



BESMARA

Besmara (bes-MAR-uh) is the goddess of pirates and sea monsters. She is brash, lusty, confrontational, and greedy, but follows a code of honor and is loyal to her crew and allies as long as it serves her interests. She cares little for senseless murder or other unprofitable acts, but is willing to take risks to attain great prizes. Even the most irreligious pirate captain throws a share of treasure overboard now and then as tribute for the Pirate Queen. Mayors of port cities and captains of merchant vessels curse her name, for her followers are a direct threat to legitimate trade. She has little power or interest in the mortal world beyond the sea and its immediate reach.

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Originally Besmara was a powerful water spirit with an affinity for manipulating sea monsters. She gained fame among primitive tribes for her willingness to drive these creatures toward rival coastal villages; later, when tribes began boat-raids on other settlements, they found she could be bribed to fend off these attacks with her monsters or arrange for predation-free sailing for the aggressors. With this long history of playing both sides, she leveraged power for herself by destroying and consuming rival spirits of wood, gold, and battle, and eventually became a minor goddess of piracy, sea monsters, and strife. She is comfortable with her current level of power and notoriety, and knows she cannot unseat a major deity such as Abadar or Gorum (though if she had an opportunity at such a prize she just might take it), so she entertains herself by raiding the outposts of celestials, fiends, and minor deities.

Besmara's existence as a deity predates the Age of Enthronement by several centuries, and as a spirit millennia before that. Her power as a goddess has waxed and waned in response to the naval power of coastal empires, but even when at her most vulnerable she has found ways to escape capture or destruction. She doesn't care about good and evil, only pursuit, battle, and reward. She grants spells to righteous privateers battling the Chelish navy and to murderous buccaneers who give no quarter to defeated opponents—much like the war god Gorum, her interest is in the conflict, not the consequences of its resolution. She enjoys strife more than peace, as when two nations squabble she has more opportunities to plunder both sides and blame her attacks on the victim's rival; her followers have been known to stir up trouble by sailing aggressively (or even attacking) while using a temperamental nation's colors or falsely claiming to be "legitimate privateers" as they attack in peacetime.

In her interactions with sea monsters, she doesn't play the motherly, brood-creating role that Lamashtu does, but rather the clever bully who keeps other bullies in line through physical threats and force of personality—her monsters are like vicious dogs who reluctantly obey her command to heel only because she can hurt or kill them, rather than loyal beasts who comply out of respect, love, or devotion. She has few priests, for pirates are more superstitious than religious, but she counts among her followers anyone who has made a desperate prayer to her

when facing death on the sea or given tribute to gain her favor. Aquatic races usually venerate their own gods and avoid attracting her attention, for her monsters prey under the sea as well as upon it.

Besmara has a buccaneer's heart and mind. She gives chase if she wants something, or lets her prey escape for a time if she wants the challenge of giving it a head start. She retreats from a superior force if she doesn't think she can win, but doesn't believe fights have to be fair. She is loyal to an ally as long as that alliance serves her interests, and thinks nothing of betraying someone who is no longer useful to her, teaming up with an old enemy for a common purpose, or fighting against a former ally. Her personal code of conduct is simple and straightforward, and most pirates follow something similar, even if they don't worship her as their patron. She hates anyone who tries to restrain her, her



"CARVE YOUR NAME ON THE EVER-CHANGING SEA WITH A SABER OF TERROR AND TRIUMPH. FIGHT FOR PLUNDER, FAME, AND GLORY, AND EARN YOUR PLACE AMONG THE LEGENDS OF THE SEA."

—BESMARA'S CODE

activities, or piracy in general, putting her in opposition to blockade fleets and most countries' navies. Though she is quite competent at winning battles involving only a few ships, pirates rarely command entire fleets, and she makes no claims of being a war deity.

