



THE TIES THAT BIND

SHATTERED HEART ADVENTURE PATH



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The Ties That Bind

The first 5th edition adventure in the *Shattered Heart* Adventure Path, designed for four to five PCs of 6th level.

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Adventure Background

Five centuries ago the fall of the Dracoprime forever changed the history of the peaceful and trusting halflings of the Picollan archipelago. The event known across Aventyr as the Great Schism battered the island homes of the short folk, causing many to sink into the sea, or explode in a blast of volcanic fury. Even the Big Island was not spared; tsunamis ravaged the coastline and earthquakes spread devastation inland. The Great Mountain bore the scars of landslides and suffered the collapse of entire cave systems. Loss of life was huge, not only in the initial blast, but during the two centuries that followed. Ash and dust blanketed the lands, threatening not only the once vibrant farmlands, but even the hearty expanse of the Great Forest. Weather patterns took decades to return to normal, and the currents of the southern ocean forever changed the migratory paths of the sea life that once supported a robust fishing economy. For the survivors the next two centuries would be a time of endurance and struggle.

No single group suffered more than the Devotees of the Four Hearts. The majority of these priests of the Great Mother's hidden mysteries perished in the cataclysm when three of their four great holy sites were destroyed. Only the temple to the earth aspect of the Great Mother survived the fall of the Dracoprime intact. The scattered remnants of the Devotees retired to this site, but the death throes of the Dracoprime were not finished with Picollo. The alien god Zagnexis transported its physical self and its spawn across the universe. The skull of the Dracoprime disgorged the hoyrall into the dark reaches of the underworld, and into Picollo, where the Hoyrall Wars would see the already beleaguered halflings brought near to extinction. The remaining Devotees joined in the struggle. During the siege of the great dwarven city of Stoneroot, the last refuge of these clerics was sealed and abandoned. One by one the Devotees gave their lives in the struggle with the Hoyrall, until none remained to pass on the deepest mysteries of the Great Mother.

The events of the Confluence, during which the connection of the hive mind to the Hoyrall to their god was severed, eventually provided relief for the halflings, allowing them to take back their lands and come out of hiding. They began to rebuild their homeland, but the disasters of the Great Schism and two and a half centuries of war left its mark on the once peace-loving society. Modern halflings pay lip service to the merry and celebratory traditions of ancient times: the end of the wars means that the traditional festivals are once again being celebrated, but there is a darker shadow now to the halflings, an untrustworthy part. This is the part that forges secret pacts, thieves' guilds, and dark deals to protect the halfling race and prevent outsiders from again invading or betraying their lands, regardless of the impact of such changes on the ancient traditions. The Great Mother watches to see what will become of her children as they cross over from war into peace.

One watched child is the cleric Carlyetta Wesleigh. The Great Mother revealed to her the mysteries of the four hearts. The priest seeks to restore the four temples and re-establish the Devotees as a force of protection in Picollo. Carlyetta's outlook, like many other halflings, is tarnished by the grim history of her people and her understanding of the goddess is less than perfect. She travels the roads as a Fallen Leaf (heretic) of the goddess, but the Mother Spirit hopes she will find her way home: it is the dream the goddess has for all her children.

Adventure Summary

A sea voyage to Picollo sets the stage for the restoration of the first Temple of the Four Hearts.

In the employ of Carlyetta Wesleigh, the PCs sail to Picollo with the last of a load of indentured servants whose transport fees will fund the restoration of the water temple of the Great Mother. The incongruity of a community-domain-based cleric transporting indentured servants marks Carlyetta as a Fallen Leaf. Carlyetta's heresy is encouraged by the machinations of an advanced tripurasura seeking to damn the cleric. The PCs' actions during the course of the adventure unwittingly frustrate or advance the tripurasura's meddling, and encourage Carlyetta to return to the fold or embrace her heretical leanings.

While escorting the indentures to the ship, the PCs brawl with a mob venting their displeasure at the halfling's "peculiar institution". Once at sea the PCs' special status alienates the sailors, many of whom have been pressed, sparking a community-building exercise in the form of training competitions. The PCs then rescue a lost child from the attack of attic whisperers, uncover the source of a debilitating sickness, and fend off an attack by a great octopus.

Arrival in Picollo after months at sea introduces the PCs to Picollo, and to influential NPCs in the capital settlement known as The Nines. Tales of nearby Vikmordere raiders are rife throughout the town. Carlyetta departs to obtain a relic required to restore the water temple, the PCs continue overland to the village of Pembroke, home to the ancient holy site. En route, the PCs investigate a shipwrecked longship and an ancient cyclopean landmark.

Pembroke is beset by misfortune. From the bottom of the bay, a sea hag coven wreaks mischief, defending its domain with adaro and merrow allies, giant eels, and draugr animated from the corpses of Vikmordere raiders; the very raiders who have been plaguing Picollan shores. The Vikmordere seek a child lost to a confrontation with these same hags years ago and have learned she was raised by the halfling villagers. The raiders have taken prisoners to force a swap. Once the hostages are saved, and the temple cleared of threats, Carlyetta returns from Stoneroot with the relic and supplies required to effect a full restoration.

Adventure Hooks

- The party's group may contain an exiled halfling (one who was raised off the shores of Picollo) who wishes to explore the land of her race's birth.
- A PC might be a worshiper of the Great Mother and wish to rediscover the ancient traditions.
- Picollo is mostly closed to immigration by other races; working with Carlyetta is a chance to gain access to that hidden land.
- One of the PCs may be related, or connected to, an indentured servant in Picollo. The *Autumn Leaves* provides a way to reconnect with lost family and friends.

Act One - The Journey Begins

Read the following to get started:

The caravel Autumn Leaves, swings quietly at anchor in the harbor of Cherr's Landing in the eastern Klavek kingdom. In the great cabin, Carlyetta Wesleigh is seated at a desk, her clerk attending and passing documents to her with ink-stained fingers. The halfling priest examines the parchments, her eyes flickering to each of you in turn as she shuffles from page to page.

Though the scrutiny makes you somewhat uneasy, you are comfortable enough to let your mind wander to the meal last night, when you once again dined as a group, renewing old acquaintances and strengthening new ones. The reasons each of you are onboard are as varied as the snowflakes that fall in this cold land, but for whatever reason, you are a member of the captain's special crew, above and aloof from the sailors that work the ship. You are her fixers, her troubleshooters, and though her motives are often hidden from you, the rewards to come appear worth the effort.

The captain stands and speaks, "I am not certain this little experiment will work. You are a strange collection of fellows, but the information I have here seems to indicate you are skilled, and some promise that you may one day realize great achievements.

Setting the parchment aside, she continues, "If you are ready then, let us see if the words on a page can be matched in deeds. At the Inn of the Smoking Pipe speak to the barkeep Waldo Pennyfeather. Acting as my agent, he has assembled a load of indentures for servitude on the island of fair Picollo. The inn is located in the Picollan trade mission in the docks district. Escort the indentures safely back to the ship, and make haste, for we sail on the evening tide.

I am sending the bosun with you. He can address any questions you may have on your arrival at the Smoking Pipe. Good Luck."

Carlyetta answers the PCs questions as best she can, but reminds them that time is precious. Carlyetta's answers below are colored by her philosophies and ideology, and offer the PCs a first glimpse into her moral code.

Indentures?

Yes - not only are Klavekians prone to drink, but their entire society is bankrupt to the point that it is easy to slip into the lowest dregs of existence - begging on the streets. I weep for a society that does not protect and defend the downtrodden, often simply skilled folk down on their luck. There is land to reclaim and redevelop in Picollo - more land than our beleaguered peoples can tend to. Our tradition of indentured servitude both protects and provides an opportunity for advancement for the disenfranchised of less civilized races. It is also one way for the tall folk to re-earn our trust after their failings in the Hoyrall Wars.

Why does a group of servants need an escort to the ship?

The common and unenlightened folk of Klavek do not understand that there is a better life waiting for their abandoned and forgotten across the seas. They think us slavers, and there have been... scuffles... in the past. It is not slavery I take these folk into - hard work, yes - but hard work with a reward at the end.

What is the ship's greater mission?

We sail to Picollo to restore the first of four great temples; everything I do is toward that end, even providing the new opportunities for the indentures we will carry across the seas. There will be time for more details when you return. There are months of sailing ahead of us to fill your evenings with details of that challenge.

Scene 1: Slaver, Sailor, Savior

A1. The Smoking Pipe

The docks district of Cherr's Landing is full of dives and sailors' haunts; beggars and cripples roam the streets. The Picollan Trade Mission, in contrast, is well kept and maintained. An entire block of buildings make up the Mission, with walls and wooden gates closing off the side alleys, and a larger gate providing entrance to a main courtyard. A group of unfortunates somewhat more presentable than the beggars of the street, but not by far, sit in front of one of the buildings inside the courtyard, halfling soldiers in leather looking on.



The bosun, Petrok Tarfingers, escorts the PCs past the waiting suppliants, commenting that “this bunch isn’t as mangy as the last one.” He leads them into the Smoking Pipe and to the bar, where Waldo Pennyfeather greets him and dubiously regards the PCs, but serves them whatever they wish. The party overhears the two halflings’ conversation. Waldo is amazed that the *Autumn Leaves* has returned for yet another load of indentures, but Petrok informs him that the money is good, and the tall folk are not all useless like the beggars in the docks district once a good dose of common sense is beaten into them. Petrok thinks Carlyetta is too idealistic to be a true entrepreneur like his brother back in Picollo, but she keeps a taught ship, and other than crazy ideas like trusting a bunch of tall folk without putting them “through the seven” (a full term of indentureship) is not a bad mistress.

Finishing his ale, he calls out to the PCs to drink up, turning back to Waldo and saying, “I’m flat mate, except for this for the goodies.” He hands Waldo a small pouch of coin, and Waldo places a number of paper wrapped packages on the bar. If the PCs offer to buy a round, the bosun nods to the booty on the counter and tells them Waldo gives a decent rate on cabin stores, because mushroom and pea soup at sea gets boring. The PCs may purchase rations from Waldo at standard prices. If asked, it’s a two month sail to Picollo.

When marching the indentures back to the harbor, Petrok asks the PCs to blaze the trail while he brings up the rear to make sure none straggle off. The indentures are not bound, and carry what pitiful few belongings they have.

Creatures: Part way back to the ship, a gang of toughs block the street. Their leader, a muscular human female speaks:

“Well my brothers, it looks like the half-pints have a few tame slaves at their service. Perhaps we give them a taste of what freedom’s fists taste like.” Two hulking bare-knuckled brutes saunter out of the shadows, while four other pugilists cut you off from the indentures bringing up your rear.

Combat: (2) Veteran plus (4) Thug; Encounter Total XP: 1,800 Adjusted XP: 3,600 Hard; See the official entry for full statistics.

Development: The town watch arrives one minute after the combat ceases. A **DC 10 Wisdom (Perception)** check notes the guards’ arrival (PCs looting the opponents have disadvantage on this check), granting the chance to take an action. If the guards observe looting, their starting attitude changes from indifferent to unfriendly and they immediately call on the PCs to stop what they are doing. The guards accept that this is simply a street brawl and that the PCs’ were not the aggressors if the PCs succeed on a **DC 15 Charisma** check. The PCs have disadvantage on this check if they caused bystander injuries or collateral damage. Failure means the guard attempts to detain them. If detained, Carlyetta must pay 100 gp per PC to bail them out of jail and straighten out the mess with the authorities. The PCs earn one *community point* if they accept responsibility and repay Carlyetta.

Ignoring the guards’ commands, or attempting to escape by force, brings down the ire of the entire watch. The initial patrol (4 **Veteran**) consists of a 4 guardsmen. If the PCs overcome these guards, it takes them 10 minutes to get back to the ship. An additional patrol of 4 guardsmen engages them every 1d6 minutes. For each patrol defeated (including the first), the fines

increase by 100 gp per PC and the PCs lose an additional *community point* (in this case paying back the fines reduces the number of points lost by half, rounded down). The PCs are on the hook even if they make it back to ship without being captured; the harbor master comes to settle with the halfling captain before the tide turns, and unlike the PCs, Carlyetta is unwilling to risk escalating the diplomatic incident.

