Jarreb Deu" Gulliver,
Jonathan "Wicht" McAnulty and Neil Spicer
illustration by Liz "Lilish" Courts

Garret's Journal

19 Sarenith

And lo! The crashing of the stones behind us sounded as the tramp of doom. Long did we journey and hard did we search, but now at last we have found it, the undertombs. Tanglehead located the mechanism to open the way. The gnome's discovery might have been the workings of a genius mind, but it may well prove our undoing. The same block that lifted the massive door to the dark regions beneath the desert sands now seals our exit. We must find another way out.

After entering the passages, we passed through several empty chambers. Following much deliberation, we determined rest was imperative before continuing. And so we traced our steps and made camp in the first chamber. We slept undisturbed, but a chill hung in the air unlike any I have hither fore encountered.

20 Sarenith

Verily, the cautious pick digs best in unknown rock.

I learned that proverb at my father's feet, and I am reminded of it today. The gnome burned his hand upon a wall of stone for lack of proper caution. The red walls lay stained with black, pulsating veins. Fascinated, Tanglehead reached forth to touch them. Alas, they were acidic. He badly injured his hand and only the ministrations of the priestess shall keep him from losing it.

The chambers we entered yesterday all lie empty. Akkunhis thinks they served as workers' quarters. For a short time we feared ourselves trapped in a set of rooms with no exit. Thankfully, while the priestess tended to the bold gnome, I managed to find a hidden panel which should open the way into other rooms. We should know more shortly. Even as I write she packs her healer's kit. Soon we will venture out of these still, dark chambers of stone. I pray the Forgefather guards us in the deep places of the earth.

20 Sarenith (II)

Behold! In the Darkness of the Earth dwell terrible and foul monsters of Hell! Fiends that, truth be known, look suspiciously like our leader, Akkunhis.

The chamber beyond the secret door was not empty.

Within, there stood an ancient sentinel against intruders. A minotaur, which looked at first to be stone, proved itself far more than a mere statue. The fact that I am writing this is indicative of our continued existence, but it was a hard fight and almost did our stalwart hearts faint as we fought a monster with the strength of the very earth itself. Yet we did not falter. Akkunhis charged in first and I followed hard at his heels. Several times it drove us back and in turn we pressed the fight against it. Once did it strike such a blow against my head that were it not for the strength of my stout dwarf helm and the quick prayers of Ashallah, I would no doubt have joined my forefathers in the forges of heaven this day.

Tanglehead also proved his mettle. It was his blade that finally drove off the guardian. Akkunhis and I kept its attention, while he tumbled behind and, leaping upon its massive back, drove his small blade deep into its spine. It is not dead. It fled into the very stone of the walls.

Alas, Tanglehead paid dearly for his courage. The thing threw him hard against the wall as he fled.

We pressed no further into the tomb following the battle. We are too injured and have returned once more to our camp in the workers' chambers. However, we have only another day worth of food upon our persons and we must not tarry in finding our way.

One more thing troubles me. The chamber beyond is filled with a palpable chill. We have no extra clothing – it all lies in

Trevor Gulliver, Jonathan McAnulty, and Neil Spicer

our camp above. I fear if the air beyond proves much colder, we shall find ourselves ill-equipped.

Akkunhis' Journal

20 Sarenith, 4707 AR

I dreamt of you again last night. I dreamt of leading your monstrous armies to do battle against the heat, sand, and wind.

I remember dragging the lords of the very elements to tremble at your feet. I remember your madness, Nellatantha. I remember your bloodbaths and beauty treatments. I remember your disconcerting tenderness before the end. Too long have I delayed our reunion.

After descending through the *Consort of Endless Sands*, we entered a series of narrow halls and wider chambers. The acrid odor stung my nostrils far worse than the *ring of servitude* you ordered me to wear so long ago. The red stone walls riddled with thick black veins attracted the inquisitive gnome's attention. "Like no stone on Golarion," he mumbled, caressing it, mesmerized until the blistering of his palm brought forth a shocked scream.

"Acid," the Calistrian said, examining his palm. Inspecting the stone confirmed it. The black veins in the rock throbbled as they slowly pumped acid deeper into the complex. We could only touch the tiles of the floor with any safety. At what cost and for what purpose did you bring stone from the Plane of Earth for the passageways leading to your tomb, Nellatantha?

While recovering, the gnome pored over his maps and equations, tracing angles and babbling like those astrologers whose arcane justifications permitted your outrages. The dwarf, peering over his shoulder as the map took shape saw it first, though it had been obvious to me shortly after we entered the undertomb this morning. "Lo! Does not the shape of these chambers and halls resemble a hieroglyph?"

"Earth," Ashallah confirmed. She looked at me but said nothing else. As clever as a concubine, that one.

I know what you did, Nellatantha. And, now, I know what you are trying to do.

I know what you did. Soon the others will as well. I must act soon or lose any chance of being alone with you.

Morning, 21 Sarenith, 4707 AR

The battle with your guardian disturbed my sleep last night, my queen. Do I forget my own kinsman's face? Was this a soldier I trained or was he born after you consigned me to an eternity of waiting in the stone? He nearly mangled the gnome. This work becomes too dangerous for my new companions. I must break from them soon.

Noon, 21 Sarenith, 4707 AR

I confirmed my belief about the layout of the undertombs as we drew near the corridors beneath the *Consort of Cooling Mists*. The chilled air assaulted us even before we entered. The layout of the chambers proved instantly familiar to me and will soon become apparent to the others as well—the halls and corridors form the Osirion hieroglyph for 'water.' What little water permeates the undertomb has frozen to its walls, forming a thin sheet of ice.

The gnome learned his lesson; he dares not touch the wall. He studies the path before us, disarming spell traps that would freeze us in our place.

I wonder how long before the others realize. They come from a time when magic has grown complex and writing commonplace. That writing *is* magic escapes the children of this age. They understand the tombs have an 'elemental theme,' but do they suspect what lies at the center or will they need to see it with their own eyes? And, in seeing it, will they want to preserve it...to somehow bring it back with them? I must get to you before they do, lest they stop me from doing what I must.

I do not like to stop and rest. I know the guardian still waits in the walls, ready to step from the stone and strike us when we let our guard down. Still, the gnome needs his rest for all the abuse he has taken and I need to explain myself to them. This journal will have to serve as that explanation. If I do not return from meeting you, perhaps my friends—I can call them that now—will read this and understand.

Ashallah's Journal

19 Sarenith, 4707 AR

Damn! That fool of a gnome locked us in!

Granted, he triumphantly found a way into the undertombs which clearly eluded every explorer before us. But the mind of this Nellatantha and her engineers seems as devious as that of Calistria herself. For, even though the stones open the way ahead, they also permanently block our exit. It would take years to dig our way out—and that assumes someone digging from the surface to meet us. We have no more choice. We must press onward. And now we venture into the undertombs on Nellatantha's terms. Judging by what Akkunhis has told me about her—as well as the things he keeps hidden from me—I'm left uneasy indeed.

20 Sarenith, 4707 AR

I watched over our camp last night. Akkunhis doesn't realize it, but I monitor his dreams using a simple ritual to read his thoughts while he sleeps—a trick every Calistrian courtesan learns by her third year in the temple. It's often very

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useful, because it lets us read a subconscious mind at its least guarded. And that's how I know Akkunhis hides things from us. I first confirmed it when Tanglehead injured his hand on the acidic walls of the first undertomb and thereafter when we discovered its passageways also conveniently scribe the sigil for 'Earth.' This very structure invokes an arcane spell so immense I can only wonder at what it seeks to power.

I must also say this minotaur dreams about some of the most interesting and frightening things I've ever examined. Long ago, he served Nellatantha, leading her armies against a host of elementals—fire, wind, stone, and water. With his help and her own considerable power, they bound the lords of such planar realms to her will. A very perverse will. This Nellatantha possessed an appetite for madness and destruction unequaled by anyone in our time. And she explored arcane mysteries even Geb and Nex would have found appalling. Perhaps more disconcerting is the knowledge that Akkunhis once loved this creature. I say once, because he goes to her for only one reason now. To exact his revenge. To repay her for turning him to stone. And for breaking his heart by becoming something so hideous inside that he could no longer love her.

These revelations have changed me, my Prince. I cannot ignore them in light of the reason you sent me here. I know something incredibly powerful resides in these halls. And long have you sought to wrest it from the ruins of the Four Consorts. While you want it for Absalom, you also don't want it to slip into the hands of our rivals. But you always lacked the key. This minotaur—Akkunhis—is that key. But he's more than that, too. And I suspect that what you want me to steal from him is more than it seems as well. I'm not sure I could do that to him again.

21 Sarenith, 4707 AR

We had an interesting battle yesterday against another minotaur infused with the elemental power of Earth. To me, this confirms my suspicions and analysis of Akkunhis' dreams. Nellatantha has

the elements of this world at her beck and call, capable of infusing her guardians with them. I felt far more useless than usual. My weapons and spells failed to pierce the minotaur's stony hide. I had to depend on the strength of my companions instead, keeping Garret and Tanglehead in the fight with Calistria's kiss. I wish I could say the same for Akkunhis, but I think he hesitated to slay his kinsman. Who could blame him, really? As a result, it was all we could manage just to drive the beast back into the walls.

22 Sarenith, 4707 AR

Armed with the knowledge I've gleaned about Nellatantha and her guardians, I spent much of my time consulting with Tanglehead on how best to ensure our safe passage through the next undertomb. As soon as I recognized the chill in the air, I knew we had reached the element of water. And so I made sure to seek Calistria's aid in combating the cold. Also, we're running out of food, but thankfully, I know a prayer that can provide manna for us to eat and water to drink so we don't waste away before we reach the other side.

In the meantime, I sense a sadness settling over Akkunhis. I watch him very closely now for his reactions to everything. The minotaur tells me more about this place than my eyes and ears ever could on their own. I've also come to appreciate the skills of my companions. Garret and Tanglehead have proven their worth a thousand times during the challenges we've faced. I don't believe any one of us could have made it this far without the others. And so I focus my energy now on ensuring we all stay together. The longer I can keep everyone going, the greater our chances of finding the treasure we seek and the greater the possibility that we'll get out of here alive.



KOBOLD Quarterly presents: THRILLING KOBOLD STORIES!

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JIRO JAWFANG, KOBOLD DETECTIVE!



THE CASE OF THE KOBOLD QUARTERLY

Jiro lit a foulweed stick. With Watch Commander Stormshield keeping a lid on the Kobold Ghetto, things were getting ugly.

Just then, Retsep Slyfingers came running down the alley. "Help me, Jiro! You've got to hide me!" The smaller kobold's scales were pink with terror. "Someone tipped off the Watch that I found those issues of Kobold Quarterly next to that dead courier. Help me!"

No wonder Stormshield was on the warpath.

Published by former Dragon magazine editor Wolfgang Baur, Kobold Quarterly was the premier small-but-fierce magazine for fans of fantasy and horror roleplaying. Every issue was filled with priceless gaming texts and works of art; dozens had gone missing during the uprising.

Jiro heard the tramp of heavy boots approaching. "I stick my snout out for nobody." He turned his back on the stunned rogue and walked away, disappearing into the night fog.

THE CASE OF THE THIRD BOOK

Jiro took a bottle from his desk drawer and poured himself two fingers of whisky. "Want some?" he said as he added two fingers-elves ones-for flavor.

"No, thank you," said his visitor. She tossed three glossy paperbacks onto his desk: *The Kobold Guide to Game Design*. Jiro knew them, all right.

"Say, sister, what're you playing at?" he snapped. "These books are the best resource around for anyone who wants to run a better campaign, or become a professional game designer. Tons of essays by the top talent in the field: tips on reading your audience, pacing, drama, running a playtest..."

She nodded. "And how to write genres from Noir to Arabian, even city adventures."

"All that and more," Jiro said. "But everyone knows there are only two volumes of that gold."

She shook her head. "*The Kobold Guide to Game Design Volume III* has more than 15 essays by an all-star lineup of industry veterans: Wolfgang Baur, Monte Cook, Ed Greenwood... even 4th Edition D&D lead designer Rob Heinsoo."

Heinsoo was involved in this caper? Jiro took a swig of whiskey; elven knucklebones clacked against his fangs. Yeah, things were about to get interesting in Zobeck.

THE CASE OF THE OPEN DESIGN

Jiro met the warlock's eyes, ignoring the ash wand pointed at his snout. "I'm telling you the truth," he said evenly. "These adventures were created under the patronage model. Anyone can become a Patron at Open Design for just a few coppers. Patrons provide suggestions and feedback, design sections of the adventure, even playtest it before publication."

"You lie!" said the warlock. "That business model hasn't existed since the Renaissance!"

Jiro could tell the guy was losing it. How could he explain to this maniac that *Sunken Empires*, *Imperial Gazetteer*, *Tales of the Old Margreve* and *Courts of the Shadow Fey*, some of the best RPG products on the market, had all been crowdsourced by Open Design?

"Let me give you the address of a website," he said.

WWW.KOBOLDQUARTERLY.COM



Mouthy Upstart



MOUThy UPSTArT

by Israel "Dogbert" Reyes

illustration by Juan Diego Dianderas

The circular lecture hall shone with the rays of midday that came through the tall, clear gothic windows and onto the polished marble of the hall's floor, where an elderly man in the black and gold robes of the Wise Council paced back and forth behind his podium, addressing his audience with the tone of someone who has done this for decades.