It is common practice for pirates to throw a treasure chest or two overboard before a risky battle as tribute to the goddess, though this is never a guarantee of her favor. Isolated caches of this tribute litter the sea floor, left alone by aquatic races (who understand to whom it belongs) and usually guarded by strange creatures of the deep sea sent by the goddess or her agents. Such creatures usually have no interest in these treasures, but watch over them because the loot attracts tasty surface-dwellers, and because serving the Pirate Queen in this way means she is less likely to find another, more dangerous task for them. The greatest of these sites contain sunken ships, either deliberately sunk by wary pirates or lost because of great battles, whose crews have transformed into draugr (*Bestiary* 2 110). If these caches are ever stolen, the goddess's reaction ranges anywhere from sending a scourge of sea beasts after them, to cursing the responsible party to drown at sea, to allowing the looter to retire in luxury—all depending on the thief's reputation, her mood, and any sentimental value she may have for the lost treasure.

Nearly all of Besmara's followers are pirates or pirates by any other name. The rest are folks who profit from strife (such as war profiteers, dog fighters, and similar



low-class folk), officials in “pirate towns,” a few intelligent sea monsters, pirates’ spouses, and prostitutes whose clientele comprises mainly pirates. Even such strumpets, harlots, trollops, and rent boys who rarely or never set foot on pirate ships indirectly profit from successful piracy, and pray to Besmara that their favorite buccaneers return with lust in their hearts and many coins to spend. Some of these consider themselves “sacred prostitutes” of the goddess, though this devotion often consists of little more than a “pirate queen” costume and roleplayed seduction (the goddess herself laughs at these mortal antics). Male prostitutes among the faithful are often referred to as *matelots* (a term also sometimes given to the male spouse of a pirate).

Besmara appears as a brash, raven-haired pirate captain of any race she pleases, dressed in a stereotypical costume—typically colored pantaloons, black boots, a blousy shirt, and a hat (a bicorne, tricorne, or bandana), with gaudy jewelry and perhaps an eye patch, and carrying a rapier, saber, or cutlass. Sometimes her skin is greenish or even bluish, and she may sport one or more scars on her face and neck, either from a blade or the suckers and beak of a great squid. She may have slow-burning matches braided into her hair, or breathe wisps of blue-green fire that ignite nearby combustibles. Despite her inhuman origins, she does not take monstrous form, even when angered, though swarms of crabs, predatory fish, and tentacled monsters have crawled out of her clothing, nearby water, or even thin air to do her bidding. Those who oppose her on the water feel seasick; those who oppose her on land feel hung over.

Besmara intervenes in the form of gold coins spinning, seabirds flying in odd patterns, mists concealing one’s approach from enemies, enemies dropping weapons or having their weapons misfire, and opposing ships’ sails tearing or burning. She shows her anger through stored food spoiling in a matter of moments, potable water turning to sludge, peg-legs splintering and hooks growing burrs against the wearers’ stumps, dead seabirds falling from the sky, sudden growths of barnacles on hulls, the wetting of black powder, the tearing of sails, foul-smelling winds, and an increased presence of sea monsters.

Besmara is chaotic neutral and her portfolio is piracy, sea monsters, and strife. Her favored weapon is the rapier. Her holy symbol in most seas is a skull and crossbones on a black or red field, though Ulfen pirates often use a viking helm with crossed swords behind it instead of the design familiar in southern waters. Her domains are Chaos, Trickery, War, Water, and Weather. Nearly all of Besmara’s priests are clerics or rangers, with a few bards and druids, and every few decades an antipaladin champions her more destructive aspects. Her most common title is the Pirate Queen, though she is also known regionally as the Black Lady, the Sea Banshee, and Sailor’s Doom.