If the PCs are defeated in this combat, the street toughs steal one random item (worth less than 500 GP from each PC) and scatter before the watch arrives.

Treasure - The thugs have only minor coinage on them. (1d6 x 10 silver pieces each)



Community Points and the Tripurasura

Throughout the adventure, the PCs have opportunities to earn community points. If the PCs take actions that promote community and teamwork rather than self-interest and pragmatism, it encourages Carlyetta to re-embrace the community tenets of her faith, and by extension alter the path of halfling society as influenced by the resurgent Devotees of the Shattered Heart.

The captain's clerk is the tripurasura in disguise (*alter self*). He has been encouraging Carlyetta's own heresy to mock and corrupt the worship of the Mother. Proscribed from ascending through each incarnation of Asuran existence by one of the Asura Rana, the tripurasura Grattip Dunhella can ascend directly to the form of Asurendra by promulgating a great enough mockery of the gods. This may enable him to ascend in a matter of centuries rather than millennia, and the outsider has picked up additional powers and skills as a result of his single-minded quest.

The presence of the clerk in read-aloud text and various descriptive moments is simply to establish him as present in the story. It is not until book two, *Temple of Jewels and Mirrors*, that his actions become direct enough that the PCs take notice of them. He has sufficient magical protections in place to withstand all but the most insistent examination by the PCs; if your players begin to take such actions simply absent the clerk/tripurasura from future scenes to deny them the opportunity: the corruptive influence continues behind the scenes.

A2. Anchor's Away

Once embarked, *Autumn Leaves* sets sail. The PCs learn that some of the halfling sailors have been pressed into service from enclaves in the Aventyr mainland, and these men are put through vigorous training. The bosun continues to view the PCs with distrust. The heroes share a meal or two with the captain, and the GM may reveal any background felt appropriate about the temples and Carlyetta's mission.

A3. Finding their sea legs

Nine days out of Cherr's Landing a sequence of events tests the PCs' mettle and provides an opportunity to build community.

A week at sea and you have found your sea legs. For the most part, it has been an easy sail. Your duties as the captain's special fixers allow you to complete your personal tasks and still leaves time to enjoy your leisure, in contrast to the training regimen of the recently pressed sailors. Indeed, the only inconvenience you suffer is being called to stations each day at dawn, even before spells may be prepared or prayers uttered, in case some threat appears as the sun breaks over the waters.

The morning drills are particularly unsatisfactory to the bosun's eye, and he is harder than usual on the new recruits, even striking them with a knotted rope (his starter) to get them to perform. The PCs notice red welts breaking out on the victims of the bosun's wrath. If this abuse does not cause the PC to make comment, the bosun spies them and calls them out - the cloves on his breath almost overpowering the olfactory senses.

Oh-ho! 'Tis the lords of the manor. Too good to do an honest day's work like a poor sailorman? Ye would not last the forenoon's watch let alone a day working the ship like these poor jack tars here."

The PCs can easily sense that the crew resents their status as "passengers". They recognize the opportunity to join in the day's training activities as a way to bond with the sailors. The following day, the bosun sets a series of competitions between the crew and the PCs. Carlyetta observes from the stern castle.

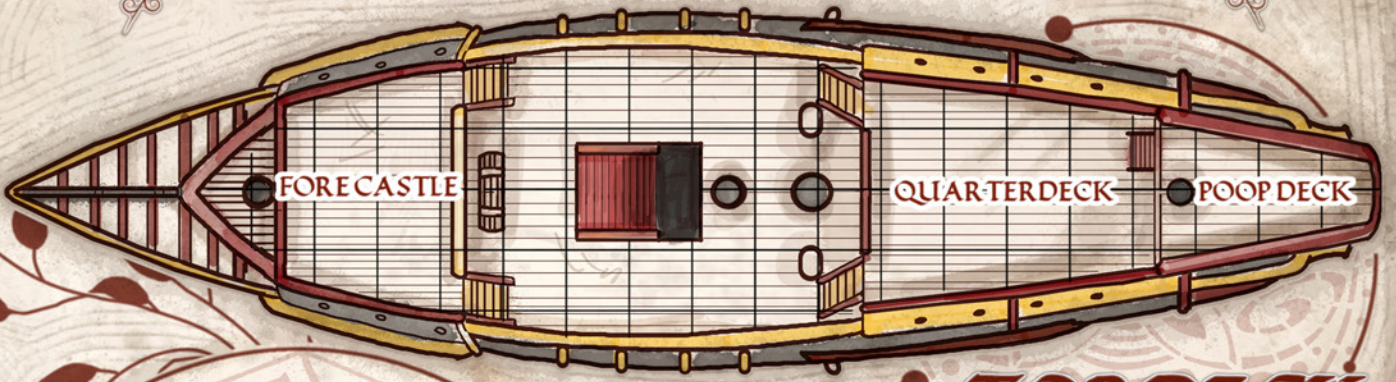
Before each skill challenge, the PCs may take part a training session with the crew. The bosun delights in putting them through the paces. PCs who participate in a training session earn advantage on any one skill check within a challenge, as well as forming a stronger bond of community with the pressed seamen. If more than half the party participates in a training session, the PCs earn one *community point*. A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** check reveals this participation threshold to the PCs, correctly interpreting the alternating good natured cajoling and not-so friendly derision of the crew and bosun respectively.

At the end of each skill challenge, PCs make a **DC 10 Constitution** check modified by +2 for each additional skill challenge throughout the day, and +2 for every training session completed. If the check fails, the character gains a level of exhaustion.

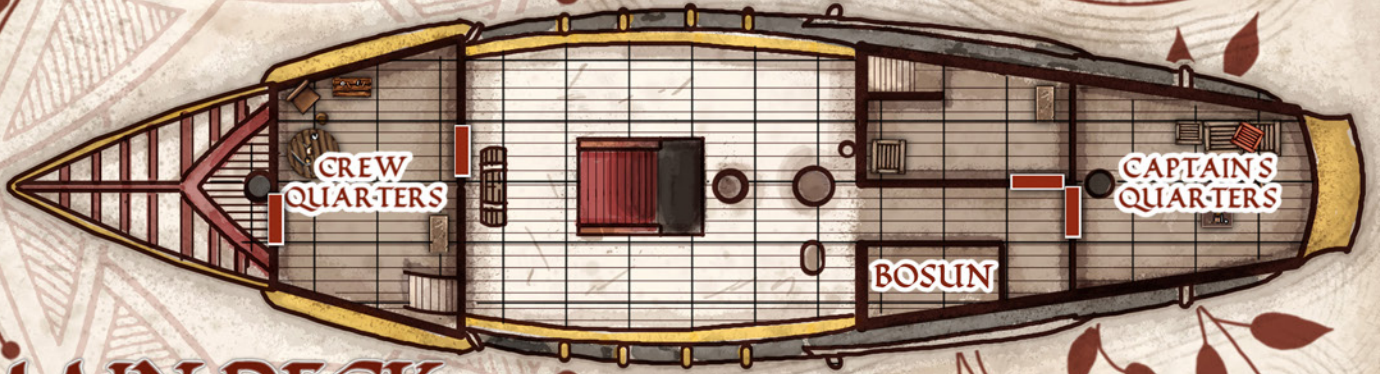
Some portions of an exercise have a time limit; PCs who do not succeed in the allotted time are challenged to complete a series of drills (along with other crew members not up to snuff). PCs may elect not to participate in this additional training, but the crewmen who are forced to do so begrudge them the freedom to "sit it out".



AUTUMN LEAVES



TOP DECK



MAIN DECK



MAIN HOLD

CABLE TIER

BILGES

SCALE IN FEET

LOWER HOLD



BLANDO

Sitting out the additional training costs the party one community point per exercise, per PC.

PCs may use magic (spells or consumables) during the challenges but unless they share such magic with an equal number of crew they lose one community point (per “cheater”). Worn magical or mundane gear does not count towards this restriction.

Skill Challenge One - Sail Drill

Part one: Climb to the main yard within 3 rounds (35 feet, DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check).

Part two: Reef and set Sails. DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Athletics) check. A PC who has completed the challenge may aid a PC next to him granting that player advantage. The drill continues until all PCs have succeeded

Part three: Balance on the footropes. A DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check means the PC maintains his balance on the footrope while reefing and setting the sails. Failure by five or more results in a 30 foot fall to the deck below and fatigue.

Skill Challenge Two - Boat Drill

The PCs must work in concert to hoist the longboats in and out. A DC 16 Intelligence check, or a DC 14 Strength check works the hoists safely. If any member of the party fails the check, the blocks become stuck, arming the trap below.

The ropes in the hoist tangle and become stuck. The boat sways precariously.

Only one PC may let go of the ropes to disable the device; if more than one does so, the boat falls. A DC 12 Dexterity check is necessary to untangle the block. If the check fails, the boat swings precariously in the seas and can hit one of the PCs or crew holding the lines. This impact may cause the PC to drop the line which can crash the boat to the deck, require a day or more to repair.

Development: The midday meal, a weak mushroom stew, is simpler than the meals usually served to the party. PCs who eat with the crew earn their respect for sharing their rations, but risk disease from contaminated mushrooms. *Fungal rot; save Constitution DC 12; effect: gain 1 level of exhaustion; cure 1 save; Retry save daily.* Even if the PCs do not contract fungal rot, the meal does little to restore their hunger and they have disadvantage on their next ability check. Supplementing the meal with personal rations eliminates the penalty, but sets the PCs apart from the crew unless they provide enough rations to share out with the 40 crewmen. One day's trail rations may be divided amongst two crewman; a casting of *create food and water* sustains three times the normal number of humanoids because it is all shared out in this one meal.

Supplementing the midday meal without sharing with the crew costs the group one community point per PC who supplements his own meal.

Skill Challenge - Kedging the anchor

The PCs must man the capstan and help in the cable tier to use the anchor cable to shift the vessel's position.

Part one: Feed the cable out of the hawse pipe without becoming entangled. Each PC must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity check within three tries. Failure by 5 or more on any check means the PC becomes entangled. PCs who do not succeed within three rounds are pinched by between cable and bulkhead and suffer 3d6+10 bludgeoning damage.

Part two: Manning the capstan. A DC 12 Strength check starts the capstan turning without straining muscles. PCs who fail have disadvantage on their check in part three.

Part Three: Going the distance. A DC 16 Constitution saving throw is required to avoid exhaustion while cranking the ship up and down the bay. Failure ends the challenge for that PC and grants a level of exhaustion.

Development: If the PCs ignore the taunting of the bosun in the first place, they automatically fail to build community within the ship's complement and lose 5 community points. The following day a storm brews up and the PCs are pressed into service to perform the same tasks as in the challenges – this time to save the ship itself from running aground on a reef. Increase the DCs of the sail drill by 4, and all other challenges by 2 because of the storm. No pre-training or extra training is available, but the Constitution check to avoid exhaustion after an exercise increases by 1 after each “challenge”. PCs must eat the mushroom stew (or nothing) as their personal stores are not accessible during the storm. Even if the heroes fail a skill challenge, the joint efforts of passengers and crew save the ship.

Development: Proceed directly to scene A4. Scenes A3 through A5 are designed to occur in sequence to stretch the PCs' resource management. Note the exhaustion level of any PCs as it features in the combat in A4.

A4. Ghosts of Shame

As the day of training comes to a close (or the storm blows itself out), a petty officer reports that one of the children of the indentures is lost. The parents and five-year old brother of the lost girl wait expectantly nearby. Carlyetta requests that the PCs look into the disappearance as the crew is busy restoring the ship to quarters.