"Skeletons and zombies are evil, even though they are mindless. This is because undeath itself is a naturally evil force, just as fire is naturally hot."

His audience listened in silence and, at least most of them, with great interest. Enchantments in the room reduced both the glare from the sun, as well as any excess heat, to comfortable levels. Proximity with the podium also enhanced the voice of the speaker to be clearly heard anywhere in the room, allowing a listener to dedicate his full attention to the

lecture at hand. This was not the case with a young, short-haired woman listening from one of the back rows.

"...Some argue that magic is just a tool, and how a tool is used determines whether the act is good or evil, but a counter-argument holds that some tools are specifically designed to be used for evil, like implements of torture..."

Astrid groaned as the lecture given by First Speaker Tor continued, the redhead's chin resting on her left hand as the index of her right hand tapped the dark wood of her desk. Her short hair was styled in a such a way as to highlight her neck and bared shoulders.

"...Worse, some tools are inherently evil, and want to be used for evil. If fire always burned the innocent and spared the guilty, fire would be evil..."

The young wizard had spent most of the night working on the final details of what would soon be her familiar's mechanical body. While sleep deprivation had never been something that interfered with Astrid's productivity or attention capacity, it could make her cranky, and this old scholar's religiously biased lecture wasn't making things any easier for her.

"...There are exceptional, intelligent undead that are not evil, just as there are extremely rare demons and devils who become good, but evil is the norm because their essence is evil. Now, are there any questions?"

"Just one!" The redhead's hand was already above her head, slowly standing up. "First Speaker Tor, have you been inhaling pesh?"

The silence in the circular lecture hall felt as if the room's temperature had dropped six degrees then and there. While Maven Astrid Volta was known for her way with words, and while she knew by heart manners and protocols to make herself worthy of Lord Gyr himself, she also had a reputation for being extremely outspoken when something really bothered her. Prejudice bothered her, ignorance bothered her, and a prejudiced ignorant was double the blight in her eyes. This only became worse coming from someone cultured, someone that ought to know better. As First Speaker of the Wise Council of the Arcanamirium, however, Dhauken Tor wasn't used to having his points of view questioned.

"Maven Volta!" While the First Speaker was trying hard to regain his composure and patience, his face still portrayed shock as if the young maven had just slapped him. "Your question is highly inappropriate and, even if you're the daughter of one of the Spell Lords, I'm sure you're aware that here you're still just a docent."

"No, really, my question was entirely serious because I need to know." Astrid primped her beige and gold maven's robes as she spoke. "I need to know whether to recriminate you on a most delusional point of view or if you're just under

Israel "Dogbert" Reyes

the influence of an intoxicating substance." Standing at one of the back rows of the hall, most of the audience had to look up as they turned their heads in the maven's direction.

"So, it's that easy, right? Spellcasters don't need to worry their pretty little heads in complicated things like thinking, because all moral choices have already been made for them. I mean... great, under your same argument, all surgeons should be sent to the gallows. Half of their tools are likewise used by torturers, right?"

"Maven Volta..." First Speaker Tor interrupted, the skin of his bald head shifting slightly as he frowned. He knew the reputation of this gifted maiden, and he also knew that the only reason why she still wasn't allowed to present the test for Arcanscutus was that having two Arcanscuti within the same noble house could offset the power balance of Absalom's nobility, especially when one of those two was a Spell Lord of the city. Contrary to most of her colleagues (including one of the Arch-lords of Nex), however, he didn't like her one bit. Where others saw all the ingenuity and willingness to press boundaries that the Arcanamirium stands for, he saw only a mouthy upstart; a non-conformist he'd have expelled from this fine college of magic long ago if she hadn't been Faustus' daughter.

"Still not finished, thank you very much." the redhead interrupted back. "Your speech is eloquent, First Speaker, and would be perfect during a sermon at the church of Sarenrae or Iomedae but, this is the Arcanamirium! We are the leading house of arcane learning in the Inner Sea, if not the whole of Golarion. We can't afford to delude ourselves into associating moral principles with primal forces that don't even have a use for the definitions of good or evil as we know them."

"Let an undead creature loose..." the old Speaker added, "...and the first, no, the only thing it will do, is attempt to destroy the living."

"So now you tell me that bases are evil because they spare other chemicals while neutralizing only the poor acids?"

"Bases are not sentient!"

"Get over yourself! Harpies are animated by positive energy, same as humans, and harpies and minotaurs are just as destructive to us as the undead in the Precipice Quarter! Positive energy doesn't make good, as negative energy doesn't make evil! Visiting the positive energy plane is as lethal for everyone as visiting the negative energy one, even for the gods! It's basic physics! Don't you even remember how negative energy wards work? It's only natural that a creature animated by negative energy will seek and try to destroy beings made from positive, it's basic instinct. We are their polar opposites, but that doesn't make them "evil," just dangerous. They're compelled to destroy us on sight. It's easy as that, they can't help it."

"If fire always burned the innocent and spared the guilty..."

"Well, let's take an innocent man and a guilty man to the Precipice and see how both are eaten by ghouls just as quickly! Evil comes from motivations and personal choice, not mere actions. Blaming a ghoul for trying to eat you is the same as blaming a hurricane for sinking a ship. Or would you accuse wolves of being evil if they chase you down while hunting? If you insist that much on antagonizing the undead, then at least treat them as a plague, not an adversary. If you contract a disease, you eradicate it, you don't hold a grudge against it or accuse it of being a work of evil."

"Maven Volta..."

The frown on the brow of the elderly man became more profound, the tone in his voice denoting that he was starting to lose his patience.

"Yes, I know, this talk is taking too long already, and I'm starting to repeat myself--something I hate. Don't worry First Speaker, I'm

concluding just now. Your argument has no legs to stand on other than dogma, and dogma has no place in arcane science. Now, if you excuse me..." Astrid waved her hand above her desk, her writing implements returning to their extra-dimensional storage before she made her way to the hall's door. "... I read your god-awful dissertation On The Nature of Evil, and knew you'd be repeating it here. I just needed to give you a piece of my mind in person. By the way, it's the higher and lower planes which are aligned to sentient values and ideals, not the energy planes. Have a nice day."

The door closed behind the redhead, leaving the audience staring both at the door as well as at each other. First Speaker Dhauken Tor stared for a moment at the closed door in disgust, part of him cursing at the insolent upstart while the rational side of his mind gradually calmed him down. The old scholar took a deep breath, assured in the knowledge that, once all is said and done, he is the First Speaker of the Wise Council, while the mouthy upstart is but a docent. His word outweighs hers, his position made his words truth.

"So, is that all for questions?"




Dear Ask a Shoanti

Do you love Rich Burlew's Order of the Stick as much as I do? I prepared expl-

Dear Vaarsuvius Fan

Oh, you'll have to get up much earlier than that.

Yours very truly,
Ask a Shoanti



Trade Caravans of Kortos: The Diobel-Absalom Route

TRADE CARAVANS OF KORTOS: THE DIOBEL-ABSALOM ROUTE

by Matthew "Fris" Wagner

illustrated by Ashton "N'wah" Sperry

On the western coast of the Isle of Kortos lies the small yet busy port town of Diobel. Often overlooked by most visitors to Absalom, Diobel plays a key role in the massive trade empire of the great city-state. Most of Absalom's imported foods and basic goods first arrive through Diobel to avoid tariffs and port fees that would be incurred by entering the Patchwork City directly. Goods of a discreet nature that would raise more than an eyebrow of a watchful harbor inspector are unloaded and hidden among other wares before being transported to a staging area on the outskirts of town. These imported cargoes are then packed with local produce and goods from the island's interior, where they finally travel towards Absalom via overland trade caravans.

While goods traveling the Diobel-Absalom trade route can be trafficked by any trader with a bit of entrepreneurial spirit and disregard for danger, many of the shipments are handled by caravaners who are directly in the employ of the Kortos Consortium. The Consortium is a guild of traders that are chiefly responsible for most goods entering or leaving Diobel. Acting as middlemen, they oversee the transfer and protection of trade shipments until they reach the markets in Absalom.

The Caravans

Although the most common routes are well traversed, few caravans set forth without an accompaniment of guards and experienced coachmen. Traveling these still wild lands has proven time and time again to be a dangerous business with little room for error. Only strong dependable beasts and hardened individuals with a coarse taste for adventure can endure on this hazardous and rough expanse.

The coachmen of Kortos have become masters of the terrain, weather, and various perils of the land through years of experience and passed down knowledge. Raiders, bandits, and highwaymen are no stranger to them. Tending the draft animals and driving the wagons is only a portion of their trade. Veteran coachmen find that when things get rough, they must often assist the guards in defending the caravan. It is rare for one to venture upon the trails without a crossbow and other armaments.

Caravan guards are generally comprised of two equally important groups. Many are tasked with riding alongside coachmen to keep a strong lookout and defend the caravan should trouble arise. They also assist in seeing after the wagon and thus some take on role of a coachman

interchangeably. Other guardsmen are mounted soldiers who scout ahead and monitor the whole length of the caravan train. Some are professional mercenaries employed directly by the Consortium, but others are freelancers hired by the caravaner, such as off-duty Postern guards. Caravans that ship contraband goods tend to be solely composed of Consortium associates.

While a variety of animal labor is employed in the caravans, horses and related livestock such as mules and donkeys are scarce on Kortos for predatory reasons. The most common beasts of burden used are the camel and the axebeak. The axebeak is a particular favorite, as they assist greatly in defending against raider attacks. Whether as pack animals, mounts, or yokes of creatures drawing wagons, both have proven to be capable for most tasks on the island's terrain.

Trade Routes

The most direct courses of the Diobel-Absalom route pass through the southern portion of the island. The journey typically takes four to eight days, depending upon caravan size, conditions, and travel speed. There are many divergent trails which are utilized throughout the year depending on season, weather, and other hazards. However, after the initial outlay from Diobel, two general approaches are followed.

The most frequently trekked route stays close to the far southern lowlands, and in some cases even overlooks sea cliffs towards the Inner Sea. This southerly course is the quickest, but is at times not any less precarious than the trails to the north. Tribes of ravaging centaur raiders lay claim to much of the land. Clear stretches of expanse with little cover have made this range subject to a keen watch by harpy tribes that use it as a hunting ground.

The northerly route passes through the lower expanse of the Kortos Mounts, and extends through various passes. While a dangerous trek, the mining industry in the Mounts has kept the trails in regular use. The terrain is quite rough and a few legs of the trip prove very difficult for camels to endure, so axebeaks often find more use. In the spring, snowmelt from the mountain peaks create a large system of rushing rivers and streams which traverse down the steep landscape in cascading falls and impede travel. Like the southerly passage, centaur raiders lay claim to much of land. In some areas, raging minotaur tribes are a great menace.

Raiders & Predatory Hazards

The Diobel-Absalom trade routes are unfortunately host to a number of predatory threats that require all caravans maintain a constant state of vigilance. The primary and most common of these are the centaurs, minotaurs, and harpies that dwell in the Kortos Mounts.

The tribes of centaurs which inhabit the base of the Mounts are typically territorial, and many have taken to raiding caravans and settlements along the routes. Other times, they are oft occupied in warring with their minotaur neighbors to the north. Some tribes have taken a begrudging acceptance of the presence of the caravans and trade posts, but still become hostile when provoked.

While minotaurs usually stay within their carefully constructed labyrinth lairs and avoid the open air, constant warring with one another and centaur clans often drive them into the world outside. Settlements close to clan lairs frequently have folk and livestock go missing or found slaughtered. In particular, minotaurs are said to abhor the use of beasts as labor. Many tales of caravans and mining posts attacked by frenzied bands of minotaurs abound among travelers. The Consortium has made attempts at brokering peace agreements with certain tribes through Nuar Spiritskin of the Taurean Embassy, but such talks have yet to bear any fruit.

The vicious harpies of the Kortos Mounts roost high upon the peaks, far beyond any traversable terrain. In a seeming insatiable thirst for humanoid flesh, the harpies swoop down on poor travelers. Survivors tell accounts of the harpies wearing the jewelry and trinkets of past victims. Others speak of entire caravans being lured to their doom through the harpies' alluring songs. As often as they devour their victims, some tribes hurl them into deep chasms as a living sacrifices to malevolent spirits of ice that are believed to inhabit the upper range.

As much as they are a threat to the caravans, these "locals" tend to be at war with one another and fight amongst themselves. It is believed the Consortium uses extensive acts of sabotage to aggravate this situation, as the infighting has proven helpful in expanding control over these wild lands. Regrettably, these tactics have at times backfired and have caused a great deal of trouble to other settlements of the routes.

Base camps, Farms & Homesteads

Nearby the routes, a number of stops have emerged which have served to enable increased trade, as well as offer a brief bit of respite and protection from the various dangers of the road.

Along the southerly route are several crop farms, logging camps, and trapper homesteads. Some of the larger homesteads have become trading outposts in which crops,

lumber, pelts, and skins are traded for supplies and currency. Here, a tired and thirsty caravan driver may find a warm fire and a stiff drink before the return to the road.

Many mining camps have been established along the northerly route in the Mounts. The miners who brave the Kortos Mounts can become very wealthy for their labor, as the terrain is known to be filled with valuable rare metals and gems. Having established agreements with the Kortos Consortium to provide mutual protection and trade, a few of the larger camps have become the equivalent of small forts. Combined with the growing pearl-farming industry in Diobel, mining operations have resulted in a lucrative source of income for the Consortium. Rumors of increasingly harsh measures to ensure commerce is not interrupted are common among the trade route populace.