Rather than having a defined deific domain, Besmara wanders the chaos of the Maelstrom aboard her idealized pirate ship, the *Seawraith*. While depictions of her vessel vary with the source, reflecting the observer’s cultural notion of a warship—everything from a galleon to a longship to a junk—the *Seawraith* uniformly inspires fear and respect. She can change its appearance or configuration at will, as well as the environment around and within it, just as any deity in its home realm. However, this power only extends about a hundred yards from the ship itself, requiring her to use conventional methods of battle when she raids planar outposts. Fortunately, the ship’s mobility and her chaotic powers make it very difficult to find should she wish to be hidden, and several vengeful divine entities have sought her in the Maelstrom for centuries, only to give up in frustration. Sometimes Besmara leads an armada of petitioner-crewed ships, or drags floating wreckage, loot, and crazed, undying sailors in her ship’s wake, or even the *Kelpie’s Wrath*, her herald. The *Seawraith* is also a constellation in Golarion’s sky.

Besmara’s followers are greedy folk. While some take to the seas in search of adventure or the joy of exploration, most people with that mindset gravitate to more benign deities, leaving those who lust for gold above all things as the predominant members of her flock. Such followers covet the belongings of others—whether actual riches, property, titles, fame, or lovers. If someone has something they want, they think it’s fair to take it. Most are chaotic and love their personal freedoms, avoiding tyrants who prey on the weak not because they disagree with this philosophy, but because they don’t like someone else telling them what to do. Her followers hate staying in place from day to day, and are usually content with a few days in town to carouse before returning to a ship and heading out again. The Pirate Queen’s followers have many superstitions about good luck (cats, figureheads with open eyes, pouring alcohol on a deck), bad luck (whistling on deck), and evil spirits (wearing gold jewelry wards them off) in addition to other pirate traditions and beliefs.

There are no formalized rituals common to all churches, but services are generally upbeat, with singing, boot-stomping, dancing, and the lighting of incense or matches (particularly slow-burning matches and fuses). Burials are one of the few somber occasions, marked by a short prayer and either burial at sea (weighted down with a chain, cannonball, or a heavy but inexpensive treasure) or burning a rowboat or raft bearing the corpse. Most priests consider it undignified to abandon fallen allies to be eaten by a sea monster unless doing so would save other crew members from an early death (such as giving sharks dead bodies to eat so living crew members can safely escape a sinking wreck).

As is befitting a chaotic pirate goddess, the church has no official stance on marriage, breeding, or raising

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children. Some pirates never marry, some have many spouses, some have children, and some choose to acknowledge or train them. Very few in the faith embrace celibacy, save those with an obvious disfiguring condition or venereal affliction.

TEMPLES AND SHRINES

Given the small numbers of Besmara's priesthood, there are few with the time and interest to build temples to her. Most of her temples are repurposed buildings or shipwrecked hulls, some of which are half-submerged. A public temple always displays a jolly roger flag, and—much like a thieves' guild providing services—its priest sells healing, local nautical charts, and hideout tips, or fences goods. In places where piracy is frowned upon, the temple has a public purpose (such as selling rope or barrels), and knowledge of its true nature is shared among pirates by word of mouth.

Far more common than temples are shrines to the goddess. In port towns, these shrines may be little nooks between buildings with a pirate flag and a carving of Besmara's face or an old ship's figurehead, a carved mast jutting from a pier, or a whittled idol of a woman holding a cup. These shrines usually have a place to hold a stick of incense or a match, or a place to pour a cupful of rum or grog. The shrines with cups are designed so that when the visitor pours the drink into the cup, it trickles out of a hole in the bottom or through a channel in the figurine's arm so it appears the goddess is drinking the offered beverage. A priest living on a ship usually owns a portable shrine that doubles as an altar, and may store it in her quarters or display it on the deck where suddenly pious pirates can mutter a prayer mid-battle.

A PRIEST'S ROLE

There is essentially no hierarchy within the church—each priest crafts his or her own title and recognizes no authority other than the goddess. Priests do not report to anyone, though they may defer to a mentor's decision if there is no compelling reason not to do so. Rarely does a particular ship have more than one priest on board, and even then they may be rivals. Every few years, a charismatic priest-captain may unite other like-minded priests under his or her banner, creating an armada with the leading priest as the admiral, but this is an exception. Most priests consider themselves entirely independent of each other.