The PCs eventually make their way to the forward hold where the lost girl can be found, but if they think to speak to the family before commencing their search a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check draws attention to a small bear doll the little boy hides in his arms. The parents do not recognize the toy. The boy's attitude may be improved with a DC 10 Charisma check but he regards answering any questions about the doll as information that could result in his punishment (disadvantage on the check). If convinced to talk, he says that his sister's new friends gave her the doll, and promised to find another to give to him. The “friends” live in the forward hold. Asking the petty officer about the doll is no help, but a nearby crewman recognizes the toy as belonging to an indentured family the *Autumn Leaves* carried to Piccolo a few years back. He relates the sad tale of the mother and father sickening and dying, followed shortly thereafter by their triplet daughters. The sailor mournfully reports that though the other indentures made sure the babes were fed, they received no love from the motley collection of souls in transit to servitude, and that the “poor little tykes died from lack of love”.

Creatures: Three poltergeists (manifested from the souls of the abandoned babes) have been attracted by the arrival of children in the current muster of servants. The undead lured their new playmate to the forward hold, where she lies unconscious, partially hidden by a crate. The souls of the triplets are determined that no one separate them from their new companion.

Combat : (3) Poltergeists; Encounter Total XP: 1,350 Adjusted XP: 2,700 Medium; see official entry for full statistics.

Treasure: The undead tempted the little girl with a collection of toys, which includes a bag of marbles. Mixed in among the glass marbles are half a dozen huge pearls worth 200 gp each.



discovers the dirty bilges later that day, commenting on the PCs' lack of skill.

B2. Bilges

The PCs are instructed to clean the bilges with pumping equipment located near the tiller. The bilges are knee deep in scummy, garbage-strewn water and fungal growth and count as difficult terrain for a creature without a swim speed. A PC must go into the bilges to place the canvas hoses correctly.

Creatures: A bilge slime hides at the back of the bilges, as far from the hatch as it can rest. A **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception)** check spots the ooze through the heavy layer of mushrooms and fungal growth, but a PC may only make a check once in the bilges, or by lying on the upper deck and bending over the coaming to peer into the bilges.

Scene 2: Becalmed

The following day the *Autumn Leaves* enters the latitude of the Scorched Lands, a world-wide weather pattern created by the fall of the Shards of the Sun centuries ago. Even out to sea, the air is stale and hot, and winds scarce. By the noon watch, the ship is becalmed, and many sailors are already affected the inhospitable climate.

B1. A bit of nausea

PCs contaminated by the mushroom stew begin to show signs of the disease today. A **DC 20 Wisdom (Medicine)** check identifies the disease as fungal rot - often caused by tainted mushrooms. PCs, passengers, and crew continue to be exposed to the disease once a day for three days unless an immediate investigation is launched. After three days, Carlyetta sets them to the task, commenting on their lack of initiative. Two crew members are involved with the food stores: the ship's cook and the purser.

The purser claims to provide only the best. A successful **Wisdom (Insight) check by the PCs contested by the purser's Charisma check (+3)** indicates the purser is hiding something.

Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) checks may convince the purser to show the PCs his stores or his account books. The dregs of the purser's dried mushrooms are untainted; revealing that fact that they ran out is an unimportant secret (**DC 10**). The purser tries to put the whole blame on the cook if this secret is revealed. Getting the purser to admit that he knew the Cook was supplementing the stores is a secret that can result in punishment (**DC 20**).

A **DC 15 Intelligence check** correctly interprets the account books, proving that the purser has been making payments to the cook and has known all along the mushrooms' provenance.

In the galley, the cook starts as indifferent unless PCs have 2 or more community points, in which case he starts friendly. Regardless, he allows the PCs access to the galley for their investigation. Examining the mushrooms in the galley with a **DC 12 Intelligence (nature) check** identifies them as freshly harvested. A **DC 20 Wisdom (Medicine) or Intelligence (nature) check** reveals them as tainted.

Questions about the mushrooms frightens the cook, who lies to the PCs about where they came from (claiming they came from the purser's stores **Wisdom (Insight) check DC 15**). If accused of lying he clams up pending a successful **Charisma (Persuasion) DC 17 check**: a secret that can result in punishment) or a **DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check**. If the PCs make either check the cook reveals all he knows.

PCs who failed an original check to translate the purser's log may try again if they discover that the purser is paying the cook.

PCs who correctly solve the mystery, casting the purser as the "villain" and the cook as stupid, but well-meaning earn 2 community points, unless they intimidated the cook, in which case they earn one point.

Development: PCs earn 1,600 experience for solving the mystery, 1,200 if they do not. If the mystery is unsolved, the bosun

Bilge Ooze

Large ooze, unaligned

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 125(15d10 + 45)

Speed 10 ft., climb 10 ft., swim 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12(+1)	6(-2)	14(+2)	2(-4)	6(-2)	1(-5)

Damage Resistances fire

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, lightning

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, prone

Senses blindsight 60ft (Blind beyond this point), passive Perception 8

Languages --

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Amorphous. The ooze can move through a space as small as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

False Appearance. While the ooze remains motionless it is indistinguishable from an oily pool or blob of goo.

ACTIONS

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage.

Engulf. The ooze moves up to its speed. While doing so, it can enter Large or smaller creatures' spaces. Whenever the ooze enters a creature's space, the creature must make a **DC 14 Dexterity saving throw**. On a successful save, the creature can choose to be pushed 5 feet back, or to the side of the ooze. A creature that chooses not to be pushed suffers the consequences of a failed saving throw. On a failed save, the ooze enters the creature's space and the creature takes 10 (d36) poison damage and is engulfed. The engulfed creature can't breathe, is restrained, and takes 21 (6d6) poison damage at the start of each of the ooze's turns. When the ooze moves, the engulfed creature moves with it. An engulfed creature can try to escape by taking an action to make a **DC 14 Strength check**. On a success, the creature escapes and enters a space of its choice within 5 feet of the ooze.

Development: The PCs discover (during a search or the pumping out of the forward bilges) that small cracks in the forward bulkhead door are stained with slime and gunk, as if food or some other decaying matter has been pushed through it. The lower hold lies on the far side of this bulkhead, and while a bilge channel runs underneath the bulkhead, it seems odd that slime would begrime the walls of the bulkhead from lower hold. Should the players decline to investigate the bosun reminds them that dealing with the infestation in the bilges requires cleaning the channel that runs through the lower hold.

Combat : Bilge Ooze; Encounter Total XP: 2,300 Easy;

B3. Lower Hold

Creatures: A trio of ooze mephits have been feeding their “pet” slime with garbage pushed through the knotholes and cracks and observing its growth. The lower hold is dank, but not knee deep in water as were the bilges. Rock ballast and barrels with a thin layer of slimy scum makes all but the central area difficult terrain. The ooze mephits live in a corrupted water butt near the starboard side of the hold. Entry to the lower hold is through the door in the bilges bulkhead, the main cargo grating midships, a ladder on the starboard side of the upper cargo deck, and a door from the cable tier (accessed through the orlop).

Ooze Mephit

Small elemental, neutral evil

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 41(10d6+ 10)

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft., swim 20 ft.

STR DEX CON INT WIS CHA
8 (-1) 12(+1) 12 (+1) 9 (-1) 11 (+0) 7 (-2)

Skills Stealth +3

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned, blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, prone

Senses blindsight 60ft (Blind beyond this point), passive Perception 10

Languages Aquan, Common

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Death Burst. When the mephit dies it explodes in a burst of noxious poison. Each Medium or smaller creature within 5 feet of it must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw take 10 (3d6) poison damage.

False Appearance. While the mephit remains motionless it is indistinguishable from an oily pool or blob of goop.

ACTIONS

Pseudopod. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (2d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage plus 4 (1d6) poison damage.

Poison Breath. The Mephit belches noxious tar onto one creature within 10 feet of it. If the target is Medium or smaller, it must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or take 21 (6d6) poison damage.

Combat : (3) Ooze Mephit; Encounter Total XP: 2,100 Adjusted XP: 4,200 Hard;

Development: The bilge channels must be cleared; the pump may become stuck as the PCs use it to suction out the slime and gunk (see treasure below).

Treasure: A ring of swimming (see official entry for stats) lies buried underneath the sludge. A **DC 18 Wisdom(Perception)** check reveals its hiding place, although a PC digging through the slime is exposed to the noxious sludge and must make a **DC 14 Constitution** saving throw every minute of exposure. Failure gains a level of exhaustion. *Detect magic* also reveals the ring (moderate transmutation). If undiscovered in the slime, the ring is sucked into and jams the bilge pump. A **DC 14 Strength** check draws in enough liquid to clear the pump, expelling the ring into the sea at the other end of the hose, but if the pump is examined when it jams, a **Wisdom(Perception)** or **Intelligence(Investigation)** check DC 12 discovers the ring before it is lost.

B4. Octopus Attack

Back on deck, the air is somewhat fresher, although the odor of the slime and debris pitched over the side occasionally assaults your noses. The entire crew is listless and uncomfortable, victims of the sun's remorseless rays. The waters begin to stir, and the glimmer of hope that it is the return of the wind is dashed as huge tentacles reach out of the sea.

Attracted by the slime and sludge being pumped out from the bilges, an octopus hauls itself part way up the ship's side to find a tasty treat. Beneath the sludge it is almost impossible to spot (**Wisdom(Perception)** **DC 20**) before it attacks, but fortunately the aquatic monster must use the surprise round to haul itself out of the water onto the deck to attack.

Monstrous Octopus

Huge beast, unaligned

Armor Class 8

Hit Points 150 (20d12+ 20)

Speed 10 ft., swim 60 ft.

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

Skills Perception +5 Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages --

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Hold Breath. While out of the water the octopus can hold its breath for one hour without needing to make any checks.

Underwater Camouflage. The octopus has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks while underwater.

Water Breathing. The octopus can only breathe while underwater.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The octopus makes 3 tentacle attacks,
Tentacles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature it is grappled (Escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the octopus cant use this tentacle against another target.
Ink Cloud (Recharges after a Short or Long rest). A 20-foot radius cloud of ink extends all around the octopus if it is underwater. The area is heavily obscured for 1 minute, although a significant current can displace the cloud, After releasing the ink, the octopus can use the dash action as a bonus action.

Combat : Monstrous Octopus; Encounter Total XP: 2,300 Easy;
Morale: When it has successfully grappled three targets, or when its hit points are reduced to 50%, the beast drops into the sea and starts moving away, satisfied with whatever food it has managed to snatch.
Developments: Any crewman rescued from the clutches of the octopus earns the PCs one community point, two if they must take to the water to effect the release.



The NINES

NORTH WOODS

Spring creek


Salmons Run


Milton

Ferry

Marigold River


Rivercross


Scrivenston

Lamb's ridge



Sudbury creek


Hayweather

Ferry

West hills


Sudbury


Culloden

Coast Road
Drift

Drift woods


Codspen

Coast Road

Lighthouse




Adventure
A WEEK.COM

Blando

Act Two - Picollo, the Island Home

A month at sea passes without incident after leaving the stillborn waters of the scorched seas. For the last ten days the big island of Picollo has lain off the port side while the Autumn Leaves makes its way down its length and swings around the southern tip to make harbor in the capital city. The approaching anchorage is the first real glimpse of a halfling settlement save scattered villages visible along the western shore. To be honest, the town looks scarcely larger than those small settlements.

Those who know Picollo seem gladdened to see the mouth of the Marigold River and the deep-water port of Culloden. The port is the gateway to The Nines, a collection of nine villages that form the political center of Picollo. Each village is within half a day's march of each other, and the proximity of these settlements makes them the closest thing the halfling people have to an urban center. The sailors promise most anything a halfling could want is available within The Nines.

The Nines

Town

DEMOGRAPHICS

Population: 4,750

Government: Council

Commerce: Basic supplies are readily available, though exotic goods and services can be found. Inns and taverns support travelers. Some magic shops exist.

Organizations: Located at the mouth of the Marigold River, the nine villages that host the Eldermoot, Board of Indentures and the Council of Freedman consist of a deep water port, milling villages along the river, fishing and farming villages up and down the coast, all within half a day's travel of each other. Individually, the deep-water port of Culloden and the government seat of Scrivenston would be considered small towns, but the symbiotic relationship of all nine settlements together creates a stronger municipal collective.