The End of the Road

Before finally reaching Absalom, both routes cut through the Cairnlands. As it is rare that a caravaneer will desire to camp for the night in such a foreboding place, this area is traversed with great haste.

At the end of the journey, most caravans enter a staging area outside the city gates in Westerhold. There, the goods are unpacked and transferred to local merchants and various intermediaries. The caravan will then resupply and possibly release and take on new drivers and guards. Trade goods for the return trip are packed onto beasts and wagons once more, and final preparations for the trip back to Diobel are made. Trade and profit rests for no man, nor beast. The open road awaits!



Dead Drop

DEAD DROP

by Thomas "Aurelius" Morrison

Venture-Captain Janiff wants to see your team in ten minutes," said the poker-faced orderly.

"They're not my team!" the half-dressed Podgurli protested for the umpteenth time. "They're just a bunch of newbies who happened to show up the same time I did!"

"Ten minutes," she repeated, then turned about casually and went back to her office. Dealing with hung-over Pathfinders seemed to be something she took in stride.

Podgurli felt like grinding his teeth to the gums. Stuck with a bunch of newbies! He would never get a decent assignment, never get the chance to prove he was worthy of the exciting and lucrative missions everyone else he knew always got!

Oh, why did I tell the venture-captain I was senior to 'Rok? Podgurli threw on his boots, still swampy from his last trudge through the Puddles. The reluctant team leader stalked down the hall, slamming the lacquered cherrywood door open without even a knock. "Get up, you louts! The Venture-Captain wants to see us in five minutes!"

Podgurli's eyes began to work only after his mouth had finished. The four new members of the Pathfinder Society were far from being bleary-eyed from too much ale and too little sleep. Instead, they were clean-shaven and respectably-dressed, clustered around a small table, on which stood several small figurines on a map, a few sheets of paper, and dice of different kinds. Podgurli recognized it as the tactical simulation game that Elira, the too-smart elf, was always trying to interest him in.

'Rok spoke: "We'll be there, Pod."

Podgurli's eyes narrowed as his hand unconsciously went to his stubbly, unwashed jaw. Go figure, I'm the only one who needs a bath and a shave! The team leader retreated back to the basin in his room. The water for his ablutions was too hot. He cursed in exasperation.

In the briefing room, Podgurli was acutely aware that everyone could smell the dockyard in his boots and the brewery on his breath. Although the Venture-Captain glanced and raised an eyebrow, he didn't comment.

"We have many means of communicating with our informants within the city," Janiff began. "One of them is

via dead drops: placing a note or a signal in a designated location so that another can secretly read it without being compromised by a face-to-face meeting. Your mission is to service some of the dead drops we have. Of course, to throw off any hostile surveillance, you will perform innocent-looking tasks as well as leaving false signs."

"You mean we might be sending messages that aren't even real?"

"Yes." The Venture-Captain stared Podgurli down. Once the team leader was properly cowed, the Venture-Captain continued. "...And you're better off not knowing which are real and which are not. Treat them all with deadly earnest."

Janiff handed Podgurli a stack of books, two short lists, a sealed letter, and a bright yellow Taldane fowler's cap. "Go to the Wise Quarter and return these books to the Arcanamirium Library. While there, check out the listed references. Then proceed to the East Theater in the Ivy District and watch the noon play *Forsaken Love*. Sit on the far left of the rearmost row and take the note under the second seat. Then proceed to the Coins District, pick up the listed spell components, and deliver the letter to Captain Hapshepsut of the Osirioni freighter *Heaven's Glory*, Pier 13. Continue to the Mud Skipper Tavern in the Puddles District, give the bartender this coin and no other, and order a jug of Belkzen Blood Bitter. Do not open it! Time your return so that you pass by Aroden's Bridge in the Ascendant Court just before sunset, stand by the right pillar at the head of the ruined bridge, and put on the yellow cap. See what color triangle is on the left pillar. Do not attract attention to yourself and make sure you are not followed. You will have the use of the lodge's riding horses. Report back to me when you are done. Any questions?"

"Do I have to take the newb -"

"Yes. Dismissed!"

The false dawn had blossomed into a sunny but crisp spring morning, so Podgurli's wet feet were chilled and his cottony eyes were squinting by the time the group reached the Arcanamirium. Worse, his throbbing head was splitting from the Elira's and Won's religious debate about fate and prophecy and Aroden.

"Where do you stupid newbies get such stupid ideas for your stupid arguments?" Podgurli snapped.

"From the book list you gave us," Won replied evenly. "Divine prophecy and Mortal Fates and Alternate Universe Divergence and Convergence by the Arch-Theurge Fro -"

"Shut up," Podgurli snarled, his head pounding like a kettle drum. "Just shut up. And give me back the list."

Despite its many high windows, the Arcanamirium was not as painfully bright as outdoors. Podgurli sent the newbies en masse to return the old books just to get them

Thomas "Aurelius" Morrison

away. The assistant librarian, however, refused to allow the team leader to check out any of the listed materials. "People have been checking out these books and not returning them, so our remaining copies are in the Reference Only section."

Having succeeded in their task, the newbies returned in time to see their leader fail at his. Podgurli turned to them blackly. "Let's just go."

"I'll take a look at the reference materials first," said Elira, "to verify that the library still has the desired books."

That was a good idea. Podgurli hated the elf even more for thinking of it.

The party wasted minutes wandering the aisles, not-so-discreetly calling out the book titles back and forth, only to find that none of them were on the shelves. "Just my stinking luck," muttered Podgurli.

"Hey," whispered Vel, the sneaky newbie. "Look."

Elira noticed it before Podgurli could get his eyes to focus in the right direction. The sweaty, plump human woman in the middle of the reference section was scribing a hefty book much faster now than when the Pathfinders first entered. Fluttering pages accentuated the wizard's soft Draconic chant as her magic copied words from the reference to an ever-rolling scroll. Her nervous eyes darted back and forth from the party to the book to the scroll; her owl familiar, however, fixed the group with an unblinking stare.

"Alternate Universe Divergence and Convergence," Elira breathed, translating the book's Draconic cover for her teammates.

Podgurli duly noted the silver winged eye in a circle prominently worn around the human wizard's neck on top of her Band of Blades tabard. A Harbinger? he wondered.

Elira was already gliding over to the human wizard's table with 'Rok protectively in tow. Podgurli moved too late to stop her. Worse, he felt Vel and Won piling up behind him, Won's scale armor clunking worse than 'Rok's due to the cleric's lack of grace. Oh, great, now we're mobbing someone in a public library! Anger and frustration played across his face. Newbies!

As the pudgy woman stood and backed up a pace in alarm, a brawny human in breastplate armor strode protectively toward her, his Band of Blades tabard neatly tucked into his sword-belt. Elira was already opening her mouth to make things worse. Of course, she spoke in Draconic, so the rest of the team couldn't understand. The human wizard maintained her book-copy spell while her owl spread its wings menacingly and half-screached. Whatever the elf asked her, the answer was clearly Back off.

By the main desk, one of the librarians, a slim, middle-aged woman, noted the unfriendly gathering and began weaving a spell.

Podgurli grabbed Elira by the arm. "You've messed it up enough, newbie," he hissed. "Let's go." Rok looked like he was about to protest, but Vel and Won had the sense to urge him to leave with them.

Outside in the too-bright sun, Won and Elira were babbling as if they were one doubly stupid ettin newbie.

"It makes sense!" the elf enthused.

"The gods determined Fate, which they revealed to mortals through prophecy –"

"– but Aroden's death changed Fate, which invalidated all previous prophecy and possibly created a divergent, alternate universe –"

"– which may or may not eventually converge with the one wherein mortal destiny was predetermined!"

"SHUT UP!"

Podgurli had the newbies' attention.

"You two are so smart, you're stupid. None of that crap matters! All that matters is that we didn't get the Venture-Captain his books. Now let's just service the dead drops and get back to the lodge." The team leader crumpled the book list and stuffed it into his coin pouch. "Now where are we going next? The Ivy District, right?"

"East Theater," 'Rok agreed. "To see Forsaken Love."

Vel shifted uncomfortably. "Guys, we shouldn't be talking so openly about what we're doing and where we're going. People have ears, you know?"

That was another good idea. Now Vel was Podgurli's least favorite newbie.

As the party mounted their horses and rode southeast along the wide but crowded street, an owl uncharacteristically glided above and behind, silently following.



Bestiary: Sea and Storm

BESTIARY:

SEA AND STORM

by John "Zherog" E. Ling, Jr.
illustrated by Liz "Lilish" Courts

Violent storms at sea are as common as flowers in the spring. Such is just a fact of life, like the sun rising in the east. While extremely dangerous to sailing ships, most times these storms have little impact on the environment. Sometimes, though, lightning from the storm strikes a massive bed of floating seaweed. Under just the right conditions, this mixing of lightning and seaweed results in the creation of a new aquatic creature.

Sailors regale any who will listen of tales of massive patches of seaweed animated by the stroke of a lightning bolt, born with an insatiable hunger for anything it nears. Similarly, tales of humanesque creatures whipped together by the wind and waves after a bolt of lightning pass through taverns and watering holes in every port town, including Absalom.

Those who make a habit of studying such occurrences find the utterly random nature of the creatures' creation to be baffling. The prevailing theory suggests the creation of either creature requires a confluence of three events: especially warm salt water, powerful thunderstorms, and a magical ley line. These theories, however, have proven difficult to test under controlled conditions.

Kelp Slime

A sickly green blob floats in the water, moving against the sea's currents.

Kelp Slime	CR 3
XP 800	
N Large ooze (aquatic)	
Init -4; Senses blindsight 60 ft.; Perception -5	
DEFENSE	
AC 5, touch 5, flat-footed 5 (-4 Dex, -1 size)	
hp 52 (5d8+30)	
Fort +7, Ref -3, Will -4	
Immune ooze traits	
OFFENSE	
Spd swim 40 ft.	
Melee slam +4 (1d6+3 plus 1d6 acid)	
Space 10 ft., Reach 5 ft.	
Special Attacks acidic slime	
STATISTICS	
Abilities Str 15, Dex 3, Con 23, Int —, Wis 1, Cha 1	
Base Atk +3; CMB +6; CMD 12 (can't be tripped)	
Skills Swim +10	

SQ amorphous form

ECOLOGY

Environment warm aquatic

Organization solitary, patch (2-5)

Treasure none

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Acidic Slime (Ex) Any creature struck by a kelp slime's slam attack must succeed at a DC 12 Reflex save or suffer an additional 1d6 points of acid damage at the start of the kelp slime's next turn. The save DC is Dexterity-based and includes a +4 racial bonus.

Amorphous Form (Ex) A kelp slime has no set physical shape. As such, it can squeeze through any opening wide enough for a Diminutive creature without penalty.

Kelp slimes are created when a bed of decaying seaweed is struck by a particularly powerful jolt of lightning. The electric jolt gives the decaying mass a semblance of life, empowering it to swim the ocean's of the world in search of food. Kelp slimes eat whatever they're able to dissolve with their particularly potent acid.

A kelp slime attacks by generating a pseudopod with which it slams its foe, attempting to dose the victim with acid along with bashing it senseless. Kelp slime reeks of decay. A patch of kelp slime is a sailor's bane, as such a gathering is capable of dissolving ships and feasting upon its contents.

Kelp Fiend

A roughly humanoid-shaped creature, clearly made of kelp and other sea plants, frolics in the waves. Four tendrils extend from its body where arms would normally be found, two on either side of the body.

Kelp Fiend	CR 11
XP 12,800	
CN Small plant (aquatic)	
Init +4; Senses low-light vision; Perception +12	
DEFENSE	
AC 23, touch 11, flat-footed 23 (+12 natural, +1 size)	
hp 136 (16d8+64)	
Fort +14, Ref +7, Will +6	
DR 5/slashing; Immune electricity, plant traits; Resist acid 10	
OFFENSE	
Speed 20 ft., swim 40 ft.	
Melee 4 tendrils +20 (1d8+6/19-20)	
Ranged kelp barb +13 (1d8+6)	
Special Attacks entangle, kelp barb	
STATISTICS	
Str 23, Dex 11, Con 19, Int 4, Wis 13, Cha 6	
Base Atk +12; CMB +17; CMD 27	
Feats Bleeding Critical, Improved Critical (tendrils), Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Lunge, Power Attack, Stealthy, Weapon Focus (tendrils)	
Skills Escape Artist +2, Perception +12, Stealth +17, Swim +14	
Languages Aquan	
SQ amphibious	
ECOLOGY	
Environment warm aquatic	
Organization solitary, pair, fletching (4-9)	
Treasure standard	

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Entangle (Ex) A number of times per day equal to its Constitution modifier, but no more than once per round, a kelp fiend is capable of expelling an entangling mass of seaweed as a standard action at a single creature within 30 feet. This attack does not provoke an attack of opportunity. On a successful ranged touch attack, the target becomes entangled. Extricating oneself from the mass requires a successful DC 22 Escape Artist or Strength check.

Kelp Barb (Ex) A kelp fiend is capable of generating a spiny mass of dead seaweed once per round that it can throw as a standard action.

Poison (Ex) Tendril-Injury; save Fort DC 14; frequency 1/round for 6 rounds; effect 1d4 Con; cure 2 consecutive saves.