Most priests are practical folk rather than zealots, using their magic to gain strength on the water. This is not to say that a typical priest's belief isn't sincere, but there is a marked difference between the crazed devotion of a Lamashtan cleric or noble serenity of an Iomedean paladin and the utilitarian faith of a Besmaran priest. As long as the goddess is respected and gets her fair share of tribute, she is content with little





CUSTOMIZED SUMMON LIST

Besmara's priests can use *summon monster* and *summon nature's ally* spells to summon the following creatures in addition to the normal creatures listed in the spells.

Summon Monster II

Reefclaw* (*Bestiary* 2 234) (CN)

Summon Monster/Nature's Ally V

Saltwater merrow (*Bestiary* 2 189) (NE)

Summon Monster/Nature's Ally VI

Tylosaurus (*Bestiary* 2 91) (N)

* This creature has the entropic simple template (*Bestiary* 2 292).

BESMARAN FAMILIARS

A cleric of Besmara may give up one domain in exchange for a bird, blue-ringed octopus (*Ultimate Magic* 117), king crab (*Ultimate Magic* 119), monkey, or any of the familiars presented in the *Core Rulebook*. The cleric uses her cleric level as her effective wizard level for this purpose. A ranger who worships Besmara may select any of the creatures listed above as a familiar instead of choosing an animal companion. The ranger's effective wizard level for this ability is equal to his ranger level – 3.

more than lip service, and her priests know this. By using her magic to gain wealth, power, and fame, they serve her interests and demonstrate her greatness.

Like lay worshippers, Besmara's priests are either pirates or folk whose business directly relies on piracy. Their personalities run the gamut from dashing privateers to rapacious murderers, and some in the middle may play both roles as the mood or pay suits them. They bless pirates and ships, heal crews, act as go-betweens for those looking for work or workers, guard pirate ships, chase off or bind sea monsters, and always try to profit from their activities. They consider the tithe-based survival of religious monks and priests to be incredibly humiliating and would rather accept a common share swabbing a deck than take a handout from someone else. They work until they've earned enough gold to retire, and go back to work if they spend it all before they die.

Priests of Besmara are usually skilled at Heal and Profession (sailor). Most have ranks in Acrobatics, Appraise, and Intimidate. Canny ones also have ranks in Diplomacy, Knowledge (geography), Knowledge (history), Knowledge (local), and Knowledge (nature). Priests don't

have any set routine, though most follow the normal cycle of activity on ship. Daily prayers are short and to the point.

HOLY TEXT

The Pirate Queen's holy text is *Besmara's Code*, just a few pages detailing treatment of crew, treasure, and captives. Most priests who can read make copies in their own hand; those who cannot read memorize the text's key points and ignore what doesn't concern them.

APHORISMS

These three phrases are the core of the goddess's code, and any person familiar with her faith should recognize them and understand what they mean.

End Your Quarrels on Shore: Whatever disagreements one sailor has with another, onboard a ship is not the place to settle them, for everyone's survival depends on the crew working together. If one member of the crew has a disagreement with another, the place to settle it is on shore—whether this is a port or just a sandy beach.

Thirty Stripes Lacking One: The traditional punishment for a serious infraction on the ship is thirty lashes on the bare back. The captain or boatswain, however, may choose to reserve the last (30th) lash as an act of mercy if the target is repentant or unconscious. Still, the captain always has the option to make that last strike at any time—a threat to ensure better behavior from the target. Usually this “lash debt” is canceled once the ship makes port, and always if the target leaves the crew.

Truce Ends at the Horizon: While pirates recognize the need for parley, any truce is only valid until the opposing ship is past the horizon. This gives the weaker captain a head start should he fear the other captain's intentions. Breaking this part of the code is seen as not only unsportsmanlike, but a threat to all pirates.