Not included in the name, but certainly in the population count is a tenth settlement, the freedman colony of Rivercross. Situated across the river from Scrivenston, this village of some 120 souls contains the wealthiest freedmen in Picollo. Many owe their wealth to a term of service on the Council of Freedmen (with its attendant bribes) and some retain considerable political influence. A few of the freedmen in Rivercross keep indentures of their own and most indentures and freedmen across Picollo hate all that Rivercross stands for: the perpetuation of the injustices of the halfling's "peculiar institution".

Arrival in the The Nines provides an opportunity for the PCs to explore, dispose of extra treasure, obtain magical gear and supplies, and learn local rumors. Roleplaying opportunities connect the heroes with prominent recurring NPCs.

Entering the Sandbox

These interactions need not be run in order. Indeed, this is a good occasion to let the PCs chart their own course a bit, inserting an interaction organically into their travels about town. It may even be possible to interweave these interactions, encouraging your players to become more invested in their relationships with the NPCs. This is also a showcase opportunity to illustrate the deal-making and dark currents that threaten to undermine ancient halfling traditions.

C1. Rumors and Sightings

In addition to the rumors presented here, the PCs may gather information on their final destination (Pembroke) while in The Nines. The **DC checks** are presented in the introduction to Act Three.

Two topics fly off the tongues of the rumormongering folk of The Nines, the first of which is the current deliberations in the Eldermoot about indentured and freedman rights. Today is the last day of debates before the Council of Freedmen are banished from the Eldermoot for the traditional three days in ten. Today, the Freedmen have the Right of Voice and may speak in assembly, so the debates promise to be lively. A vigorous book-making concern has been offering odds on how elders and councilors will vote, and there is much conjecture about the amount and origin of the many bribes changing hand this past week.

Additional tales report raids on the southern shores of Picollo by a pair of Vikmordere longships. Some folk recall similar raids twenty years ago, but these most recent attacks differ in nature. There has been little loss of life, and scant destruction of property. Released hostages speak of being questioned about the "lost one". The attacks began during a full moon, and a huge wolf-like creature participates in the assaults.

C2. The Broker

The indentures shipped to Picollo are consigned to the "care" of Digory Crosseyes (LE male halfling, use bandit leader stats). Digory, the brother of Carlyetta's bosun, buys and sells contracts all over Picollo, and his selfishness prompts him to exploit the "peculiar institution" for all its worth. Unabashedly greedy, his lip service to the notion that indentureship is a path to reform and advancement for non-halflings is readily apparent – he views indentures as figures in a profit ledger.

The PCs witness Crosseyes' contemptuous treatment and barely adequate accommodations of the recent immigrants. If so inclined, 500 gp in medicines, better housing, clothing and provisions would ease the lot of not just this current batch of indentures, but those yet to arrive in Digory's intake compound. The adventurers might provide this aid through Tryfenna Hayweather, an abolitionist activist, or confront Digory directly. Digory is unfriendly and any request that costs him gold is considered aid that results in "financial" punishment, while costs covered by the PCs are merely lengthy aid, unless the PCs agree to cover an administrative charge of 100 gp in addition to the original 500 gp. If the PCs succeed with charity and diplomacy, they earn one community point. Intimidating Digory is an option (**DC 18 Charisma(Intimidation)**), but costs the PCs one community point.

C3. The Exemplar

Tryfena Hayweather (NG female halfling, **noble**) is Carlyetta's cousin and an avowed abolitionist. She protests by improving the lot of the indentures throughout Picollo. A charming and witty lass, the fire of the Goddess burns bright her sparkling eyes. Tryfena is betrothed to Myghal Weskenver (LN male halfling, **mage**), one of the Second Speakers in the Eldermoot.

PCs might encounter Tyrfena shopping for, or bringing aid to, the indentures (although her resources are scant), watching proceedings in the Eldermoot, or in the company of her brother Faerilon.

C4. The Crusader

Faerilon Hayweather (LG male halfling, **knight**) has joined Carlyetta's cause and is currently assembling an expedition to restore the Fire temple. Good natured but driven, Faerilon possesses a dry sense of humor. He might introduce himself to the PCs by commenting on the behaviors of the elders and freedman councilors during open sessions of the Eldermoot, or even during a recess where bags of coin change hands. He might be seen in the company of his sister or cousin, and he eventually seeks out the PCs for their assistance with Digory Crossseys.



Faeliron is in need of a boatwright, and no halfling craftsmen are willing to sail on his expedition to the Burning Isle. He has learned that one of the recently arrived indentures is a ship builder but cannot convince Digory to allow him to buy out his contract. The only way Digory will agree to, as he puts it, "eat the costs of renegotiating with his customers," is if he can recoup the costs. He can do so if the PCs agree to make up half of the overland escort of the indentures to Pembroke. This allows him to send a much-reduced guard contingent and secure a contract (for a hefty fee) for halfling shipbuilders. A **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation)** check allows the PCs to put together bits of rumor and reveals the details of Digory's chicanery, but no die roll is required for the heroes to realize that they are being blatantly manipulated and taken advantage of for the merchant's gain.

The tripurasura has been poisoning Carlyetta's mind against the PCs, causing her to doubt that halflings and non-halflings can actually work in community. The outsider is subtle, and intimates to the cleric that the PCs will not do this extra favor because they are too prideful and selfish. If asked for advice, Carlyetta tells the adventurers that their agreement with her does not include such extra duty, and while it would be helpful to her cousin, the decision is entirely up to them. The PCs may travel overland or she will take them to Pembroke by sea as originally planned. If the PCs elect not to escort the indentures overland, they lose one community point; a **DC 10 Wisdom (Insight)** check informs them of Carlyetta's disappointment during the sea voyage to Pembroke.

In the end, if the PCs agree to travel overland, a small bit of sunshine makes up for being so egregiously used. Tryfena Hayweather will be traveling with the group to minister to the indentures, and she thanks the PCs warmly for their service.

C5. The Babble

Carlyetta invites the PCs to attend a meeting of the Eldermoot. She has been asked to speak on a bill that allows those holding indentured servants to voluntarily reduce the term of indentureship in certain conditions. Her report on the PCs' conduct (who enjoy such an arrangement) is considered germane to the topic.

Before the debates, the PCs are introduced to many of the elders and the priest relates some of their experiences while her clerk (the tripurasura) passes out copies of her reports. During these conversations, the PCs see bags of coin change hands between the elders, as well as spectators in the galleries. Intense conversations (including some that look quite intimidating) also occur throughout. A **DC 15 Wisdom (Insight)** check correctly interprets the political scene as one of bribery and deal-making; failure leads the PCs to believe that bets are being placed on the outcome of the vote.

Carlyetta's stance depends on the current community point total. If the PCs have four or more community points she advocates for the bill, holding them up as successful examples. If the PCs have not earned sufficient community points, she regretfully informs the assembly that while she hopes that under her continued guidance the outsiders will be worthy of such consideration she cannot support the bill at this time. It is clear to the PCs that Carlyetta hopes that she can one day give them her unconditional trust, and that she is struggling deeply with conflicting emotions and conclusions.

The PCs first become aware of Myghal Weskenver (who figures prominently in Books 2-4 of the AP) at this time.

Myghal Weskenver, Second Speaker of the Eldermoot, and betrothed to Tryfenna Hayweather rises after Carlyetta's testimony.

(If Carlyetta supports the resolution...)

He speaks, "Carlyetta Wesleigh, you and I have long been in disagreement on this issue. I have had, and continue to have vast reservations about your "experiment" with this mixed group..."

(If Carlyetta speaks against the resolution...)

He speaks, "Carlyetta Wesleigh, for once you and I are in agreement on this issue; I have had, and continue to have vast reservations about your "experiment" with this mixed group..."

(Continuing, in both cases...)

At this point, from the gallery a cry shouts out, "Are you sure it's not Carlyetta you want to be betrothed to Myghal, for the two of you already bicker like an old married couple!" The assembly bursts into laughter and stamping of feet as the Speaker blushes bright red. After a moment the congress settles down and Myghal continues, "But, recently a more forgiving heart than mine has swayed my view."

At this statement, the redheaded lass Tryfenna Hayweather grants the Speaker a loving smile. The orator completes his statement, "We must never forget the Betrayal, when those not of halfling blood broke trust and delivered us to the enemy, but our fathers introduced servitude as a process, and so cautiously, I yield to the process and encourage the members of the Board of Indentures and Council of Freedmen to do the same."

Myghal calls the vote of the Freedman Council which passes the resolution 4 to 3. Then, as is tradition, the assembly adjourns for thirty minutes before calling the vote of the Board of Indentures

During the recess, Tryfenna and Myghal join the PCs. Myghal shows an interest in their tales, but they sense he is ill at ease with them. In moments of doubt, Tryfenna reassures the politician, it is obvious that Myghal's current political position is bolstered by his love for Tryfenna, rather than a deep and true conversion of principles.

Tryfenna points out the swing vote on the Board of Indentures, Jory Tremorgan (NG male halfling **mage**). She is worried Jory won't vote his heart. He has suffered a recent financial setback, and the rumors are that the conservatives have offered a significant bribe for his vote – almost 1,000 gp. She suggests that maybe a direct conversation with the PCs might remind him that he truly does believe that progress for Picollan society as a whole is more important than temporary individual discomfort.

PCs may earn Tremorgan's vote by offering to top the conservatives' bribe outright by paying the wavering elder 1,000 go. They may appeal to him diplomatically to vote his conscience; Tremorgan starts with an attitude of indifferent if Carlyetta backed the resolution, unfriendly if she did not. The PCs' request is considered difficult aid and would need a **Charisma(Persuasion) check DC 15** to succeed. Intimidating Tremorgan, or intimidating the conservative elders to withdraw their bribe is also possible, the **Charisma (Intimidation) DC** in both cases is **20**. Diplomatically winning the vote earns the PCs one community point, topping the bribe earns them zero points, and using intimidation costs them a community point. If they do nothing (or fail in their attempts), and the vote fails, they lose one community point (they might lose two if they fail at intimidation and fail the vote).

If no representative of the PCs attends the Eldermoot at Carlyetta's request, the group loses one community point (*applied before*

she speaks in support of or against the resolution) and one community point for the resolution failing as if they had not acted. The GM may reveal the events of the moot (and Carlyetta's attitude towards the PCs) through ongoing rumors and hearsay as the PCs move through town.

C6. Setting out

If the PCs travel overland with the indentures, all three halfling cousins are present at their leave-taking, and Myghal Weskenver arrives to bid his farewells to Tyfenna, cautioning her to be careful. Digory's escort consists of four rude and condescending halfling warriors, prompting Tryfenna to raise her eyebrows in sympathetic exasperation in support of the PCs.

If traveling by ship, see the **Journey to Pembroke** sidebar in the introduction to Act Three to improvise a leave-taking.



Pennbrooke



Miles

Temple Bay

Coast Road

West Beach

Copal Steps

Rivanna Creek

Rock Point

Blando



Act Three - Pembroke

The tidal waves caused by the fall of the Dracoprime in the Great Schism not only destroyed many of the islands of the Picollan archipelago, but caused major damage to the coastal regions of the big island. The water temple of the Great Mother was one such victim, although the damage was limited to surface and shore-based support structures. The sanctuary remained safe at the bottom of a deep bay. The village was rebuilt and the blessings of the goddess granted good fishing in the area until two relatively recent events took place.

The first event was the forming of a sea hag coven in a neighboring cove. Originally a single sea hag dwelled within the hidden folds of the shoreline, intrigued and enticed by the lingering power of the water temple. Not powerful enough to corrupt the holy site, the hag bided her time, capturing and corrupting the odd fisherman or sailor to quicken her womb. Eventually, the daughters of the hag joined with their mother and began to corrupt a magical seaweed. Carefully transplanted cuttings of the the fell kelp ultimately weakened the temple defenses and allowed the hags to establish a base there and further enhance their power.



The hags' fortunes waxed and waned, and before they controlled the entire shoreline, they crossed paths with a crew of Vikmordere raiders. Long exiled from Serpent Lake, a husband and wife team sought easier raiding on the disorganized shores of Picollo. The hags and the raiders engaged in deadly skirmishes, neither side getting the better of each other. Both sides withdrew, and it would be another twenty years before they would once again clash.