Kelp fiends are relatively new creatures, having come into existence little more than 200 years ago. A pirate fleet disrespected the high seas, befouling the waters of the ocean by dumping massive amounts of alchemical substances into the sea in an effort to avoid capture. This foul alchemical sludge killed thousands of sea creatures and plants, and drew the ire of Gozreh. In an act of vengeance, the god summoned a great storm, battering the pirate fleet for days with heavy rains, hail, and lightning. As each ship of the fleet sunk under the raw power of the storm, the pirates aboard the ships found themselves engulfed by the very alchemical sludge they dumped. The sludge killed the pirates as it painfully dissolved their flesh and organs. When the storm subsided four days later, not a trace of the pirate fleet was left, nor was the alchemical sludge the pirates created a further danger to the sea. In their place, a new creature was born—the kelp fiends.

The typical kelp fiend stands about three feet tall and weighs a scant 25 pounds. They resemble most humanoids in shape, except in place of arms they have four wicked tendrils that lash about.

Slightly more intelligent than animals, kelp fiends are cunning and dangerous to those who cross them. They prefer to attack from ambush, making use of their skill at stealth to surprise foes. If unable to close range, they fire their kelp barbs while moving into position. Once within thirty feet, it expels its entangling mass, hoping to prevent its foe from withdrawing from combat. It then focuses all its tendril attacks on one victim at a time, lashing and poisoning that foe into submission before moving to another target.

On rare occasions, a tribe of sea elves befriends a fletching of kelp fiends, and the two work together patrolling and protecting the sea floor. In such relationships, the elves treat the plant creatures as their equal, despite the kelp fiend's primitive intellect.

Metamagic Component - Kelp Slime

When properly harvested, a vial of dead kelp slime serves as a metamagic component when casting *plant growth*, allowing the caster to cast the spell as though affected by the Extend Spell feat without increasing the spell level or casting time of the spell. Properly harvesting the slime requires a DC 20 Knowledge (nature) or Craft (alchemy) check. The slime remains potent for 5 days, after which it becomes inert. One vial is worth 500 gp.



Taste of Golarion



TASTE OF GOLARION

by Michael Kelley, Helder Marques,
Jonathan "Wih" McAnulty
& Matthew "Fris" Wagner
art by Liz "Lilith" Courts & Crystal Frasier

Absalom Butter Pear Sauce

Absalom is a crossroads, a place where cultures and flavors blend. This recipe takes a sauce that is common to Taldor and blends it with the butter pear, a fruit common to the southern part of Cheliax and northern Garund. It is commonly made without meat for those fasting or observing religious rites.

Marinade

- ¼ cup white wine
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- 2 to 4 garlic cloves, pressed

Sauce

- 4 tbsp butter
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, pressed
- pinch of red pepper flakes (optional)
- ½ to 1 lb. venison, diced
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 ripe avocado, diced
- 1 to 2 cups freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

Marinate the meat (if using) in the garlic, salt and wine for at least an hour.

Melt the butter and the oil together on medium heat in a saucepan. Add the garlic and red pepper flakes to the butter-

oil mixture and sauté for about fifteen seconds before adding the marinated meat.

Brown the meat on all sides, then add the cream. Allow the cream to foam, stirring occasionally. (The foaming allows the cream to blend with the oils.)

When the mixture has come together, add the diced avocado and cook for two minutes, stirring constantly, then reduce the heat to low.

Stir in half of the cheese, making sure that the cheese has completely blended in before adding more cheese. Add the remaining cheese in small handfuls until it reaches the desired consistency.

Add salt and pepper to taste and serve over a pound of cooked pasta. Serves 4.

Tips

Overly ripe and bruised avocados are bitter and stringy, while unripe avocados are too hard and lack flavor. Choose an avocado whose peel is darkened but only slightly soft to the touch.

Cheese sauces are notoriously finicky – too hot and the cheese will become stringy. The sauce will still be tasty, but visually unappealing. Make the sauce without the meat until you become comfortable with it.

You can replace the venison with lean beef, and the Parmesan with Romano.

Copperhead Noodle Soup

As with laborers everywhere, the hearty folk who dwell outside Absalom's city walls in Copperwood make the best of the cheapest ingredients they can afford. The numerous docks of Absalom bring in goods from every country imaginable (and a few more not) and the workers make a filling meal with mish mash Inner Sea origins.

Ingredients

- ½ lb. thin spaghetti noodles, broken into small pieces
- 2 tbsp butter or vegetable oil
- Clove of garlic, minced
- ¼ cup onion, minced
- ½ tsp sesame seeds
- 3 cups chicken stock
- 1 cup water
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- ½ tsp chili powder
- Pinch of fresh parsley, minced
- Crushed red pepper to taste
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

In a large saucepot over medium-high heat, sauté the noodle pieces in the butter or oil, stirring occasionally until the pieces are slightly browned.

Add the garlic, onions and sesame seeds, stirring



frequently to prevent sticking, until the seeds become toasted, about 2 to 3 minutes. Watch carefully to avoid burning.

Add the remaining ingredients and bring to a boil for 10 to 15 minutes, adding salt and pepper to taste. Serves 2.

Tips

Orzo, a small rice-shaped pasta, is an easy way to “fancy up” this dish.

Grand Lodge Breakfast Skillet

Ingredients

- 12 large eggs
- ¼ cup milk
- 3 russet potatoes, cooked and cut into ¼ inch slices
- ¼ lb. bacon, cooked and chopped
- ¼ lb. pork sausage, cooked
- ¼ cup onions, diced
- ½ cup cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 ½ tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 ½ tsp. fresh parsley, minced

Directions

In a large skillet, combine the bacon, onions, parsley,

potatoes and sausage, cooking over medium-low heat until the potatoes and onions begin to brown, stirring occasionally.

In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, milk and Worcestershire sauce.

Pour the egg mixture into the skillet and cover.

Cook for 5 to 10 minutes until the eggs are fully cooked.

Top with shredded cheese, then cover again. Continue cooking for 1 to 2 minutes over low heat until cheese is melted.

Serve plain or over toast. Serves 6 to 8.

Zenj Honey Bread

This is my first day back here in Absalom. Walking the streets of the Foreign Quarter I found an old Zenj woman selling delicate pastries. Since I am always attracted to experimenting new tastes, especially unusual and exotic ones, I bought a loaf of what the woman called “honey bread.” Four slices later I was trying to persuade the woman to give me the recipe. It took my silver tongue (and some silver pieces) to get it from her, but in the end she yielded. So, I returned to the Society Lodge with a full belly and a smile on my face. – Ender’s travelogue, 31 Abadius, 4708 AR



Taste of Golarion

Ingredients

- 1 envelope (2 ¼ tsp) active dry yeast
- ¼ cup warm water
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup honey
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp ground cloves
- ¼ tsp ground coriander
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 cup warm milk
- 5 tbsps unsalted butter, melted
- Up to 5 cups all-purpose flour, sifted

Directions

Add yeast to the warm water and let stand for ten minutes.

Combine the cinnamon, cloves, coriander, eggs, honey and salt in a deep bowl and mix together thoroughly.

Add the yeast mixture, milk and the melted butter to the honey mixture, beating until the ingredients are well blended.

Stir in the flour, a little at a time, until the dough can be gathered into a soft ball. When the dough becomes too stiff to stir easily, blend in the additionally flour gently.

Liberaly sprinkle flour over a countertop and knead the dough for approximately five minutes or until the dough is smooth and spongy.

Shape the dough into a ball and place in a large, lightly buttered

bowl. Cover with a kitchen towel and set in a warm, draft-free spot for approximately one hour or until the dough doubles in size.

Using your fingertips, lightly press into the dough, shaping it into an oblong and place into a greased loaf pan (at least three inches deep). Let the dough double in size again.

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F.

Bake for 60 minutes or until lightly browned on top. Let cool for at least 20 minutes before slicing.

Serve with whipped honey butter. Serves 4.

Tips

Too-hot water or milk can kill your yeast! Body temperature should be just right – do what moms do and test on the inside of your wrist or with a digital thermometer.

Let the eggs and honey warm to room temperature before using.

The amount of flour you use greatly depends on how old the flour is and how humid the day is.

Finding a good place to let your dough rise is tricky sometimes – search around your kitchen!

It is essential to let your bread rest before cutting into it! A too-warm loaf of bread is difficult to slice neatly – your patience will be rewarded!

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CMD	25
Init	5
Hp	71/71+0
Speed	20
Fort,Ref,Will	9,3,3
Perception	1

Breaking of Forstor Nagar

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Tales from the Front: Running Rivalry



TALES FROM THE FRONT



RUNNING RIVALRY

by Jeff "Shadowborn" Lee

illustrated by Kevin "Callous Jack" Coleman

"Stop, thieves!" The cry echoed down the alley over the sounds of two sets of feet pounding the street. Two men, one tall and lanky, the other shorter and stocky, fled through the dark night. The jangle of mail and rattling of scabbards indicated determined pursuit. Splashing through a puddle, the tall one called back over his shoulder.

"I thought you said the Guard had been decimated by the plague? And the rest were too demoralized to be effective?" He turned a corner, crossing the street into a nearby market square, its stalls closed for the night.

"That's what my cousin told me! I guess there are still a few on the job," called the shorter man, pumping his legs to keep up.

Orrin D'Vault groaned. He rounded another corner, pulling

up short near a small tree. Then he reached out an arm and yanked the shorter man aside as he ran by.

"Stand still, and by Desna's wings, be silent!" D'Vault worked his fingers in intricate patterns, rasping out an arcane chant. He shut his eyes and passed a small tuft of wool—plucked from a pouch as he ran—lightly over his eyelids. The two were suddenly surrounded by a vendor's stall, identical to the others. Startled, the shorter man began to speak, but D'Vault silenced him with a curt gesture. Then he bent over, hands on his knees, and tried to control his breathing as he concentrated on maintaining the illusion. Catching on, the other leaned against the tree, burying his face in the crook of an arm to muffle his breathing.

The clattering sound of their pursuers ceased nearby. D'Vault opened his eyes, peering through what to him was merely the gauzy outline of a structure. The four guardsmen were some ten yards away.

The leader of the squad ordered them to split up and begin searching the market. The guards split into pairs, moving in opposite directions to canvas the rows of stalls. D'Vault silently praised Desna as both pairs moved further from their hiding place. He glanced over at the other man, wondering for the hundredth time what possessed him to take a mission with

Alvan Vancaskerkin, of all people.

His father's elven blood allowed him to see the other man clearly, even in the moonless night. Vancaskerkin was half a foot shorter than he, with a head of thick, dark hair; the polar opposite of his own, he thought, a bit ruefully. He was garbed in worn leathers and clutching a canvas sack, which held their purpose for being here. Now if they could only get out of the city with it. Gods, thought D'Vault, I hate Korvosa. The death of its king had not improved matters. A plague ran rampant in its streets and the queen was rumored to have gone mad. Still, the present chaos had allowed them to infiltrate the great pyramid beneath the castle and retrieve their prizes: a beautifully crafted death mask of Thassilonian origin, and a trio of scroll tubes—whatever magic or lore they might contain—to be taken back to the Grand Lodge in Absalom for further study.

A call from a short distance away broke him from his reverie. The guards' squad leader was calling off the hunt. He

Jeff “Shadowborn” Lee

looked up at Vancaskerkin’s face and saw his victorious grin. Whenever he smiled like that D’Vaul felt the urge to punch him. When the tromp of the guards’ boots had faded, he reached out and grabbed the sack from Alvan’s hands.

“I don’t know what you’re smiling about. It’s your fault we were being pursued in the first place.” He ceased concentrating, and the false stall faded from sight. He had the satisfaction of seeing the grin fade from Vancaskerkin’s face, replaced by a puzzled look.

“Huh? How do you figure that?”

“We raised no alarm when we escaped the castle grounds,” explained D’Vaul. “When that patrol challenged us we were guilty of nothing more than violating curfew. We could have talked our way past them. Failing that, I could have enspelled them with sleep magics.” He motioned for the other man to lead them the way.

“Why didn’t you do one or the other?” Vancaskerkin moved out onto the street, eyes peeled for more guards. D’Vaul followed.

“Because you ran. I had to follow or risk losing you, and at that point they were convinced they’d discovered looters.” D’Vaul sighed. This man had no sense of subtlety.

“So how did you end up ahead of me?”

“I have longer legs, so I run faster. So long as you were still following me, I didn’t have to worry. I’m just glad you managed to keep up; it would have been disappointing to lose these artifacts.”

“Humph, right,” Vancaskerkin snorted, “If it wasn’t for me, we wouldn’t even have those treasures.”

“Oh really? How did you come to that conclusion?”

“I was the one that disabled the acid trap on that sarcophagus. You’d likely have burned that long nose right off your face. It’d be a just thing, too, since you wouldn’t be able to look down it at me ever again.” He stepped into an alley, cutting across to the next street. D’Vaul followed.

“You have a broad definition of the word ‘disable.’ As I recall, you simply set it off and had the good fortune and reflexes to get out of the way.”

“Well it worked, didn’t it? I even took out half the guardians that awoke once I got the lid off.” He flashed D’Vaul the annoying grin again.

“Yes, half of the two guardians, which means you defeated exactly one skeletal warrior. Why the devil did you throw the mask at it?”

“I was startled. I just reacted. It worked, didn’t it? Cracked his yellow skull right in two.” He paused at a fork then headed up the left path. D’Vaul followed.