HOLIDAYS

The church of the Pirate Queen has no official holidays. Her old role as a master of sea monsters (many of which have seasonal hunting grounds) means that in Garundi lands her faith is remembered more at certain seasonal events. Thus, some tribes may associate her with the return of reefclaws in the summer or the ebbing of sahuagin attacks at the start of winter. Besmara has grown beyond that role, however, and doesn't care about the old rituals as long as she is respected.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

Besmara is a thorn in the side of many lawful powers and a casual ally or enemy of just about everyone else. Like her followers, she interacts peacefully when it suits her, but may betray an ally when it is convenient or profitable. She has been known to associate with Cayden Cailean (who considers her dangerously attractive), Gorum (who treats her like

an untrustworthy mercenary captain), and Gozreh (who calls her sister, lover, monster-tamer, or all of the above). Erastil loathes Besmara because she is a threat to families and doesn't adhere to his idea of a woman's role, Iomedae dislikes her because the Pirate Queen has a corrupt sense of honor, Abadar abhors her because she is a disruption to naval trade, and Asmodeus despises her because she has no sense of order, dares interfere with his plans, and is a female who disrespects him. Because her home is in the Maelstrom, she has frequent interactions with protean cabals and their mysterious lords, but has bargained and bribed them into accepting her presence.

NEW DIVINE SPELLS

Clerics of Besmara may prepare *lesser geas* as a 3rd-level spell and *curse of disgust* (*Pathfinder RPG Ultimate Magic* 215) as a 5th-level spell, but can only use them to cause an aversion to boats, ships, or open bodies of water.

ADVANCED SCURVY

School necromancy [disease, evil]; **Level** cleric 1, druid 1 (Besmara)

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S

Range touch

Target living creature touched

Duration instantaneous

Saving Throw Fortitude negates; **Spell Resistance** yes

The subject contracts an advanced form of scurvy. He becomes constantly fatigued, suffers from bone pain (–1 penalty on Strength- and Dexterity-based checks), wounds easily (add +1 point of damage to any bleed effects affecting the target), experiences loose teeth, and is slow to heal (natural healing occurs at half the normal rate). Scurvy can be treated magically or can be overcome with proper nutrition; eating the right foods ends the fatigue and bone pain within 1–2 days and provides a full cure 2d6 days after that.

CLOUD OF SEASICKNESS

School conjuration (creation) [poison];

Level cleric 2, druid 2, sorcerer/wizard 2 (Besmara)

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, M (a piece of seaweed)

Range close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Effect cloud spreads in 20-ft. radius, 20 ft. high

Duration 1 round/level

Saving Throw Fortitude negates; see text; **Spell Resistance** no
This spell functions like *stinking cloud*, except as noted above and that the vapors make creatures sickened instead of nauseated.

Cloud of seasickness can be made permanent with a *permanency* spell (requiring a 9th-level caster and costing 2,500 gp). A permanent *cloud of seasickness* dispersed by wind reforms in 10 minutes.

PLANAR ALLIES

Besmara is the patron of sea monsters, and all of her best-known minions are great beasts from beneath the waves. All Besmaran priests know of dead pirate captains who are legendary in their hometowns and may call them with the right bribe, but most prefer to conjure nightmare creatures to drag enemy sailors to their deaths. Her herald is *Kelpie's Wrath*, a haunted ship that is a living being (see page 86). The following are well-known supernatural servitors of Besmara, suitable for conjuring with *planar ally* or similar spells.

Blackwarn: This tentacled thing resembles a bear-sized aquatic decapus (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 277) encrusted with barnacles. Stealthy and contrary, its preferred payments are gold, squid brains, or gnome flesh.

Old Vengeance: This ancient charybdis (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 256) has been under Besmara's thumb since before she was a goddess. Though weary and decrepit from age, it persists out of spite and the hopes that someday it will see the Pirate Queen destroyed. It loves the taste of creatures drowned in holy or unholy water.

Rusizi: Alternately described as a turtle, a crocodile, or a dragon turtle with a crocodilian head, this huge creature is a vicious man-eater and is sometimes worshiped as a god by lizardfolk, goblins, and other primitives. Long used to eating humanoid flesh, it prefers virgins, though its service can be bought with gold and adamantine (which it eats, making its shell even harder).