That time is now. Seeking the child they thought was lost, Hirtha Seawolf and her Vikmordere have returned to the area. Sensing the return of the sea warriors, the hags (who contented themselves with with minor mischief from the bottom of the bay) begin to assert control over the area.

Lore: Before setting out for Pembroke, the PCs may consult Carlyetta and others in The Nines to uncover useful information. They may also seek this information once they arrive in Pembroke.

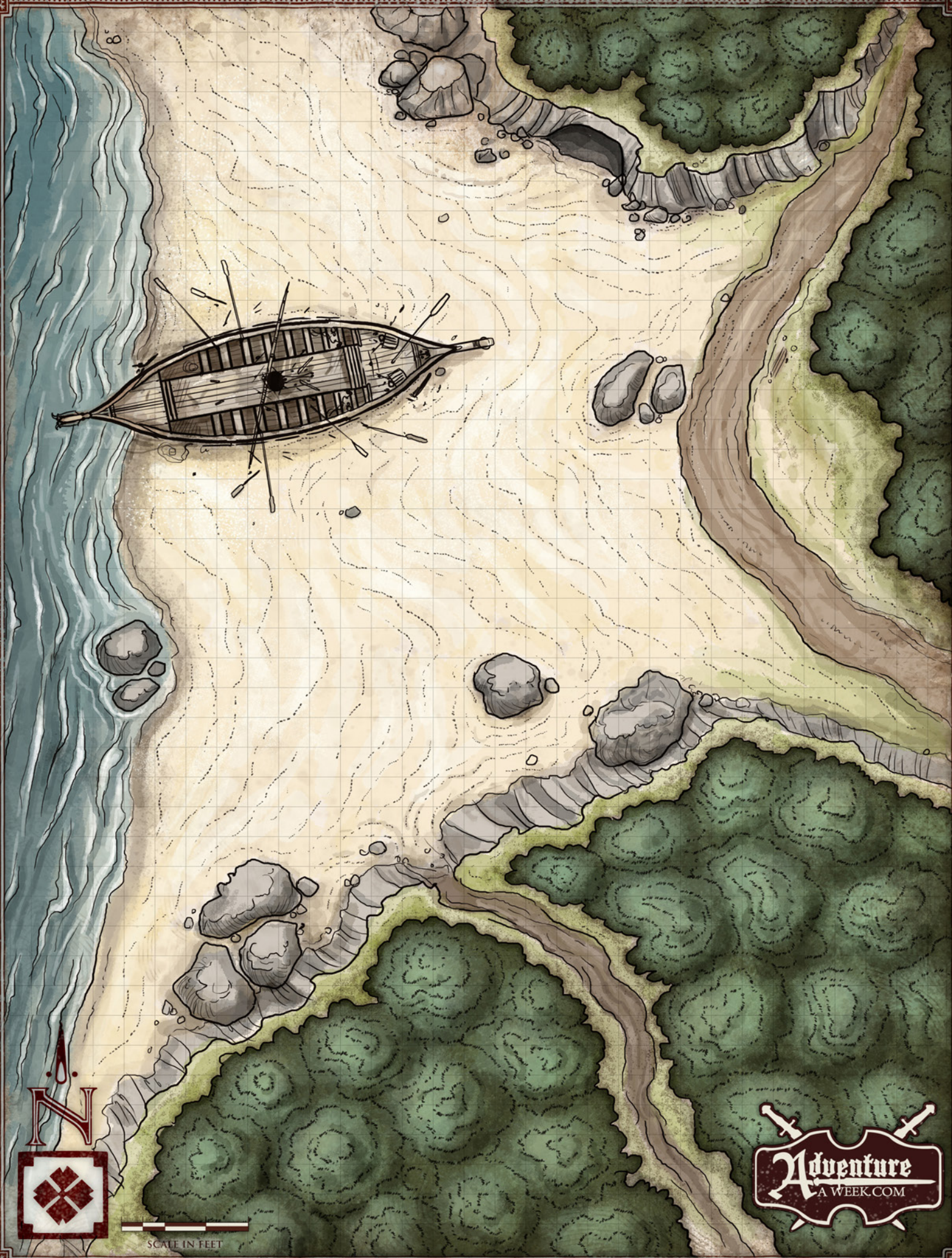
Intelligence (Religion) DC 15 The village that catered to the priests serving the water temple was totally destroyed by the tidal waves accompanying the Great Schism. Much of the lore has been lost, but it is said that villagers worshipped at the temple only on the most holy of days - regular worship was conducted in the village green at the holy tree there.

Intelligence (History) DC 15 Fishermen repopulated the bay near the ancient site of the temple shortly after the waters of the Great Schism subsided. Excellent fishing in the area was attributed to the blessings of the Mother. During the height of the Hoyrall Wars, the villagers took to the seas but still put into the bay to fish. When the Confluence destroyed the hive mind of the Hoyrall, Pembroke was one of the first villages resettled.

Intelligence (Religion) DC 18 The Holy Tree of the Water Aspect of the Great Mother rests at the bottom of the bay in an underwater contemplative garden. The monks provided magical seaweed to pilgrims that allowed them to breathe underwater during worship and contemplation. In case of accident, a holy monk was always on hand with water-breathing magic.

Intelligence (History) DC 18 Though once considered a lucky site for fishermen, the blessings of the goddess have begun to fade. Twenty years ago the village, along with much of the southern coast of Picollo, was subject to seaborne raids by a Vikmordere fleet. The raids coincided with a drop in fishing and unseasonable changes in weather. The Mother Spirit was said to curse the raiders, who then desecrated the temple at the bottom of the bay and stole the Great Mother's power before sailing away.

Intelligence (History) DC 23 Tales of Vikmordere raiders despoiling the ancient temple of the Great Mother twenty years ago don't add up. While many villagers and communities recall the raids the plagued the coasts, none remember a raid on the temple site itself. All agree that the raiders suffered some sort of setback or curse that eventually drove them from the area.



SCALE IN FEET



The Journey to Pembroke

It is assumed that the PCs part ways with Carlyetta in The Nines, escorting the indentures bound for Pembroke overland. If they chose not to deal with Digory Crosseyes, Carlyetta is disappointed, but transports the PCs to the fishing village promising to return with relics to restore the temple. A night fog prevents *Autumn Leaves* from making a safe anchorage in the port; the PCs are transported by longboat. While the PCs meet with the village elders (introduction to Scene 2), the barge returns to Carlyetta's caravel which then departs. The great storm that beaches the longship in encounter **D1** breaks over the village that night, dying down before the attack in encounter **E1**. When the PC decide to seek the hostages, they rendezvous with the incoming indentures and halfling guards at the beach in **D1** below, starting the encounter with the third paragraph of read-aloud text.

Scene 1: The Southern Shores

D1. Beached!

Shortly before arriving in Pembroke, the PCs bear witness to the ongoing feud of the hag coven and the Vikmordere raiders.

The march has been unpleasant to say the least. The halfling mercenaries provided by Digory Crosseyes are curt and demanding to the bewildered indentures, and this rudeness extends to those in your party. Only the unfailing kindness of Tryfena Hayweather softens the tension. Indeed, compared to many of the halflings you have met since your arrival, there is a grace and ease to Tryfena's outlook. Her smile is always genuine; her eyes twinkle with mirth.

Stopping in a small village, Digory's men inform the party that is two days more to Pembroke before heading off to the common room of a nearby tavern. As always, they secure the indentures in a hay barn. It is clean and soft in the hay, but definitely not the best of available accommodations. A huge storm breaks over the village that night, interrupting sleep and, ironically, the stone hay croft is the least damaged of the settlement's buildings. At Tryfenna's insistence you grant aid to the battered villagers, a few broken bones other minor injuries occupy much of the morning, but by mid-day you are well on your way.

The road hugs the coast, scant feet from the beaches. Rounding one headland, your eyes spy a Vikmordere longship drawn up on the beach, damage to the mast and rigging visible even at this distance.

The hag coven unleashed the full fury of its might on the raiders shortly after Hirtha Seawolf raided Pembroke. The hags dispatched their pet sargassum fiend whose powerful scent caused much of the Seawolf crew to dive into the sea and perish in its grasp. Those who resisted were met with the fury of the storm called down by the coven's weather magic. Hirtha beached the longship and fled with the hostages and surviving crew as the hags' adaro allies further pressed the attack. Now all that remains is the abandoned hulk of the storm-damaged ship and scavengers preying on the corpses left behind.

Creatures: The road passes within scant steps of the beach here; as the PCs approach, A **15 Intelligence** check spots damage to the hull of the ship inconsistent with storm damage (it is actually damage from the crab vermin splintering the waterlogged hull).

Success allows action in the surprise round as thousands of crabs swarm out of the damaged hull. From out of the sea, a much larger crab joins its smaller cousins.

Swarm of Crabs

Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 36(8d8)

Speed 10 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12(+1)	13(+1)	13 (+1)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	4 (-3)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

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

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages --

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Amphibious. The crab swarm can breathe both air and water.

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

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 0 ft., one creature in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 8 (2d6 + 1) piercing damage, or 4 (1d6+1) of the swarm has half its hit points or fewer.



Monstrous Crab

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (8d10+ 8)

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

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

Skills Stealth +3

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages --

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Amphibious. The crab swarm can breathe both air and water.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The crab makes 2 claw attacks,

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 8 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature it is grappled (Escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the crab can't use this claw against another target.

Combat: Monstrous Crab, plus (2) Crab Swarms; Encounter Total XP: 1,600; Adjusted XP 3,200 Medium;

Development: Twelve hour-old tracks lead to a path climbing a high cliff on the far side of the beach. The tracks are comprised of at least half a dozen booted medium sized creatures, and four barefooted small creatures. A DC 10 **Wisdom (Survival)** check correctly identify the small tracks as halflings, exceeding the check by 4 or more reveals the feet of the halflings were shackled together.

Searching the longship unearths the treasure indicated below as well as portfolio with drafts of ransom demands translated from Vikmordere rune writing into Picollish. The drafts instruct that the "foundling" must be brought to the cyclopean temple in exchange for the captured villagers. A map in the portfolio identifies the nearby promontory as the site of the temple. A DC 15 **Intelligence** check informs the PCs that the foundling is likely a gnoll child raised in the nearby village of Pembroke.

Choice Point: The PCs may push on to Pembroke or track the captured halflings to the ransom exchange site. If they choose not to climb the cliffs to the temple at this time, a second opportunity will present itself on their arrival in Pembroke. If they seize the moment (advancing to encounter D2), Digory's halfling mercenaries refuse to join them, but agree to watch over the indentures, herding them into a small cave in the cliff side. As the PCs climb the trail to the temple, the unpleasant soldiers already have a pot on the boil and are dropping crabs into the water for a beachside feast.

Treasure: Near the prow of the longship, a box attached to the gunwale contains a masterwork spyglass and a *potion of healing*.

D2. The Perimeter

Thick jungle crowns the top of the cliff. A single-file trail, overgrown with vines and other foliage, is easy to follow; machetes have hacked through the growth.

A sentry stands at the head of the trail while two of his fellows make an alternating circuit of the perimeter. The sentry, who is 60 feet back from the cliff edge and operating from cover, may spot the PCs approach before they notice him (**Wisdom (Perception)** check DC 18 to detect him) unless the PCs are actively looking, or being stealthy.

The trail meanders enough to prevent a charge, but is not difficult terrain, unlike the flanking jungle. Once within 30 feet of the sentry along the trail, check the PC's passive Perception again.

The sentry is expecting a ransom to occur and calls out for the PCs to halt and instructs them to show him the gnoll foundling. Unless they can do so within one round, he raises the alarm and falls back on the camp (D2). If the PCs are here with Meatball, the sentry escorts them to the ransom exchange (D3).

If the PCs attack, neutralizing the sentry must occur before he acts in the first regular combat round, else he raises the alarm and falls back. If the PCs defeat him and do not immediately move up the trail to the temple (D3), one of the other perimeter guards arrives within 2 rounds, followed by the third 2 rounds later. These guards raise the alarm at the first sign of trouble.