“Yes. Congratulations. You’re lucky that mask is obviously magical, else it would have shattered like a dinner plate.”

“See? I discovered the thing has special properties. Admit

it, I’m handy to have around, and we’ve made a fine team thus far.”

“I’d sooner admit to fathering ogrekin,” D’Vaul shot back.

They heard the sound of heavy boots on the cobbles and quickly moved back into an alley.

Three figures came into view, headed whence they’d come. The beaky mask of one of the Queen’s physicians was unmistakable. He was flanked by two armored figures, the faces of their helms blank masks. Gray Maidens. They looked about as they walked, possibly having heard the two Pathfinders speaking. The physician paused, pointy mask high in the air as if he were hunting out their scent. Then he moved on, his bodyguards in tow. D’Vaul spotted something on the street in their wake.

After they moved out of sight, he stepped over to it. It was a pouch, apparently fallen from the physician’s coat. He scooped it up and pulled the drawstrings, revealing the glint of silver coins. Vancaskerkin reached to pluck some from the pouch, but D’Vaul quickly drew it shut again.

“I saw them first. This will get me a bed and breakfast in the first inn we hit once we’re out of here. Now just where are we going anyway? Weren’t you going to get your cousin to help us leave the city?”

“I tried. Word is Verik and his men deserted. They were supposed to be holed up in an old butcher’s shop in Northgate, but when I got there, the place was empty. I’ve no idea where he’s gone.”

“What do you mean you’ve no idea? The city is under quarantine! It was your job to find us a way out while I cased the castle and found us a way into the pyramid.” Angry, now, he lowered his voice to a hiss to keep from shouting. Vancaskerkin simply gave him that infuriating grin again.

“Orrin, relax. I called in a favor with some people down in Eel’s End. I used to live here, remember? I’ll make sure those pretties make it out of here and back to Absalom without a hitch,” he said and gestured for D’Vaul to take the lead, “Just up this street to its end and then over the bridge to Old Korvosa.”

D’Vaul pushed past him in a huff. He got two and a half paces before he was hit solidly behind the left ear. He crumpled. Alvan Vancaskerkin, sap in hand, leaned down and grabbed the canvas sack containing the artifacts, the smug grin still plastered on his face.

“I’ll take these, you arrogant bastard,” he said, then scooped up the pouch. “I’ll take this too, as payment for putting up with you as long as I have.” He removed a coin, running a finger over its smooth, freshly minted surface. Then he gave a sharp whistle to attract the attention of the trio that had passed them shortly before, and ran off toward the docks, his laughter echoing in the night.

From the Monastery

WEAL

OR

WOE

FROM THE MONASTERY

by Clinton J. Boomer

illustrated by Ashton "N'wah" Sperry

I here's a man in the Puddles who's looking to buy himself some friends, they say. Yeah, he's a scraggly fella, with a nose that looks like it's been broken a few times, but he's a pleasant sort - if a little nervous now and again. 'Course, folks who've spent some time 'round him over the week since he rode into port say that the man's charm is about as deep as the skin of his teeth - he's all bluster and strained grins, buying drinks for anybody who'll pull up a barstool, and he's got an ocean of panicked sweat and desperation hiding beneath that smile.

"His purse is running low, too, from what I heard ..."

- Old Billy Grits, Precipice District drunk

Within the treacherous and unnamed mountain passes which slice and curl through the snow-choked peaks some six days' ride northeast of Pangolais, secreted in an echoing valley said to lie only sixty miles from the fortress of Kraggodan in Nirmathas, the Black Triune of Nidal sequesters a secret academy of unholy learning and terrible ambition. Trained there in the black arts of the shadewright and in an esoteric martial style drawn in some measure from the dread Hamatulatsu form taught by Chelias's Sisters of the Golden Erinyes, the most devoted students of the Midnight Lord are forged into living

weapons with which the Umbral Court plans to someday pierce the heart of all Avistan.

Two months ago, a cadre of Aspis Consortium agents previously operating underground in Molthune successfully confirmed rumors regarding the existence of this so-called "Monastery of Unyielding Shadows," following tantalizingly vague hints laid down in a recovered Pathfinder's journal discovered in the Knife Quarter of Logas. After weeks of careful travel and search in the company of a hired Varisian guide, the mystery-seekers finally beheld a black and eerie spectacle: an austere temple carved of obsidian and set with darkwood sunk into the stark-stone face of a shaded plateau in terrible, cyclopean parody of Jalmeray's fabled Houses of Perfection. When their guide would travel no further, the agents slit his throat, dumped his body into a rocky culvert, and pressed on, determined to discover the darkest secrets of Nidal for their leader, the Aspis Prophet.

One explorer of that group still lives.

Those few who escaped the valley intact have been picked off one by one, hunted down by a pale and silent ghost with hands that rend flesh from bone with awful swiftness. The final survivor of that ill-fated expedition - an amateur translator, professional leg-breaker, and consummate coward most skilled at sniper fire and keeping himself alive while those around him die - has been on the run now for eight weeks. Hopping borders, stealing horses, and snatching sleep when he can, his supplies and sanity are swiftly running out.

Finally, he has come to Absalom.

And the cold, living shadow which tracks him has followed.

In truth, Smilin' Knox would be willing to trade just about anything for continued safety or even the promise thereof. He has few tangibles to barter with, but as a respected Bronze Agent of the Consortium, he has access to information regarding the plots and inner workings of the company, and can point the PCs in the direction of other members, including the Silver Agent to whom he once reported. He'll hire on with any party as translator, and his fees are low.

Of course, Knox can't be trusted.

WEAL: SMILIN' KNOX WAIGRO

EX-ASPIS CONSORTIUM AGENT

CR 5

XP 1,600

Male human rogue 3/fighter 3

NE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +6; Senses Perception +8 (+9 vs traps)

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 13, flat-footed 17 (+5 armor, +2 shield, +2 Dex, +1 dodge)

hp 52 (3d10+3d8+18)

Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +2 (+3 vs fear)

Defensive Abilities evasion



OFFENSE
Speed 30 ft.
Melee mwk cold iron longsword +6 (1d8+1/19-20)
Ranged mwk heavy crossbow +8 (1d10/19-20)
Special Attacks sneak attack +2d6
STATISTICS
Str 12, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 10
Base Atk +5; CMB +6; CMD 18
Feats Deadly Aim, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Reload (heavy crossbow), Weapon Focus (heavy crossbow)
Skills Acrobatics +10, Appraise +7, Bluff +9, Climb +7, Escape Artist +11, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +10, Knowledge (local) +11, Linguistics +10, Perception +8 (+9 vs traps), Sense Motive +8
Languages Garundi, Goblin, Hallit, Kelish, Osiriani, Polyglot, Skald, Taldane (Common)
SQ trapfinding, trap sense +1, resiliency
Combat Gear 30 bolts, <i>potions of cure moderate wounds</i> , 3 <i>potions of cure light wounds</i> ; Other Gear +1 chain shirt, mithral heavy shield, 200 gp in gems and greasy silver

Smilin' Knox is thief, liar, coward, murderer, and bully. Against unarmed women and children – his preferred targets – he's an absolutely horrifying combatant, but his true gift is an almost preternatural sense for when he's outmatched in a fight. Better, faster, smarter, and stronger men than him have died in fights that Smilin' Knox slunk away from with his skin mostly intact. If left to his own devices, it's likely that Waigro would turn to sport-killing, supplementing his drinking habit with easy, cheap criminal and mercenary work.

At the moment, however, he needs to make a deal with forces that can keep him safe from the shadow of the Monastery. He's willing to promise anything and everything necessary to stay alive.

Because of his skill with languages and his gilded tongue, especially his talent for telling people what they want to hear, Waigro is at ease in Absalom, or anywhere in the Inner Sea region. With his long hair and mongrel-Kellid looks, he's not particularly adept at blending into crowds, but right now he's not concerned with concealment: he's looking for an easily-duped savior.

WOE: ALLEPH ROARIK

EMPTY HAND OF ZON-KUTHON

CR 12

XP 19,200

Male human monk 8/cleric 5
LE Medium humanoid (human)
Init +6; **Senses** Perception +18
Aura law, evil (weak)

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 17, flat-footed 17 (+3 armor, +2 Dex, +2 monk, +1 dodge, +2 Wis)
hp 88 (13d8+26)
Fort +12, **Ref** +9, **Will** +12
Defensive Abilities evasion, still mind; **Immune** disease

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft.
Melee
human bane unarmed strike +12/+7 (2d8+2/19-20)
flurry of blows +12/+12/+7/+7 (2d8+2/19-20)

Special Attacks channel negative energy (3/day, 3d6, DC 12), destructive strike 5/day (+2 damage), ki pool (6, magic), stunning fist 9/day (DC 18, stunned, fatigued or sickened), touch of darkness 5/day (2 rounds)
Spells prepared (CL 5th; concentration +7)
3rd – *cure serious wounds*, *deeper darkness*^o
2nd – *blindness*^o (DC 14), *cure moderate wounds* (3)
1st – *cure light wounds* (4), *true strike*^o
0 – *detect magic*, *mending*, *purify food and drink*, *stabilize*
D domain spell; **Domains** Darkness, Destruction

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 15, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 10
Base Atk +9; **CMB** +13 (+15 disarm); **CMD** 23 (25 vs disarm)
Feats Blind Fight^s, Channel Smite, Deflect Arrows^s, Dodge^s, Improved Critical (unarmed strike), Improved Disarm^s, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack, Improved Unarmed Attack^s, Mobility, Snatch Arrows, Stunning Fist^s, Weapon Focus (unarmed strike), Wind Stance
Skills Acrobatics +18 (+44 for jumps, always has a running start), Knowledge (religion) +6, Perception +18, Sense Motive +18, Spellcraft +11, Stealth +18

Languages Shadowtongue


SQ slow fall 40 ft., wholeness of body

Combat Gear 3 scrolls of *shadow conjuration*; **Other Gear** *amulet of mighty fists (human bane)*, +3 *bracers of armor*, *ring of improved jumping*, black cloak, black monk's outfit, unholy symbol of Zon-Kuthon

Third-born son to an Azlanti-blooded family of Nidal's lesser Umbral Court and direct male-line descendant of the 400-year old vampire who now serves as Right Hand to the Black Triune, Alleph was given over to the Monastery at the age of five. He is one of the finest assassins in the employ of the Midnight Lord, and counts his kills in the hundreds. Quiet, calm, and emotionally restrained, the countenance of Alleph Roarik is like a field of ice under a cloudy sky. His target is Knox, but he will kill others without hesitation. Unlike many villains, however, he gladly takes prisoners to be delivered to Nidal as slaves.

Alleph is encountering great difficulty in Absalom. He is unused to crowds or commerce, and because he does not speak the common language of the Inner Sea, in most cases Alleph must guess the intention of those who speak to him. His instincts are good, however, for the meanings of many phrases. He has memorized a few words and terms in Taldane such as "Surrender," and "Stop or I will kill you." Alleph is no ranger and cannot track his quarry; he receives *sendings* with instructions from a cleric who sries upon Waigro each day.





A Chance Encounter

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

by Paris Crenshaw

illustration by Glen Zimmerman

It was a Wealday in mid-Gozran, 4686. Quince had ordered me to take Tertius and pick up a package from the *Mistmare*, which had arrived on the docks that morning. It was the kind of menial task all Society candidates must accomplish for their superiors as part of their training.

Unfortunately, our mission ended up taking the better part of the day. The ship's captain was engaged in a lengthy disagreement with the First Harbormaster about scheduling the services of "the Beast", Absalom's massive cargo crane. Tertius and I waited patiently on the docks until he had made his arrangements. When the captain placed the parcel in my hands, we knew we had been wise not to rush him. His mood was almost as foul as his body odor.

The captain muttered something about being glad to be rid of the package, but I gave it little thought. This wasn't the first time I'd collected parcels from far-flung Pathfinders. Many couriers say similar things about the items they bring to the Grand Lodge. Still, I was quick to hand the package to Tertius. As sailors say, he needed to learn the ropes.

I paid the captain his fee and headed off for Skyreach. We hadn't taken a dozen steps when I noticed two men talking nearby. To this day, I'm not sure why they caught my attention, but I stopped in my tracks, tripping Tertius in the process.

One of the men was obviously Taldan, though he wore a deck hand's clothing and lacked any air of pretension. He kept looking up the roads leading from the docks, so I assumed he was asking for directions. The other man listened carefully, but his wan face bore an almost deperate expression.

I watched them for several breaths before Tertius finally spoke up. "We need to get going," he said. "Quince seemed anxious to get this. We shouldn't keep him waiting." I couldn't have cared less about Quince's impatience, but Tertius was new.

"You go ahead," I told him. Tertius nodded reluctantly, tucked the package under his arm and headed north. I watched him go, then looked back to where the two men had been standing. They were already gone, but I scanned the crowd and spotted them quickly. The pale fellow was leading the Taldan toward the Puddles, which only deepened my suspicions.

Following them, I tried to get close enough to hear what they were saying, but they had a good head start. I couldn't weave in and out of the throng quickly enough without being obvious. I had to settle for keeping them in sight as we continued west.

The Puddles is one of the places in Abasalom I have always tried to avoid. The place was fetid and filthy even before the

great quake of 4697. The most wretched of Absalom's poor have called it home for generations. I couldn't divine what business the Taldan might have there.

