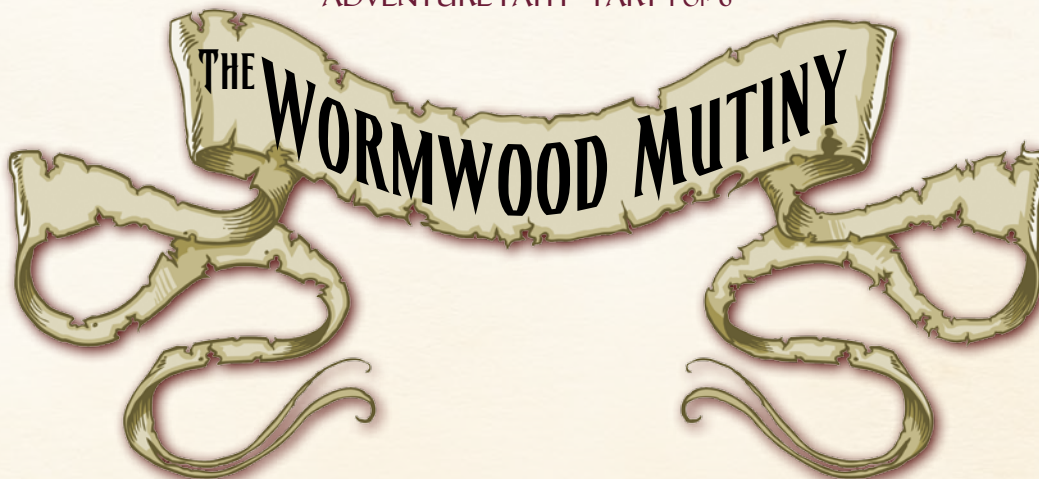


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	4
The Wormwood Mutiny by Richard Pett	6
NPC Gallery by Richard Pett	52
Skull & Shackles Treasures by Richard Pett	58
The Life of a Pirate by Jesse Benner, Richard Pett, and F. Wesley Schneider	60
Besmara by Sean K Reynolds	68
Pathfinder's Journal: The Treasure of Far Thallai 1 of 6 by Robin D. Laws	74
Bestiary by Jesse Benner, Sean K Reynolds, and Steven D. Russell	80
Campaign Outline	90
Preview	92



BLACK-HEARTED MISCREANTS OR DARING SCOUNDRELS

Welcome to the Skull & Shackles Adventure Path, where piracy is the rule, and plunder and infamy fill the seas of Golarion! In this month's adventure, "The Wormwood Mutiny," the PCs find themselves unwilling members of a pirate crew. The adventure assumes that the PCs all were in Port Peril, the capital of the Shackles, and that they fell afoul of a pirate press gang. They wake up the next morning in the hold of the pirate ship *Wormwood*, where the adventure begins. The campaign traits presented in the *Skull & Shackles Player's Guide* (available for free at paizo.com) provide hooks for each PC that describe the circumstances of their capture.

It's important to manage your players' expectations for this Adventure Path right from the start. Most importantly,

they should all want to play pirates of one stripe or another. The PCs came to Port Peril to become pirates, to earn fortunes, to be adored by men and women, and live lives of fame—or perhaps infamy—at sea. They could be scurvy knaves who would slit a throat without a second's thought, or they might be dandy swashbucklers with hearts of gold in search of fame and glory on the high seas. Whatever course they choose, piracy should be in their blood. This doesn't mean the players can't play good characters, but they should be scoundrels, more interested in plunder and high-seas adventure than heroics and saving the world.

Likewise, you should make sure that your players are ready and willing for the unique challenges this adventure presents. The first part of "The Wormwood Mutiny" takes

place aboard the *Wormwood*, a pirate ship filled to the gunwales with dangerous cutthroats, and the PCs wake up in the ship's hold as little more than prisoners, with next to no equipment. Played right, this can be a fun way to start an adventuring career, but your players need to be onboard with the assumptions of the adventure.