If the PCs wait to engage the sentry, and observe him for at least one minute, the two perimeter guards check in with the sentry, and then begin another walk of the boundary. In this case, the PCs have 3 minutes to act after any combat at the sentry post before the guards return.

Combat: (3) Vikmordere Raiders (Use **Veteran** statistics); Encounter Total XP: 2,100; Adjusted XP 4,200 Hard;

Development: If any of the perimeter guards get off a warning shout, Hirtha, Grothnir and their fellows have time to prepare.

D3. Hostages at the Temple

The path cutting through the jungle leads to a small clearing, in the center of which stands a circle of stone posts and lintels covered in a thick growth of vines. Four carved stone giants are visible in the enclosure, facing inward to a fifth sculpture, the details of which are obscured by the curtain of vegetation. A small campfire burns to one side of the monument.

Hirtha Seawolf, her husband Grothnir and crew, are holed up at the temple site with the four hostages taken from Pembroke. Expecting a hostage exchange to occur, their stance is dependent on the actions of the perimeter guard from D2.

If the sentry retreated under fire, the entire group readies for combat, taking defensive positions.

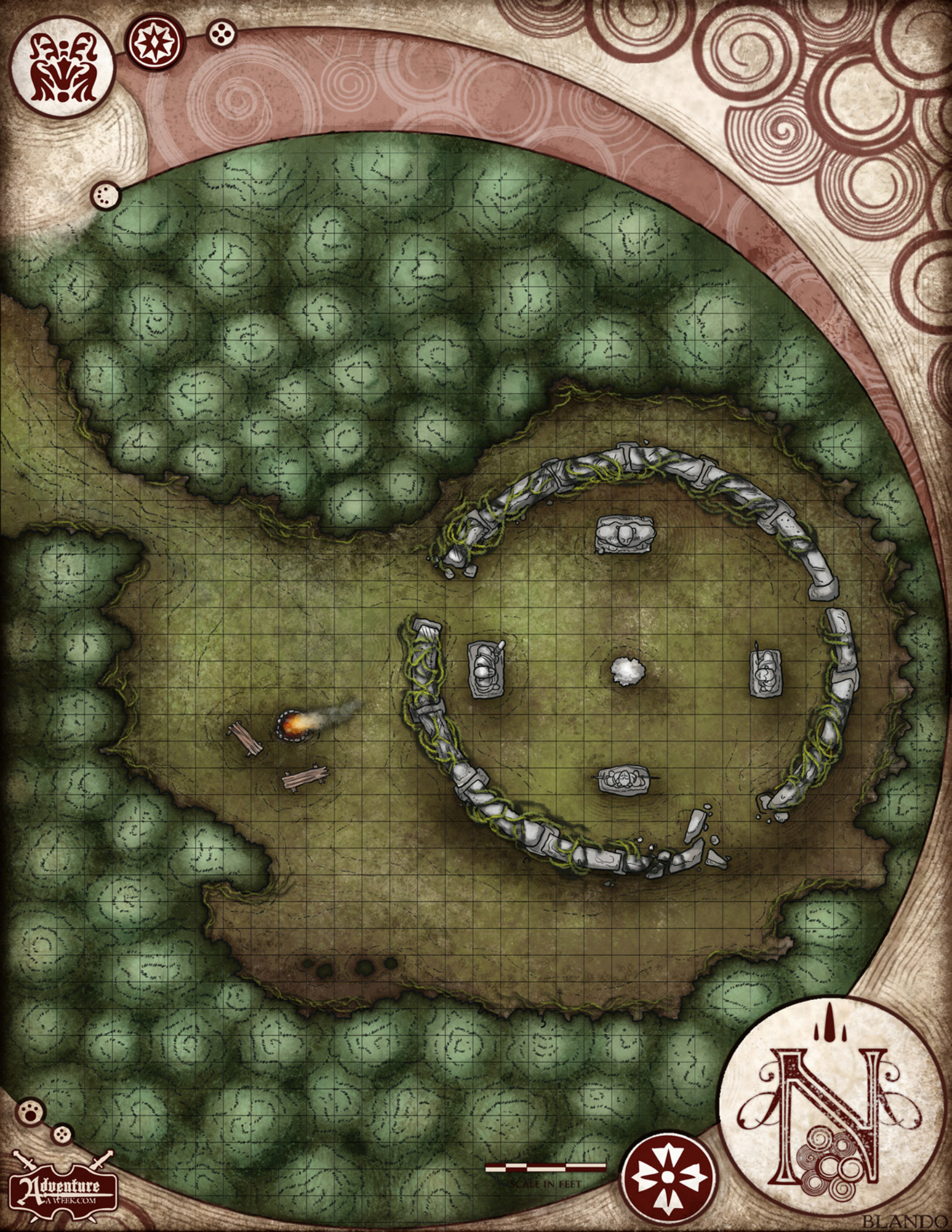
If the sentry retreated because the gnoll foundling was not present, but was not attacked, the crew assume a defensive posture but are not immediately hostile.



SCALE IN FEET



BLANDO



If the perimeter guard has been attacked, but the gnoll foundling is present with the party, Hirtha calls out for parlay when the PCs appear - her attitude is unfriendly.

If the gnoll foundling is present, and the sentry safe, negotiations commence with the Vikmordere starting attitude as indifferent.

Regardless of the attitude of the Vikmordere, as long as combat does not break out, they will honor a hostage exchange and free the halflings in exchange for Meatball, the gnoll foundling. If the PCs have proceeded directly from D2 to the cliffside, the Vikmordere will release one hostage as a show of good faith if the PCs promise to return within two days with Meatball.

The Vikmordere are close-mouthed about why they want the foundling, but the full tale may be learned by making a Charisma check DC 15 with the Vikmordere.

Hirtha's Tale



I have returned to seek my child, the foundling known as Meatball, whom I thought lost these past two decades. Twenty years ago, the Picollan shores were easy pickings, and it amused me to steal gold and slaves from slavers. The booty was good, and fighting the wee folk was more interesting than the clumsy Klavekians - the half-pints are a nimble people.

We heard tales of an ancient site, rife with power. Power we did find, in the form of a trio terrible crones, whose magic frustrated all our efforts to recover the treasures buried under the sea. Indeed, one of the crones took my life.

My man, Grothnir, cried out to the gods, for I was heavy with child when the witch stole my life. Grothnir and my loyal crew pursued the crones. Capturing one and threatening her with death, a bargain was struck, in which the crones agreed to bring me back from the dead. But it was in this form that I returned. When my child was born, she too, took this form.

Leaving this place for a time, we raided the Dweorg of Stoneroot, but when a storm washed my child overboard, we quit this land as cursed. The eastern shores of the Klavek Kingdom would sate our need for war, until one day my spies in Cherr's Landing overheard tales from halfling sailors that a gnoll baby washed up on shore 2 decades ago had been raised in one of the villages of the southern coast of Picollo. To this land we returned, though cursed it still is. The crones wait at the bottom of the bay and wreak their mischief on all nearby.

Development: Meatball, though excited to return to her Vikmordere parents, mournfully tells the party she will miss her adopted home and wishes she could visit from time to time. The PCs may make an additional request of the Vikmordere. If the PCs succeed on the **Charisma (Persuasion) check DC 16**, they earn two community points as the Vikmordere and halflings of Pembroke eventually forge bonds of trust. A successful hostage exchange earns one community point. If the raiders are slain, the PCs lose one community point once the villagers piece together (through

the tales of the hostages) that the Vikmordere were seeking their lost child. The PCs also lose the chance to learn Hirtha's tale and the intelligence it grants about the threat below the waves.

The PCs earn 1,500 experience if they resolve the hostage crisis diplomatically.

Treasure: If the PC learn Hirtha's tale, they may ask for help against the hags. A **Charisma (Persuasion) check DC 18** is needed to garner help. Success results in the Vikmordere giving the PCs a *bag containing 3 potions of healing, a scroll of dispel magic and 2 scrolls of lesser restoration*. If the heroes defeat the Vikmordere by combat, this treasure was lost at sea, and only the gear of the raiders serves to enrich the party.



Terrain: The jungle surrounding the clearing is difficult terrain. The vines overgrowing the temple in the center clearing grant cover to those within the perimeter against those without and vice-versa. Moving through the vines exposes oneself to poison thorns.

Vine Trap



Wisdom (Perception) check DC 16 to find, **Dexterity check DC 14** to disable; affects a target entering the vines and a new check is required for each 10ft of movement, **Dexterity saving throw DC 14** save or take 1d4 piercing damage plus 3d6 poison damage.

PCs taking their time through the vines have advantage on checks to vine poison vines and saves against them. A careful PC can make a **Dexterity check DC 18** to pass through the thorny vines safely. Failure by 5 or more on this check exposes a creature to the poison vines.

Chopping a path through the vines is possible.

Disabling this trap involves improvising protective clothing and tools to pass through or pull the vines down with minimum exposure to the thorns.

Cutting the vines weakens the lintels (which are held up by the clinging growth). An immediate **Wisdom (Perception) check DC 15** recognizes this; a **DC 18 Intelligence check** also warns the PCs that the construction may be unstable.

Falling Rock Trap



Wisdom (Perception) check DC 16 to find, **Dexterity check DC 12** to disable; affects all targets entering a 15 ft. square area, **Dexterity saving throw DC 14** save or take 5d6 bludgeoning damage.

Creatures: Once the Vikmordere are dealt with through diplomacy or combat, the hostages may be rescued, and the temple investigated, possibly activating any un-triggered traps.

Hirtha Seawolf

Medium humanoid (gnoll), beast, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (hide armor)

Hit Points 49(9d8+9)

Speed 30 ft.

STR DEX CON INT WIS CHA
16 (+3) 13(+1) 14 (+2) 10 (+0) 11 (+0) 16 (+3)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Gnoll

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Spellcasting. Hirtha is a 6th level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (Spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Hirtha has the following spells and slots available:

Cantrips: (at will): *acid splash*, *mending*, *message*, *ray of frost*, *prestidigitation*

1st level (4 slots): *jump*, *mage armor*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step*, *scorching ray*, *spider climb*

3rd level (3 slots): *blink*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The gnoll makes 2 attacks with either its longbow, longsword, and a bite.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

TACTICS

Before Combat Hirtha maintains mage armor at all times, and casts *shield* as a reaction whenever attacked. During combat, Hirtha casts *blink* and retires into the vine enclosure of the temple for cover to cast spells. She then reinforces her crew.

Morale If reduced to 8 HP or less, Hirtha retires into the temple perimeter or jumps into the trees above to heal and then peppers the party with spells at range. She uses her *necklace of fireballs* only when her crew is slain.

Treasure: *necklace of fireballs* (1d6 charges remaining), *potion of greater healing*;

Grothnir Seawolf

(use gladiator statistics)

Treasure: *potion of hill giant strength*, *potion of healing*

Combat: (3) Vikmordere Raiders (Use **Veteran** statistics); plus Hirtha, plus Grothnir; Encounter Total XP: 4,300; Adjusted XP 8,600 Deadly;

Development: Once the PCs penetrate the curtain of vines, read the following.

Four stone cyclopes squat in the stone circle. Three heads turn to regard their companion to the right, while the fourth focuses its single jeweled eye on the central sculpture, a stone tree with a hole bored through the center of the trunk. Suspended in the hole is a fist-sized

emerald, glowing faintly with arcane power. Runes and pictographs decorate the trunk of the stone tree, and carved garments of the stone sentinels.

The adventurers may know something more about the site:

Intelligence (arcana, history) DC 15 Knowledge that has been lost to modern times has often been rediscovered from clues scattered amongst ancient cyclopean sites. As more and more cyclopean runes are discovered, more lucid translations of ancient texts are possible.

Intelligence (religion) DC 15 Cyclopean mystics often studied and contemplated gods other than their own. It is rumored they even found ways to trap or channel the divine energy of gods they did not worship.

Intelligence (arcana) DC 18 Sites like this often provide a boon to pilgrims of a later age. The eye crystals focus and grant the ancient knowledge of the cyclopes to those with the means to emulate them. Some mages and scholars believe that rune magic developed from the early exploration and study of sites like these all over Aventyr.