He likely was a sailor, and the Puddles is a place to satisfy all kinds of vices, but he didn't seem the type to possess such prurient interests. At one point, I had to evade the grasp of one zealous young woman—I think it was a woman—who hoped I had similar interests. Though I managed to get away without fear of contracting something incurable, the harlot's attention made me lose sight of my quarry.

They couldn't have gone far, so I turned into the next alley. The street turned sharply before ending at a barren wall. The place reeked of mold and filth, but there was no sign of the Taldan or his strange guide.

I briefly considered giving up my search. After all, I didn't know either of them. What could their fates mean to me? I couldn't even say what had driven me to pursue them this far—except for the pale man's expression. There was a vacancy there, but also a horrible need. Whatever it meant, it wasn't good.

With renewed purpose, I closely examined the dead end. By now, the alley was covered in shadow. I cast a cantrip and sent three orbs of light to different corners of the alley. I had to adjust their positions before I found what I was looking for. Placing the lights low to the ground, I saw the shadowed outlines of footprints leading to the wall. A few moments of searching revealed a cleverly hidden doorway, which I opened quietly.

The tunnel smelled worse than the alley. There was the expected smell of rot and decay, but there was something else—a smell I did not yet recognize. If I had known what that smell meant, I might have left the Taldan to his fate. Instead, I stepped into the deeper darkness of the passage, calling my dancing lights to follow me.

Unlike most places in the Puddles, the tunnel was fairly dry. I surmised it was well-crafted and nearly watertight—certainly not the kind of stonework one would expect to find there. My examination was cut short by a voice rising from the tunnels below.

"We are here!" I couldn't tell which of the men was speaking at first, but he sounded jubilant. The second man was not so pleased.

"What are you talking about? I thought we were going to the Pathfinder Lodge!" I suspected this was the Taldan. I moved further into the tunnels to investigate as he began to protest. "Hey! Let me go," he said. "What are you doing?"

"We are here, Mistress! I have returned and brought you sustenance!"

I heard the sounds of a struggle. Things were turning for the worse. Without stopping to consider the danger, I slipped through the darkened corridor as quickly as I could and called the words of magic to mind. Rounding a corner, I planned to unleash my spell on the Taldan's captor.

What I saw, instead, changed my mind.

Paris Crenshaw

I had expected to see the two men fighting. The sickly one was surprisingly strong and had nearly overpowered the Taldan.

What I did not expect was a grey-skinned woman's head, her stringy, black hair wild and matted with filth, floating out of another tunnel across the room. It was followed by the sinuous body of a jet black snake.

We would later come to know the spirit naga, Ashrii, as a hated foe. At the time, however, I had never seen her ilk before. Even my studies of the arcane had not prepared me for such a sight. I nearly lost my spell from the shock, but I quickly recovered.

My sudden appearance surprised the creature as much as hers surprised me. Fortunately, I recovered first. I unleashed my magic with a word, and the room exploded with a flash of light. The naga shrieked in rage, reared backward, and slammed her head against the ceiling.

Meanwhile, her lackey struggled to restrain the Taldan. "Stop," he pleaded. "Her journey here was so long. She must feed!"

With those words, the truth of the situation finally dawned in the Taldan's mind, and he got serious about winning his freedom. Bending forward at the waist, he flipped his captor over one shoulder and onto the stone floor. Once he was free, he planted his heel in the man's midsection before stepping back and looking around the room for another attacker. When he got a good look at the naga, he headed for the surface, instead.

The naga's face was a fanged mask of rage, and she spat vile curses into the air as she blinked repeatedly, trying to regain her sight. We didn't have time to waste. I grabbed the Taldan and pulled him toward the exit. We were nearly at the secret door when the other man's screams erupted from the chamber below. The naga would have her meal, after all.

We burst into the alleyway and kept running until we were well clear of the Puddles. I had never run for so long in my life and was barely able to breathe when we finally stopped and leaned against a building for support. At long last, I was able to offer my hand and gasp an introduction.

"Sarrish," I said. "Pathfinder. Well, almost." The Taldan took my hand and gripped it firmly.

"Saeren," he replied. He was barely winded from the run. "Me, too. Well, I hope."

I took his meaning and nodded my head northward, toward Absalom's Foreign Quarter. "I can take you to Skyreach. I'll introduce you."

Saeren extended his hand, suggesting I should lead the way. Then he smiled broadly and said, "You sure you aren't going to try to kill me, too?"

I was out of breath, but I still couldn't keep from laughing. "Saeren," I gasped, "with your questionable decision-making skills, it is far more likely you'll end up getting me killed." We were still laughing when we reached the Lodge, and we had already become lifelong friends.



TRAPPED

by Nik "Kobold Cleaver" Geier
illustration by Ashton "N'wah" Sperry

Kuntag led his band through the tunnels hurriedly. They had to get back to the city before they were caught. "Grap tastet, migtul!" he barked. Move faster, tadpoles!

"What is you doing here?" a high-pitched, wheezy voice asked. The kobold swore as he turned. "Agnag! This not your concern!" he said in halting Taldane.

"Who that peep in wagon?" the mite asked. Five other mites, all riding enormous centipedes, accompanied him. The kobolds outnumbered them, but they would risk losing the cargo if it came down to a fight.

"Not your concern! Go away!" Kuntag snapped. He motioned to a nearby guard, and the curtains were drawn on the frog-drawn wagon.

The mite shook his head stubbornly. "Not 'til you tell me what in there."

"It special delivery for Lord! Go!" Kuntag brandished his whip threateningly. The mite hesitated, and then glared with its pudgy eyes. "Fine. But I want answers about this later."

Kuntag rolled his reptilian eyes as the troupe of mites turned and left. The mite was an idiot and he wanted to teach it a lesson, but he was under orders not to engage in combat until the cargo was delivered.

"Vatik nosun, fuhrg!" one of the guards said, pointing. Look north, sir! "Drow!"

"Migdug!" Kuntag swore. He put away his whip and drew his longspear. The drow approached, led by a bald dark elf that had his crossbow loaded and held threateningly at his side. The drow captain smirked. "Ut kantil waight ein tulik svok, Kuntag fuhrg?" In addition, what is in that wagon, sir Kuntag?

Kuntag glared. "Neit ets tett, konkre drow!" That is not your concern, drow!

The captain shook his head. "Wrong. We are in drow territory. Your captive is forfeit." Kuntag rolled his eyes. He knew what the drow was trying to do. He thought that by taking advantage of his limited Taldane, he could embarrass Kuntag and make him lose standing. Far from it. "You is wrong, elf. This our territory. We pass your border five minutes ago. Or you not aware of trade new agreement?" He grinned, showing a mouthful of razor-sharp teeth.

The kobold was gratified to see that the dark elf

captain seemed surprised. Then the drow regained composure, though his smirk had faded. "Times change," he said, and let the crossbow bolt fly.

Kuntag ducked just in time, and the quarrel whistled harmlessly over his head. "Entrak, migtul!" To arms, tadpoles! He leaped onto his giant frog and raised his spear. "Gok!" he ordered, and the frog obeyed, leaping at the attackers.

"You can't win, lizards!" the captain shouted. "You're hopelessly outnumbered!" He began to reload his crossbow.

Too late. Kuntag thrust forward, his spear impaling the dark elf's chest. "That where you wrong, elf!" he shouted. He threw a stone at a panel in the ceiling.

There was a click, and the dark elves froze for a moment.

Then the panel opened. Through the panel came a great swarm of bats, screeching and diving at the drow. Then suddenly the floor beneath the feet of one of the drow exploded, and the drow howled in pain.

The kobolds, for their part, had been ordered to memorize the map of traps that Kuntag had just armed. The drow, on the other hand, were completely befuddled. One fell into a pit, and they heard a splash. Another now struggled with a patch of ground that had suddenly become quicksand. The kobold trapsmiths had done well.

Suddenly, they heard a screech. Kuntag recognized that sound. His eyes widened, and he struggled to free his spear from the body of the dead captain.

Down the hallway came not one, but two enormous creatures. Huge fusions of drow and spider, they clicked their mandibles as they approached. Driders.

"Tast! Tast! Enti teh prixul!" Kuntag shouted. Retreat! Retreat! Protect the cargo! He spurred his giant frog forward at the abominations.

One of the driders raised a monstrous claw, and Kuntag reared to the side to avoid a lethal lightning bolt. Unfortunately, his mount was not so lucky. Kuntag had to leap off his mount to avoid being electrocuted.

"Turvok!" he howled in anger. Death! He brought back his arm, and threw the spear with all his might. The missile connected, and one of the driders howled in pain but did not fall.

Kuntag knew he would need every trick he had if he was going to survive this. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small vial of sand, whispering a short prayer. He threw the vial, moving back.

The projectile hit the lead drider in the face and exploded. The monstrous creature screamed in fury,

Nik "Kobold Cleaver" Geier

hurling another lightning bolt at Kuntag. Kuntag dodged, but part of it still caught him, and he howled in agony. The kobold knew he had little choice. He pulled out a small stone, and threw it with all his might at a hidden panel. The driders took a step back reflexively.

A great resounding explosion echoed throughout the tunnels. Kuntag covered his ears and whimpered, as did the driders.

The driders hesitated, staring. "A thunderstone?" one of them asked, confused.

The panel slowly opened. And down came—a puddle of goo. Then another one. And another. Soon there were dozens of the quivering piles, and still the things came.

The driders looked curiously. One took a step back.

Then the oozes started moving, towards the driders – and towards Kuntag.

Kuntag ran. He knew he had little chance to make it. For before him, the same beasts were coming out of another panel. It was a trap, the most dangerous one his tribe had ever constructed. Hundreds of gray oozes would fall out of two separate panels, dooming all those within the area to a terrible death. Intended for use against invading forces, it would easily be enough to deal with the driders.

He ran at top speed, swearing. Had he only had his frog, he could have made it easily, but as it was, he would never make it before the oozes formed a wall. Kuntag gave up running, seeing he was indeed trapped. He sadly pulled out an orb and spoke into it.

"Master. Cargo arrives shortly. I regret to say I not make it, and had to spring Ooze Trap to make sure mission was success."

"Good work, Kuntag. You have served us well," the aboleth said. "The captive you have brought me is the key to everything."

"Why?" the kobold asked, the oozes inches away.

"Because," the aboleth said, watching the kobold's death calmly, "He is Espon Terbit. Builder of the Starstone Cathedral."



THE TAILS

Written and Illustrated by Tim Hitchcock

From its exterior, the Tails looks like a boarded up shack decorated with tails of large fish nailed to its graying planks. Perhaps one of the most infamous haunts in Diobel, the Tails has well earned its reputation as the place to go if you want to get falling over drunk with old sailors. It never closes, and rarely tosses patrons out, even when they can't walk. Its local patrons only change when they die of liver failure, and even that is questionable for there exists numerous tales of patrons caught still drinking with folks that died the night before, and never noticed. Once one visits the Tails, the soon discover why such stories might not be as far fetched as they might seem elsewhere.

Its windows boarded shut, the interior receives no light beyond a dull glow cast from a few dozen candles and whale oil lamps. Only when the front doors open during the daytime, to let a customer lip in does the sun pierce its withered planks, and those within squint, guard their eyes and hiss like vampires until the door shuts. The lack of airflow also heightens the smell of alcohol, smoke, sweat, and urine. Those more perceptive note the floor's unusual stickiness.

Finding a seat within often proves a difficult task for visitors, most are assigned to local patrons, and even less often are they unoccupied. For the most part, the bar is standing room only, though one can usually find a spot to lean or set a drink upon along the ledge that runs the perimeter of the main room.

Etiquette dictates buying rounds to keep a seat or a lean, as well as a few pints for any local who spins a drunken philosophies or recollections of their ventures at sea. Still, all are strongly advised to keep their hands on their purses, their tone calm, and their eyes moving, lest some wrongly perceived gesture fire up a local patron to booze-fueled rage.

The vast majority of the Tails patrons are aging dockworkers, sailors, and fishermen. Poor folk who spent their lives doing hard work in order to scrape by, and now eager to spend enough of their coin as possible to forget about it all. They pass the remainder of their days drinking cheap booze and gambling on dice, cards, and the occasional fist-fight. As might be expected, the Tails has few female patrons, and those they have are often as crude and decrepit as the men.

The Bartenders

The Tails has three bartenders, depending on the shift. If at anytime any of them feel it necessary to remove a patron, there is an iron bell behind the bar. A single ring sends out a warning alerting the bar's attack dog. A second ring or multiple rings signal the dog to attack (**see area 2 below**). Shifts run from late morning

to early evening, and vice versa.

On most days the bar is run by Mietsy Bynt (N Com 4) a heavysset woman in her mid-forties with a lumberjack's jaw, and a hint of facial hair. As Tails' second oldest bartender, she's worked the bar for about six years. Rumors about Meitsy's past suggest everything from prostitution to drowning her husband. In truth, her prior career was the very inglorious task of knotting and repairing fishing nets, a job that paid her a few coppers a month, but left her with a strong grip. She's quite content in her position, makes good tips and receives more than a healthy dose of drunken flattery. As for any of the furtive or illicit dealings that occasionally take place in the bar, she knows little and cares to know less, having very deliberately kept her distance from them. If approached about dealings, she politely tells folks that she "ain't a talker or a listener", and only shows up to pour drinks. Any who become overly persistent, she repeats herself once, and add "I don't mind nobody's business, not even yours, so do what you need to do and then shove off, but ask me for anything other than a drink again, and I'll have you thrown out on your arse." Her threat is neither unsubstantiated nor idle and if further provoked, she rings the ship's bell.