THE BIRTH OF AN ADVENTURE PATH

Although I've been the development lead on the past three Pathfinder Adventure Paths—Serpent's Skull, Carrion Crown, and Jade Regent—Skull & Shackles represents a first for me in several ways. Serpent's Skull, and to an even greater extent, Jade Regent, were the brainchildren of James Jacobs, and though I developed all of the adventures, it was James who outlined the Adventure Paths, and my development process involved a lot of consultation with him to ensure that the individual adventures matched his original concepts for the overall plots of the campaigns. Likewise, it should be no surprise that the Carrion Crown Adventure Path and all of its gothic horror was Wes Schneider's baby, once again requiring significant contribution on his part during the development process.

But with Skull & Shackles, I finally get an Adventure Path all my own. Just as James created Ameiko Kaijitsu way back in *Pathfinder #1* in preparation for eventual reappearance in the Jade Regent Adventure Path, and as Wes had originally created the nation of Ustalav to be a setting for what would eventually become the Carrion Crown Adventure Path, I've wanted to work on a pirate AP since my very first freelance assignment for Paizo, when I got the opportunity to write four of the countries detailed in the *Pathfinder Chronicles Campaign Setting*, including the pirate isles of the Shackles.

As we brainstormed ideas for the Adventure Path to follow Jade Regent, I threw out my pirates idea, and was apparently passionate enough about it to get the rest of the team excited about it as well. Since this was a new idea, of course, and not one of the secret projects held and nurtured for years in the minds of James and Wes, it fell to me to do all of background work to get this AP off the ground. I made copious notes, wrote an outline, and with lots of feedback from the rest of the team, revised it several times, until we had the best ideas that incorporated all of the pirate themes we all know and love from fiction and movies: attacking ships at sea, raiding coastal settlements, naval combat, digging for buried treasure, being marooned on a deserted island, ghost ships, storms, sea serpents, sunken ships, and many, many more.

At the same time, of course, I got the chance to populate the Adventure Path with characters I had created back when I first wrote about the Shackles. James may have Ameiko, and Wes has Ailson Kindler, but now Tessa Fairwind, Avimar Sorrinash, Arronax Endymion, and the

ON THE COVER

This month's cover gives us the notorious Free Captain of the Shackles Barnabas Harrigan, captain of the pirate ship *Wormwood*. Although he is destined to become one of the PCs' greatest rivals in their quests to become Free Captains in their own right, the PCs will have to wait until they're more infamous pirates themselves before they're ready to face him. For now, Harrigan is just a figure to be hated and reviled, the tyrannical captain who holds the PCs' fates in his hands.

Master of the Gales will get their time in the spotlight as well, not to mention new characters such as Captain Barnabas Harrigan, the despicable Mr. Plugg, and Isabella "Inkskin" Locke.

But an outline is only the first step. I still needed authors for the six adventures of Skull & Shackles. As usual, our freelancers stepped up to plate, with Richard Pett taking the helm of the first installment, "The Wormwood Mutiny." I don't know if it's because of "Rule, Britannia!", or maybe because I've read too many Horatio Hornblower novels, but it seemed fitting that an Englishman should write our inaugural high-seas adventure, and Mr. Pett has done an outstanding job. Perennial Adventure Path author Greg Vaughan has also stepped in, as well as two RPG Superstars, Neil Spicer and Matt Goodall. And finally, stalwart adventure writers Tim Hitchcock and Jason Nelson agreed to round out the all-star cast of authors.

If you're reading this foreword, it means the Skull & Shackles Adventure Path has finally been born, and is set to lead a full and adventurous life at the table of you and your players. Skull & Shackles might be my baby, but I leave it now in your capable hands, to create tales of swashbuckling adventure and piratical legend for years to come. As always, stop by the messageboards at paizo.com to tell us what you think and how the campaign has turned out in your game, or to get more ideas from other great GMs running the Adventure Path.

So down your cup of grog, hoist the sails, and set a steady course for the Shackles, where plunder and infamy galore await those who can seize it!

ROB

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