The runes and pictographs inscribed throughout the site require a **DC 22 Intelligence check** to translate; knowledge of modern giant grants advantage on this check. Failure on the check by less than 5 still grants the translator knowledge of the most prominent runes, Fire, Earth, Air, Water and Eye.

The runes describe cyclopean insights into the Mother Spirit and instruction for a meditation ritual. Ancient cyclopes would scribe the four elemental runes on their body and turn their one eye on the green emerald in the central tree. The arcane power in the site would then grant focus and clarity for further contemplation. The four elemental runes are inscribed prominently on the forearms of each of the stone cyclopes.

Treasure: A PC gains the Boon of Insight by drawing the elemental runes on his body, and emulating the one eye of the cyclopes by wearing a blindfold, inscribing the “eye” rune on his forehead and then turning that “eye” to focus on the emerald suspended in the tree. He may deduce this with a correct translation of the runes. If the players are working from a partial translation and lore, they may puzzle it out. If they “emulate” the cyclopes by covering one eye instead of crafting a correctly centered eye, they have a 75% chance of gaining the boon.

If the PCs fail to scribe the elemental runes on themselves, they may still gain the boon, but they also gain vulnerability to the next elemental attack they suffer for each rune unrepresented on their person (**Fire:** fire, **Earth:** acid, **Water:** cold, **Air:** electricity)

Boon of Insight: The recipient can peer into an occluded visual spectrum of possible futures, gaining insight that allows it to select the exact result of one die roll before the roll is made. This effect can alter an action taken by the recipient only, and cannot be applied to the rolls of others. The boon dissipates if not used within 30 days, and can only be granted once every six months.

The eye gems of the cyclopes as well as the tree emerald are valuable (1,500 gp each). Prying them out of their sockets is not only an act of desecration, but releases a blast of elemental energy (or force in the case of the emerald) against would-be thieves. All creatures in a 20 ft. burst must make a **Dexterity saving throw DC 12** for each damage type or take 6d6 fire damage, plus 6d6 acid damage, plus 6d6 cold damage, plus 6d6 lightning damage, or half damage on a successful save. The trap can be spotted by careful inspection and a **Wisdom (Perception) check DC 18**. A **Dexterity check DC 16** is required to nullify the trap.

D4. Crab feast gone wrong

Once the PCs return from the cliff (if alive, the Vikmordere remain behind to search for timber to make repairs to the longship) a new threat greets them. A pair of monstrous crabs, attracted by the pile of detritus on the beach, has consumed Digory’s men. If the indentures have already been delivered to Pembroke, the halfling mercenaries stopped here to crab on their return to The Nines; if still en-route to Pembroke, the indentures are safe in the cave.

When the PCs approach within 40 feet, check their passive Perception scores against a Wisdom (Perception) check DC 16. Whoever succeeds can act in a surprise round.

The pile of crab shells near water’s edge has been joined by other seaweed and detritus washed in on high tide; the stench is almost overpowering. A beach fire can be seen burning low. One of Digory’s mercenaries is asleep near the beached longship, his head cradled on a bunch of seaweed. The pile suddenly rears up and spits out a half-digested halfling, along with a slew of kelp, shells and undigested humanoid and crab remains. Both piles of debris then begin to advance.

Monstrous Crab

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (8d10+ 8)

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

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

Skills Stealth +3

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages --

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Amphibious. The crab swarm can breathe both air and water.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The crab makes 2 claw attacks,

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 8 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature it is grappled (Escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the crab can’t use this claw against another target.

Combat : (2) Monstrous Crab; Encounter Total XP: 1,400; Adjusted XP 2,100 Easy;

Scene 2: The Blessings of the Bay

The village of Pembroke resides in a beautiful bay, and the harbor is well sheltered. As the village comes into sight, it appears all is not well. Smoke rises from a number of damaged buildings, there are scenes of recent combat on the sandy shore.

The villagers view the approach of the PCs with apprehension. They look tired and haggard. After introductions, the halflings recount their recent misfortunes.

If the PCs have already encountered the Vikmordere, they may already have uncovered much of this information.

Recent Events: Although the area is known for freak storms, about a month ago, the frequency and intensity of the strange weather increased. A few fishing boats were lost at sea.

Two weeks ago, zombies and skeletons covered in seaweed rose from the bay in the direction of the old coral steps to the temple. The town militia was able to destroy the undead with minor casualties. A **Wisdom (Insight) check DC 12** makes the PCs aware that one villager has more to say - that some of the skeletons were half man, half shark. His fellows deride him for his superstition.

One week ago a villager on shore watch was discovered paralyzed with a spear thrust to the thigh. When he came to a few minutes later he says the last he can remember is being struck by the spear. A **Intelligence (nature) check DC 19** identifies traces of nettles.

poison on the spear. If the PCs are aware of the half-shark skeletons, A **DC 16 Knowledge (nature)** determines the likely suspects to be adaro.

Two nights ago, four villagers were captured in a raid by humans in a dragon-prowed longship. A huge wolf-like creature sprang from the ship and snatched up its prey. As the raiders (easily recognizable as Vikmordere) departed, an arrow with a message wrapped around it was fired back into the village. The message demands that the “gnoll foundling” be brought to the cyclopean temple within three days to ransom the villagers. Unlike the undead attacks, the Vikmordere raiders used non-lethal force, subduing or incapacitating the fishermen during their attack.

Many villagers report suffering minor curses and ill luck over the last month. **Charisma or Intelligence (Investigation)** checks to gather information uncover some of the rumors. Fishing boats drawn up on the south beach, which is closest to the coral steps once leading to the underwater temple, have been missing equipment or suffered minor acts of sabotage (**DC 12**). Many villager report feelings of foreboding and doom crushing their spirits (**DC 15**). A pair of young lovers have been cursed with a painful rash after swimming near the coral steps (**DC 17**); the rash can be identified as jellyfish stings with a **Wisdom (Medicine) check DC 16**.

The gnoll referred to in the ransom demand is an orphan who washed up on shore some twenty years past. Two of the fisher-folk raised the hairy creature as their own. Meatball, as she is known in the village, fell asleep in the sun while picking berries and chasing butterflies at the time of the attack. More information on Meatball is contained in encounter **E2**.

PCs may also obtain additional lore about the water temple (Act Three introduction by gathering information from the villagers.

Development: During the night, the hags send their most powerful assault on the village thus far. If the party makes for the shore

line to cross to the coral steps and examine the temple, the attack occurs as they approach the shore. If the PCs leave immediately to rescue the hostages, this attack occurs upon their return.

E1. Night Attack

The villagers set three watches during the night, the PCs are free to join the watches or not. The attack occurs during the second watch; light activity until then grants the PCs (even those on watch) some chance to recover from the day’s fatigue.

Creatures: The hags have used the fell power of the corrupted temple to raise the slain Vikmordere as draugr, including a Vikmordere champion who rides into battle tethered to a giant undead turtle. Under the cover of *fog cloud*, the enemy rises from the sea.

Skeletal Giant Snapping Turtle

Huge undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 90(12d12+ 12)

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

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

Damage vulnerabilities bludgeoning

Damage immunities poison

Condition immunities exhaustion, poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages --

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The turtle makes 2 bite attacks,

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d12 + 3) piercing damage.

Draugr Captain

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (armor scraps)

Hit Points 90(12d12+ 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	11(+0)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)	4 (-3)

Damage vulnerabilities bludgeoning

Damage immunities poison

Condition immunities exhaustion, poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages --

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The draugr captain makes 2 weapon attacks,

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) slashing damage.

Mist of the Dead. As a bonus action, the draugr captain can form a 20 foot radius of fog centered around it. It does not need to concentrate on this effect. The fog is a natural fog and may be displaced by an sufficient wind.



Combat : Skeletal Giant Snapping Turtle, plus Dragr Captain, plus (6) skeletons; Encounter Total XP: 1,700; Adjusted XP 4,250 Hard;

Development: A terribly sad discovery awaits the conclusion of the attack. Tryfena's body guards the opening to a small food storage pit, the collapsed bones of a skeleton nearby. Two halfling toddlers and one human child took refuge in the pit and Tryfena stood alone against an undead raider to save the children, who can be heard weeping under the wicker mat covering the entrance.

E2. The morning after

Choice Point: The PCs must decide what course of action to pursue first. By this point, they are aware of the hostages taken by the Vikmordere, but also that the threats from under the waves of the bay have been increasing in intensity.

The Elders of the village are more immediately concerned about the deadline relating to the hostages, and encourage the PC to deal with that first. If the PCs follow the elder's wishes and deal with the hostage crisis first, they earn one community point.

Annik Dowrick, the foundling, was raised by Perran and Kensa when she washed up on shore some decades ago. Known as Meatball (for her love of that food), of all the inhabitants of the village, she is probably the most pure in embracing the ancient outlooks of the halfling people. She is a bit slow-witted, but full of cheer and joy. Though frightened of what the raiders want with her, she is brave enough to accompany the party if they desire, and if the PCs have already discovered her origins, she is excited to meet her birth parents, although the parting with Perran and Kensa is bittersweet. As they hesitate, Meatball reminds them it is the duty of every halfling to protect her family, and that she is a good halfling.

If the PCs put off the hostage exchange to investigate the temple, they may require some means to breathe underwater. If they cannot provide a method, the elders know of an old cove where the monks once raised a seaweed that granted the ability to breathe underwater. Up until twenty years ago, fishermen harvested the natural growth to aid in their craft. The cove is now avoided as cursed; some fishermen never returned from a harvesting expedition. If the PCs seek the magic of the weed, advance to encounter E3.

Once prepared to seek the temple under the waves, advance the PCs to encounter E4.

E3. The Corrupting Weed

The cove mentioned by the village elders is a four-hour march from the village along a crumbling cliff-side trail. A small causeway leads to a huge rock formation 100 yards out to sea and shelters the waters from the crash of the waves. Within the breakwater dwells the first creation of the hags: a sargassum fiend cultivated from the magical water-breathing seaweed once raised by the monks of the water temple.

Creatures: The sargassum fiend suffered damage during the attack on the Vikmordere, and has not fully recovered, but it does not hesitate to kill interlopers into its watery haven. It waits patiently for the effects of its mirage to bring it its prey.

Sargassum fiend

Large plant, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 153(18d10+ 54)

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Stealth +2

Damage resistances slashing

Damage immunities cold

Condition immunities blinded, deafened, exhaustion

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), tremorsense 60ft., passive Perception 10

Languages --

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Mirage. A sargassum fiend emits a powerful scent that causes specific, mirage-like hallucinations. All creatures within 300 feet of a sargassum fiend must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become enraptured by the scent. An enraptured creature sees the monster as whatever would most compel it to approach. This might be a lost loved one, a child in need of help, an enchanting mermaid, the promise of dry land, and so on. This effect ends immediately if the plant makes an attack against any target.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The sargassum fiend makes 2 slam attacks. If both slam attacks hit the same target of medium or smaller size, the target is grappled (Escape DC 14) and the fiend uses its Choking Tethers attack.

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. **Hit:** 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Choking Tethers. The fiend wraps its tendrils around a victim and squeezes the life from them. The grappled target is restrained, unable to breathe, and must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw at the beginning of each of its turns or take 13 (2d8+4) bludgeoning damage. If the fiend moves it takes the target with it. The fiend can have up to two targets choked at a time, however, for each target choked, it loses the ability to make a slam attack.

Development: The monks who once tended the magical seaweed dwelled in small cave in the rocks at the end of the causeway. When the original hag first came to this area, she lived in the cave, experimenting on the weed to develop the sargassum fiend. She also gave birth to her daughters here, and the bones of their halfling fathers still litter the ground, along with twenty years of hag-blown debris, graffiti, and evil magical waste. The fiend's *mirage* takes the form of glorious sea lilies promising powerful magic to overcome the dangers of the sea.

Treasure: Once the plant is defeated, the PCs may correctly identify small clusters of the true magical plant described by the halfling elders. Each dose of weed (there are 6 total) grants *water breathing* for twenty four hours. The weed must be kept in seawater until used.