Most nights Jesh Hestenford (N Fighter 8) runs the Tails. In his mid-fifties with thick wrinkles, and half a set of teeth, he spits a bit when he talks, especially after he's had a few grogs (which is most of the time). Despite his age, Jesh has quite a bit of fight left in hi m, especially if some one insults his birthplace of Augustana or his god. He's a proud Andoran with a thick accent and fervent follower of Cayden Cailean. He dearly loves his homeland, strong drink, good music, and an occasional fight.

What few know about Jesh is he is a member of the Pathfinder Society as well as part owner of the Tails, which he owns with his partner Osprey. While he says little, he is able to answer certain questions about the sort of dealings and arrangements made in his bar. Of course what he reveals is largely based on whether he trusts the person asking the questions. Those raising his suspicions, he interrogates out back, and those who fail his interrogations often slip off the docks, break their necks, and wash up along the Kortos shore a few days latter.

On those days when Mietsy or Jesh aren't tending bar, the shift is filled by a young woman named Sye Gredlen (N Com 1). In her early thirties, Sye is still a pretty woman with a fine figure and sad, green eyes. The daughter of a fisherman, she married young, and had two daughters. Her husband (also a fisherman) recently drowned during a storm, leaving Sye to fend for herself and her two young children. Everyone in the Tails adores her, and all quickly turn to her defense should they notice anyone intimidating her.

3 Copper Drinks

In addition to standard beer, ale, stout, whiskey, rum, and wine,



the Tails sports a variety of strong, cheap drinks, many of which it seems were concocted to turn the stomach and hemorrhage the brain. None of the drinks listed below cost over a silver piece. Most of the regular patrons simply ask for “a three-copper” and take whichever of these toxins arrives in front of them first.

Devil’s Grog: A mix of black rum and Chelish wine.

Fish-Head Grog: Another local special made with rum, seawater, and kipper heads.

Poteen: A potent, clear liquor distilled from potatoes and barley in a small pot still.

Tails Grog: A mix of house rum and whatever beer goes flat first. Served in pints.

Map Key

1. Three Copper Room: This is the main drinking hall of the Tails. Most times the three copper room is standing room only. There are only two doors which lead into the main room, both at the front of the building. Those coming to the Tails to seek Osprey are usually told by operatives to identify themselves by entering through a specific door.

2. The Server’s Room: A long bar isolated the server’s room from the patrons. A line of ale, rum kegs beneath the bar provide the majority of the institution’s booze. A long the side wall they keep bottles of hard liquor and wine casks, along with imports, rarities. A wall behind the bar masks the buildings rear entrance.

Creatures: The Tails has a house pet, a Mwangi wild dog trained by Osprey named Drendle (Dog, Pathfinder Bestiary 87). He is extremely protective of the barkeeps and trained to attack if any of

them ring the small iron ships bell behind the bar.

3. Storage Shed: This leaky shed provides an excess storage area for booze and other items the bar needs, though they rarely use it as its too much of a risk. Osprey occasionally uses it to work people over that either owe him money or information.

4. The Shack: This small shack belongs to Osprey, though he rarely uses it except for times of trouble when he needs to smuggle Pathfinder Agents or hold covert conversations.

5. Baroness Davonia’s House: This is a private residence. It belongs to a wealthy Chelaxian noblewoman who converted portion of it as an apothecary catering to the drunks staggering out of the Tails.

6. Dingy Master’s Watch. This small shack is run by helps with the catches and secures the smaller row boats.

7. 1st Wharf or Long Wharf: This slip is dredged to accommodate larger ships, particularly ships carrying prominent merchants or other trades ships with deeper keels.

8. 2nd Wharf or Fisher’s Wharf: This is chiefly over-crowded with local fishermen too poor to own a fishing boat of their own.

9. Dry Dock Platform: This free-floating dock sits at water-level. It is used to dry dock smaller craft that requires repairs or refinishing.

10. 3rd Wharf or Public: Third Wharf connects outer docks to smaller dinghy docks. Provided there is vacancy, the dock accommodates any wishing to tie up while getting supplies. The tie up limit is a strict two hours.

11. Small Craft or Dinghy Dock. This small floating dock connects to the main docks, and is large enough to accommodate several small craft.

Gangs of Absalom

GANGS OF ABSALOM

by Adam DaiGLE

illustration by Hugo "Butterfrog" Solis*

In the City at the Center of the World, thousands of petty criminals envision a place at the center of the action, and in a city of this size, already percolating with crime and vice, many go unnoticed in the hubbub. Barely a handful of those ambitious organizations fill the article below. For good or ill, characters may encounter these assemblies in their exploration of the city's quarters.

Each entry provides a quick description of the organization followed by a few ways to use the group in your campaign, depending on the characters' dispositions.

- **Head** This entry describes the person running the group.
- **Befriend** The first part of this entry describes how a character can gain the initial attention of the gang. After making contact, a character must succeed at a number of Diplomacy checks. To obtain the boon, a character must shift the target from their initial reaction to friendly within the number of consecutive meetings indicated.
- **Boon** This entry describes the benefit obtained.
- **Backlash** When a character spectacularly fails contact or violates accepted rules and tact of the criminal underworld, they suffer a backlash from their association with the organization.

Dimmon's Boys

While any number of consumable vices trade both openly and in secret on the streets of Absalom, an exiled Thuvian alchemist promises the cleanest trips, purest stimulants, strongest smoke, and an array of other chemical vices. His method of distribution belies his corrupting wares – an innocent army of children running lace-wrapped packages from district to district. Though powerful gangs dominate the drug trade, Dimmon's boys find ominous protection as only legitimate authorities choose to arrest the vagrant youth. Dimmon, living in the basement of his infirm mother's manor house, hires Owl Sanctuary Services to protect his organization, thus he fears no transgressions. Dozens of fellow cooks, distillers, growers, and smugglers seek Dimmon's recipes, yet none, to this day, found satisfaction. Though Dimmon's supply finds no comparison, the man keeps a tight clientele, an activity saving him from retaliation from rivals. Teenage boys, and the occasional girl, compose his distribution network with a "mother" heading each squad.

Head Though absorbed in his work pursuing new psychotropic substances, Markel Dimmon (CN male human adept 8/rogue 2) sees his employees as family, emotionally

overreacting to any slight heaped on them.

Befriend Finding one of Dimmon's boys in Absalom, especially in the Docks or Foreign Quarter, is as easy as finding a pigeon. Purchasing their wares twice guarantees friendship. To meet with Dimmon himself, the character must provide a rare mind-altering material or hope for an accepting mood (30% chance). **Initial** indifferent; DC 18; two consecutive meetings.

Boon Gaining favor with Dimmon's Boys grants the character a 50% discount on any drugs the youths sell. In addition, Dimmon can serve as a healer for intoxication, disease, and poisons, including overdose. Dimmon is also an expert on plants and minerals, glad to ramble on about any related questions or topics.

Backlash Upsetting Dimmon, one of the "mothers" or one of his runners calls down the wrath of the Owl Sanctuary Services. Minor infractions in this kind of business area all too common, and thusly are ignored.

Jocund Pranksters

A loose affiliation of artists in the Ivy district who conduct destructive and disrupting revels throughout the quarter. Often their misdemeanor-strewn parade of anarchy and debauchery spills into other districts not as accepting of "performance art". The Jocund Pranksters, usually chemically enhanced by any number of illicit substances, paint graffiti, stage elaborate pranks in public places, cause jovial mayhem, and plan outrageous stunts, all aided by wild displays of magic. This group has the habit of entangling innocent spectators in their events, drawing on the power of an interested crowd. As such, authorities find difficulty in determining exactly who is to blame for particular abuses of the law. Their recent "Rally Against Red" event left illusion-touched buildings, repainted property, and smashed stained glass in its wake – the only thing red left untouched was wine.

Head Lanky and awkward looking, a poor Taldan artist called Spence (male human bard 5) dreams up these crazy revels amid a haze of smoke and hallucinations.

Befriend The best way to incorporate oneself with the Jocund Pranksters is to simply be willing to go along for the ride. A character must assist in a prank or revel. **Initial** indifferent; DC 17; two consecutive meetings.

Boon Gaining favor with the Jocund Pranksters grants a character access to a pool of gossip. Any Knowledge (local) checks, or attempts to gather information through the use of Diplomacy, made in the Ivy District gain a +2 bonus. In addition, through this group the character may have greater access to illusion magic and illicit substances.

Backlash While it may be difficult to upset this group of merry miscreants, those successfully doing so end up the butt of many pranks and whispers of gossip.

Illustration courtesy of *The Sands of the Empire* <http://www.the-sand.info/>



The Nowhere Men

A gang of veterans from throughout the Inner Sea region, this group squats out ruined buildings where the Docks touch the Precipice District. Formerly soldiers of dozens of different lands, these scarred individualists bear all manner of deformities, handicaps, and wounds. Those with all their limbs and fingers have lost parts of their sanity. Staunch anarchists, they resort to doing what they originally signed up for – to protect their people. Since no one claims them anymore, they roam the Precipice and shady alleys of the Docks keeping beggars, prostitutes and vagrants safe from the horrors of the city, human or otherwise.

Head Originally a crusader in Mendev, General Ancell Bryn (male human fighter 7) bears a bizarre mechanical arm affixed to his stump. Despite losing his sword arm and some of his mind, he keeps his men in top form, always sword accepting new recruits.

Befriend Helping their cause in any way, or even providing aid for one of their perceived charges gains favor with this group. Being a disfigured or war torn veteran grants immediate access (+8 to Diplomacy checks). **Initial** indifferent; DC 20; three meetings.

Boon Gaining favor with the Nowhere Men provides access to arms, safe houses, and reports on movements of street figures, and those inflicting harm on the disparaged and disenfranchised.

Backlash Souring a relationship with the Nowhere Men leads to targeted ambushes, and use of guerrilla warfare tactics against the perceived traitor. Minor sleights draw the unwanted jeers of street people throughout various slum districts.

Owl Sanctuary Services

Many misinterpret this particular business, especially with their motto being, “You are safe under our wing.” Having nothing to do with harboring and protecting nocturnal avian predators, the group earns legitimate income providing general security services, such as setting up traps and alarms (both magical and mundane) and providing bodyguards for wealthy clients. While not outwardly illegal, the group does not refuse any paying assignment, thusly, the organization will secure a library by day, and serve as collectors and muscle for a criminal organization by night. Numbering in the hundreds, many agents are unaware of the size of the whole company, acting independently and with little superfluous information aside from their specific duty and engagement guidelines.

Head Tall, with a constant scowl on her face and her dark hair in a tight bun, the commanding Bernadine Gray (LN female human fighter 9) serves as High General leading hundreds of agents and officers in their duty.

Befriend Approaching an agent is simple; however, an active client must refer a character to meet with an officer or even High General Gray. **Initial** indifferent; DC 20; two consecutive meetings.

Boon Gaining favor with Owl Sanctuary Services provides a character a reliable stream of mercenaries at 75% the normal rate of hire. In addition, a character may question an agent about a particular establishment or individual under their protection with a bribe (5-50 gp) and a successful Diplomacy check DC 20.

Backlash Finding oneself on the wrong side of this organization risks private incarceration, execution, or a turnover to city authorities on trumped up or artificial charges. A constant tail, small legal troubles, and surveillance follow minor infractions of tact.

The Red Crabs

Scavengers and smugglers living on the Flotsam Graveyard, this group, clad in salt-flaked red leather armor, provides all manner of cast-off and illicitly-obtained wares cheaply and quietly. Numbering just over forty strong, some of the free traders hire themselves out as unofficial pilots through the dangerous bay, often pirating the vessel with the aid of their companions. The Red Crabs maintain a brother gang in Diobal freely trading goods and information. The group keeps close watch on other smuggling operations and quickly sweep in and retrieve jettisoned goods. Fond of ambushes, the group makes a solid income on the retrieval of specific items coming into the city from the Inner Sea.

Head Gnarled and weathered under his wide-brimmed hat, Jonah Lin (N male human fighter 4/rogue 4) scatters his men like gulls, working hard to scavenge the entire bay.

Befriend A simple bribe of at least 25 gp or an offer of relevant information gets this group's attention. **Initial** indifferent; DC 24; three consecutive meetings.

Boon Gaining favor with the Red Crabs provides a character with an excellent source of equipment and merchandise. Common goods cost only 75% the going rate and specially requested materials take only a day to procure. The character may also hire the gang to assist in ambushes within the Flotsam Graveyard or even hire them to obtain a specific item lying beneath, or passing through, their domain.

Backlash Betrayal makes any transport through the bay difficult as the group seeks to find and drown the transgressor. Minor infractions often pass without personal harm.

The Silken Fold

A collection of pimps and a handful of organized brothel owners throughout the city, they claim the ability to suit any kink or idle proclivity. Based in Absalom, few disagree. While also offering pleasures of the flesh, this fills its coffers in the trafficking of people. With every new batch of sex workers, picked strictly from foreign stock, one or two proves difficult to deal with and the group cuts its losses by selling the troublemaker into slavery. Though some may ignore this kind of servitude, the group prefers to operate completely underground when it comes to smuggling humanoids into and out of the city, maintaining the guise of simple pimps and pleasure pushers.

Head The sinister and sultry Nelia Albertine (LE female

human expert 3/bard 6) quietly heads this organization, relying on trusted lieutenants to carry out the day-to-day details.

Befriend To gain trust a character must spend 100 gp over the course of a week in the company of one of the Silken Fold's merchandise. **Initial** indifferent; DC 30; five consecutive meetings.

Boon Gaining favor of the Silken Fold allows free access to their merchandise, as well as a highly competent network of smugglers adept at getting people into and out of the city with no one noticing.

Backlash Anyone upsetting Nelia or bringing any manner of unwanted attention on the underbelly of the organization risks being sold into slavery or simply disappearing from the city. The spread of rumors whispering of infection from a "private" malady follow minor infractions of tact.

The Velvet Glove

Composed of ambitious barristers and crooked moneylenders, this group uses complex contracts and legal action to extort their marks. They put liens on property, seek out loopholes allowing them to legitimately lay claim on businesses, and work the city's laws to their advantage. This organization hires out a number of thugs as collectors, as the ruling members sit in their lofty apartments plotting more mayhem. One of their greatest achievements in recent times is consolidating the pawnbrokers, and managing to skim a decent sum off the top of every second-hand transaction in town. An unintended side effect is the pawnbrokers, realizing their strength in the city, are beginning to organize and it is yet to be seen whether the fledgling guild will continue working with the Velvet Glove or betray their agreements.

Head A corpulent and hateful prick, Foss Baltwin (LE male human aristocrat 4/expert 7) serves as the current Prime Councilman leading an aggressive campaign claiming ruined property in the Docks and Precipice Quarters.

Befriend Fascinated by legal order and politics, a character able to carry on a conversation in detail on these subjects (Knowledge [nobility] or Knowledge [local] DC 25) can find favor with this group, provided their ethics and wealth measure up. **Initial** unfriendly; DC 28; four consecutive meetings.

Boon Gaining favor of the Velvet Glove allows characters to swiftly maneuver legal proceedings and more easily obtain property or dispute claims within the city. While expedient, and somewhat shady, these services are not free.

Backlash Characters owning property have the most to fear from disrespecting this organization. The group can work hundreds of years of obscure laws to find some manner of taking their property, and perhaps even their freedom. High exchange rates at moneychangers and ridiculous interest rates from lenders follow minor infractions of tact.

LEGENDARY BLOODLINE

Written and Illustrated by Tim "Rixx" Jenkins

There was either a mythic warrior of great prowess in your family tree, or perhaps you are the latest born to a long line of such heroes. For some reason or another, the spirits of your ancestors have chosen you as their successor, and somehow lend you their legendary skill and power from beyond Pharasma's Boneyard.

Class Skill: Knowledge (history).

Bonus Spells: *true strike* (3rd), *bull's strength* (5th), *heroism* (7th), *speak with dead* (9th), *contact other plane* (11th), *greater heroism* (13th), *mage's sword* (15th), *moment of prescience* (17th), *foresight* (19th).

Bonus Feats: Armor Proficiency (Light), Arcane Armor Training, Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Defensive Combat Training, Great Fortitude, Martial Weapon Proficiency, Skill Focus (Knowledge [history]), Still Spell

Bloodline Arcana: You may deliver a melee touch spell through a single attack with a melee weapon. A spell cast in this way uses its standard casting time and you make your attack as part of the casting. You may not take a full attack action when delivering a spell in this way, and you provoke attacks of opportunity as normal when casting in melee. You declare use of this ability and the spell being cast before making your attack roll. The spell takes effect even if the target's damage reduction negates the damage dealt, but you must land a successful hit.

Bloodline Powers: Guided by the souls of your ancestors, your weapons strike true and your enemies become humbled by your prowess.

Legendary Strike (Su): You gain the legendary strike

power: the supernatural ability to make a single melee attack with a morale bonus on damage rolls equal to ½ your sorcerer level (minimum 1). You must declare the legendary strike before making the attack. You can use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + your Charisma modifier.

Watchful Protectors (Su): At 3rd level, you gain a +1 deflection bonus to your AC. At 7th level and every four levels thereafter, this bonus increases by +1, to a maximum of +5 at 19th level.

Memory of Prowess (Su): At 9th level, when making attacks or performing combat maneuvers with a manufactured weapon, you may treat your character level as your base attack bonus for a number of rounds per day equal to your sorcerer level (which may give you multiple attacks).

These rounds need not be consecutive. Using this ability is a free action.

Mythic Grace (Ex): At 15th level, you gain +10 feet to your base land speed and gain a +4 dodge bonus against attacks of opportunity provoked by moving through a threatened square. You also gain a +2 dodge bonus against attacks of opportunity made for any other reason.

True Successor (Ex): At 20th level, you

have achieved legendary greatness equal to or surpassing that of your ancestors. When delivering a touch spell through a single melee attack (via your bloodline arcana), the spell automatically ignores the target's spell resistance. You also gain a +4 inherent bonus to your Strength and Dexterity, and all of your bloodline powers become extraordinary abilities.



Dear Ask a Shoanti

I'm the "Wayne Reynold's troll" on the cover of the Pathfinder Bestiary. What can you recommend for total orthodontic care? After a recent binge on gnomes, molars 4 & 5 are starting to throbl! (Yes, I still have some of my baby teeth.)

Sincere Regards,
Underbitten in Ustalarv

Dear Underbitten in Ustalarv

First, congrats on your Bestiary cover appearance. But if you are going to be a cover model, you'll definitely need braces. Braces do not have the stigma that they use to. Indeed, these days a licensed illusionist can render them practically invisible. And if the local goblinoids tease you? You can always, you know, tear their heads off.

Yours very truly,
Ask a Shoanti

Guide to Absalom Index



PATHFINDER CHRONICLES: GUIDE TO ABSALOM INDEX

Compiled by Charles Evans

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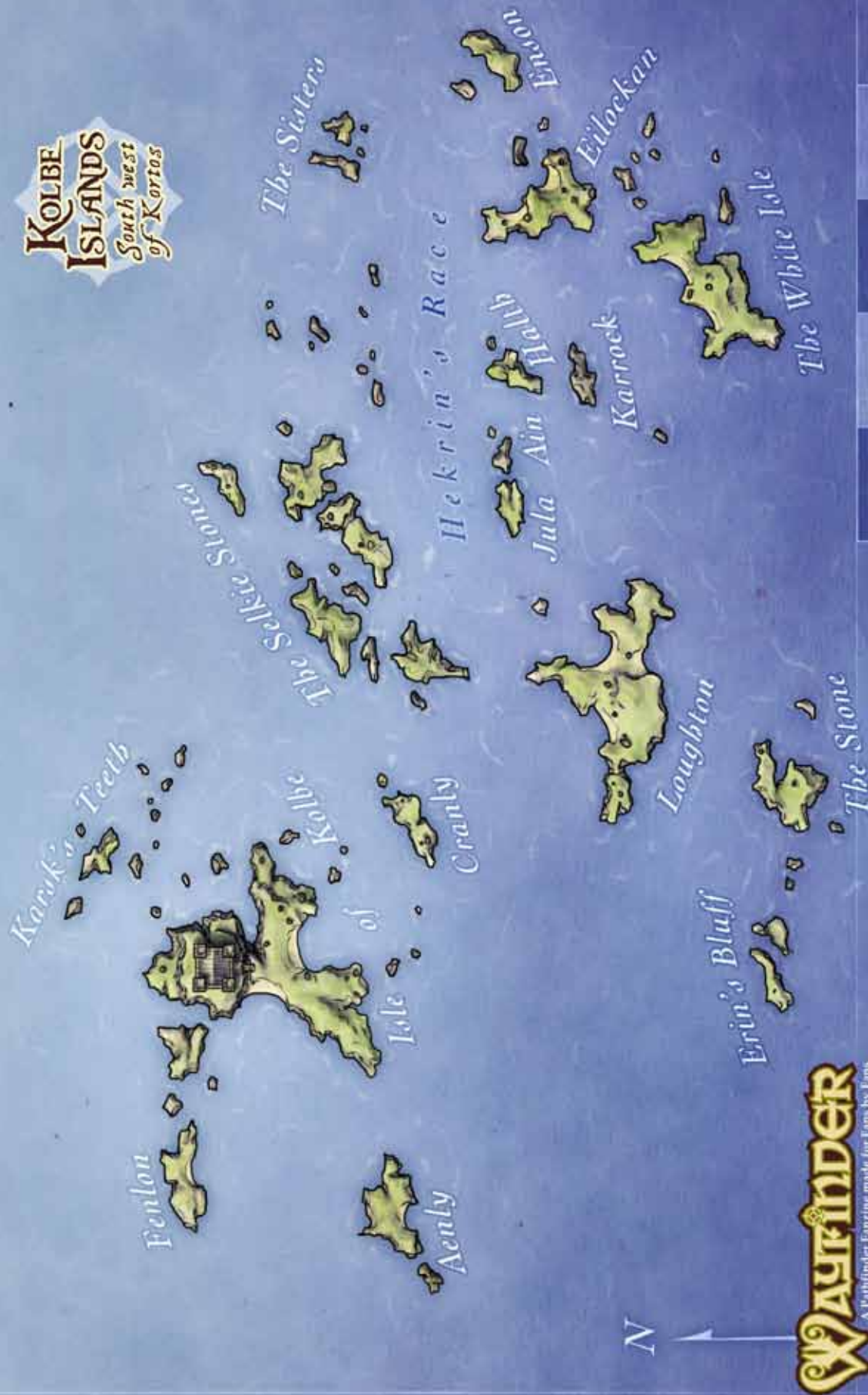
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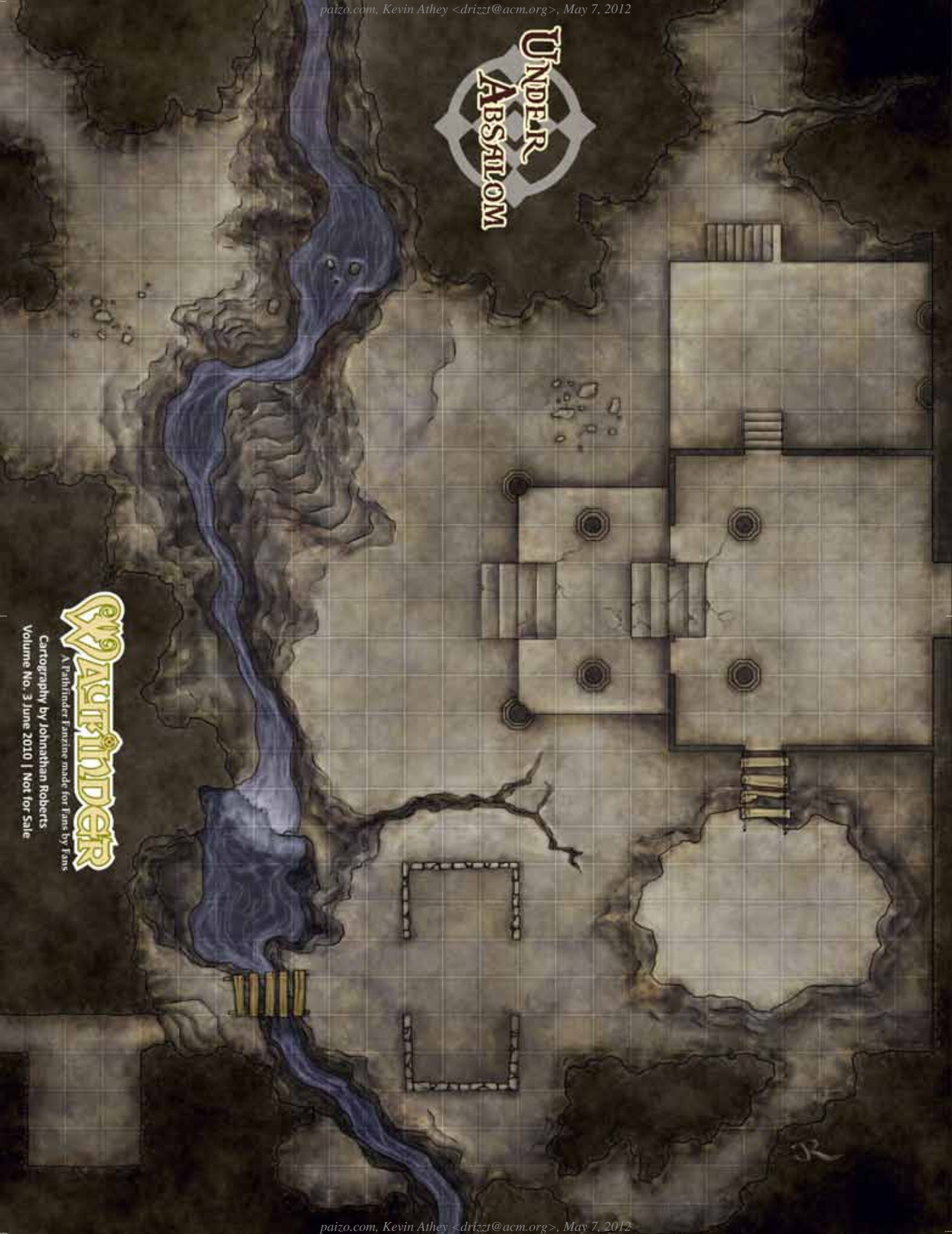


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