Combat : Sargassum Fiend; **Encounter Total XP:** 2,300; **Adjusted XP** 2,300 **Easy;**

E4. The Coral Steps

The south beach of the village provides the shortest access by boat to a landing made of stone and coral in the middle of the bay. This landing is the best available landmark from which to begin the search for the temple's meditation garden and holy tree that lies somewhere beneath the surface.

As the PCs make their way to the coral steps, ominous storm clouds roll in over the bay. The hags use magic to scry on the bay and to control the weather to support their sahuagin sentries.

If the PCs determined that sahuagin are among the threats from the bay, they know that an ambush on the steps leading to the bottom of the bay would favor the sahuagin once the rain starts. See the tactics bloc for further information.

Optional Entrance to the bay

Starting from the coral steps allows the PCs to easily make their way to the temple at the bottom of the bay, following an ancient set of coral landmarks. If the PCs begin their search from elsewhere, they may get lost. A **DC 16 Wisdom(Survival)** check prevents them from getting lost in the underwater forest. If the PCs seek the temple cross country, the battle with the sahuagin takes place far enough under the waves that the weather does not affect them, but the hunting sahuagin have been joined by their "shark hound": a great white shark.

Level up: If your group has been struggling with the encounters throughout the adventure you may consider leveling them to 7th level before venturing into the bay. Underwater fights are tricky, and this option provides some flexibility to keep the fights, (especially the final combat) tough but not overwhelming for smaller, or less experienced groups.

Combat: (4) Sahuagin, plus (1) Sahuagin priestess, plus (1) Giant Shark; **Encounter Total XP** 2,650; **Adjusted Encounter XP** 5,300 **Hard;**



Development: The "trail" at the bottom of the bay can be followed by those walking on the sandy bottom or by swimming above it. The plants and coral along the side of the trail make up an underground forest. When swimming above this growth, a PC must stay within the 40' high "canopy" or within 40 feet of the trail or risk becoming separated from the party. Treat the entire group as being lost in the wilderness, but instead of making **Wisdom(Survival)** checks every hour, make them every minute until the party is reunited by "finding the path". Even if a scout stays within the "safe" zone, a **DC 12 Wisdom(Survival)** check is required to notice separated segments of the group being engaged in combat. Failure requires an action to orient oneself towards any new threats.

E5. Invisible Death

The path is marked by ancient coral sculptures leading to what was once an attended aquatic garden. A miasma of corruption embraces the area, but there is much of the beauty of the ancient site still visible under the corruption.

Creatures: A jellyfish swarm is almost impossible to spot (**Wisdom(Perception)** check **DC 18**) before the party stumbles into it. If the PCs are not together on the trail (some swimming above the "canopy" or in the "forest" roll randomly to see which segment of the party blunders into the swarm.

Jellyfish Swarm

Large swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 99(18d10)

Speed swim 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	13(+1)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Stealth +4

Damage resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 10

Languages --

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

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

Water Breathing. The swarm can only breathe underwater.

ACTIONS

Sting. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. **Hit:** 3 (1d6) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6 poison damage) plus Paralytic sting.

Paralytic Sting. Any creature stung by the jellyfish swarm, and not immune to poison or paralysis, must succeed on a **DC 14 Constitution** saving throw or become paralyzed.

Development: If the PCs withdraw from the slow-swimming jellyfish, a **DC 16 Wisdom(Survival)** check allows them to skirt the swarm's territory without blundering into it a second time. If they do so, the hags have time to animate additional guardians in their sanctuary.

Combat: Jellyfish Swarm; Encounter Total XP 2,300; Easy;

E6. Crossroads Guardians

The trail ahead branches into a "Y" with a more tended and cultivated forest of seaweed directly ahead. Both branches of the new path seem to be skirting these domesticated plants. An inky smear is visible in what appears to be the center of the cultivated area.

Creatures: Three undead Merrow march out of the inky stain in the cultivated patch and from the edges of the sea forest at the crossroads. The two forward guardians might be spotted by a cautious scout with a **DC 16 Wisdom(Perception)** check before they notice the party.

Skeletal Merrow Guard

Large undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 67 (9d10+18)

Speed 10 ft., swim 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10(+0)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)

Damage vulnerabilities bludgeoning

Damage immunities poison

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

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages understands all languages it knew in life, but cannot speak

Challenge 3 (700 XP)



ACTIONS

Multiattack. The undead merrow guard can make two attacks, one with its bite, the other with either a claw or harpoon.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) slashing damage.

Harpoon. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., or range 20/60 ft. one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is a Huge or smaller creature, it must succeed on a Strength contest against the merrow or be pulled 20 ft. towards it.

Combat: (3) Undead Skeletal Merrow Guards; Encounter Total XP 2,100; Adjusted Total XP 4,200; Hard;

The party regroup?

If the PCs retreat from their underwater excursion at any time, the hags replace the guardians with new undead guards or other allies (living sahuagin, merrow, sharks or other similar challenges). The PCs should endure at least two medium or hard encounters on their return before a final confrontation with the hags. The hags might also skirmish with the PCs on shore to keep them from regaining their full strength, although they prefer to use minions, and certainly retreat after taking any damage.

E7. The Coven

The new path does indeed mark the boundaries of the ancient meditation garden. From the perimeter paths, four equidistant avenues lead to its center, which is currently obscured by a clouds of black ink. Kelp fields grow in between the avenues. The edges of the once groomed and exotically colored plants are withered and decayed; the bases of some are strangled by a black weed.

The hags have spent 20 years corrupting the holy site at the bottom of the bay. Like all temples to the great mother, a holy tree (in this case a once vibrant growth of blue-green kelp) stands in the center. Three intact coral benches once provided a place to meditate on the blessings of the Mother. The fourth bench is missing, looted after the Great Schism. The absence of this fourth bench allowed the hags' corruption enough purchase to weaken the Great Mother's blessings.

Hazards: The black weed strangling the kelp beds in the temple surround, as well as the base of the holy tree itself, is recognizable as cuttings from the sargassum fiend if the PCs have encountered it. Otherwise a **DC 19 Intelligence(nature)** check identifies the fell kelp. The Hags have been trying to get this strain of plant to overcome the original holy growth of the temple, but the blessings still resist the complete domination of the evil weed. Enough of the garden is corrupted sufficiently to permit the Hags to raise more powerful versions of undead (such



as draugr or skeletal merrow) with their *animate dead* shared spell ability.

Scattered amongst the kelp beds are full grown strands of black weed that allow the hags to deliver touch spells to adjoining squares.

The kelp beds are otherwise considered difficult terrain.

The ink cloud is actually a *mirage arcane* allowing the hags to witness the approach of any intruders, while keeping them hidden.

Creatures: The three hags await within their magical defenses, while their hunter shark pet lurks in the kelp waiting to attack the PCs as they move down the path. If the PCs retreated and avoided the fight with the jellyfish in E5, two skeletal merrow guards also lie in wait, hidden in the inner clearing by the ink illusion.

During Combat: The shark glides silently through kelp (**Wisdom(Perception) DC 18**) and attacks the PCs once they start moving towards the central courtyard. The shark fights until half its hit points are lost and then flees.

During Combat: The hags maintain their *illusory appearance*, whittling down the party by trying to frighten and separate them. The hags fight to the death but are not afraid to parlay or pause for time.

Morale: If two of the hags are slain, the third attempts to flee.

See the official Hag entry for more information about running hags.

Skeletal Merrow Guard

Large undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 67 (9d10+18)

Speed 10 ft., swim 20 ft.

STR **DEX** **CON** **INT** **WIS** **CHA**

18 (+4) 10(+0) 15 (+2) 8 (-1) 10 (+0) 9 (-1)

Damage vulnerabilities bludgeoning

Damage immunities poison

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

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages understands all languages it knew in life, but cannot speak

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The undead merrow guard can make two attacks, one with its bite, the other with either a claw or harpoon.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) slashing damage.

Harpoon. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., or range 20/60 ft. one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is a Huge or smaller creature, it must succeed on a Strength contest against the merrow or be pulled 20 ft. towards it.

Combat: Hunter Shark, plus (2) Skeletal Merrow Guards, plus (3) Sea Hag; Encounter XP 3,200; Adjusted Total XP 6,400; Deadly;

Cleansing the garden: Once the power of the hag covenant is broken, the Kelp bed begins to show signs of returning to health. This process may be accelerated by clearing the black weed from the area (**Intelligence(arcana/nature) check DC 14**). Otherwise the blessings of the goddess heal the area over the course of the next three days.

Treasure: Once the kelp tree is restored to full health, the goddess grants a *Water Lily of the Goddess* to each of the PCs. If still in the waters of the bay, the lilies float on the currents and nestle in the PC's hair. If above the surface the blooms float on the wind to find the PCs.

Conclusion

Three days after the hags are defeated and the hostages rescued, the *Autumn Leaves* sails into the bay. Carlyetta has retrieved a coral bench raised and formed by water fey living off the shores of the Great Forest in western Picollo. This new coral bench replaces the destroyed bench in the meditative garden, and Carlyetta, with help of a trio of Priests, re-consecrates the Holy Tree below, purging the last remnants of lingering corruptions. She invites the adventurers to witness his event.

Carlyetta is deeply saddened by the death of her cousin Tryfena but does not blame the PCs. The death does harden her resolve and in the intervening months, the tripurasura will continue to plant whispers of heresy in her ear, trying to drive a further wedge between Carlyetta and a true understanding of the Goddess.

In the moment, however, the PCs have a chance to take stock of the situation and “read” the nature of Carlyetta and the halflings of Pembroke as an indicator of the future path of halfling society.

Read the appropriate section depending on how many community points the PCs earn.

10 Points or more

“I’ve been blind,” Carlyetta says. “My thanks for opening my eyes to the true power of community. For so long have I fretted over the protection of my people that I blocked out the whispers of the Goddess. I see now that we can build community together, halfling and non-halfling. Look!”

So saying Carlyetta points to indenture and halfling working together to repair the damage in the village – overcoming the shared dangers has sparked a shift in attitude. You overhear a halfling vow to his servant to set him free before his time, if he must shout to the rafters in the Eldermoot to do so.

The sweet breath of the Goddess fills your lungs with contentment.

New Magic Item

6-9 points

Well done my friends, for I can truly call you that now," says Carlyetta. "I may have doubted this experiment at times, but with heroes like you we have the strength to protect and rebuild these lands."

All about you, the villagers regard you mostly with thanks, but sometimes with thoughtfulness as they shift their gaze from you to the indentures in the commons, as if to consider whether those folk too might be worthy of place other than servitude.

1-5 points

All about the village, deals are being made, labor and resources assigned to rebuilding projects. Many halflings are overheard exhorting their servants to be as efficient as they perceive you to be. The compliment is back handed, as you sense they regard you as sharp and dangerous tools. Some wonder aloud if it would have been better had you gone "through the seven", discussing you as if you were prime livestock. Carlyetta's words offer some encouragement, "More difficult than I imagined, but you seem to have held up well. Perhaps as we continue our work together, we may better understand our future paths."

Less than one point

The eyes of the fishermen in Pembroke regard you with fear and distaste, all but accusing you for the failure to help them before their troubles occurred (unreasonable as that seems). The indentures blame you for the death of Tryfena, muttering that you only look out for yourselves. The tension between halfling and non-halflings is palpable; seeds of distrust abound.

Carlyetta speaks, "There is much yet to do, and though you have learned little of our ways, I will protect my people with any means at my disposal. You are blunt instruments, but no worse than any other mercenaries in outlook. I will pay well to harness your skills to achieve my goal."

Experience Point Awards

The PCs earn experience based on the encounters and challenges faced. The adventure path is designed to advance the PCs one level per adventure, although there is some wiggle room to speed up the progression, and as noted in encounter E4, you can level the PCs before fighting the hags and their minions if they need additional advantage.

A party of 4-5 PCs should advance from 6th to 7th level at the conclusion of the adventure based on XP alone. If you use milestone rules, level the PCs to 7th level at the conclusion of the adventure in preparation for Book Two: *Temple of Jewels and Mirrors*.

Water Lily of the Goddess

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

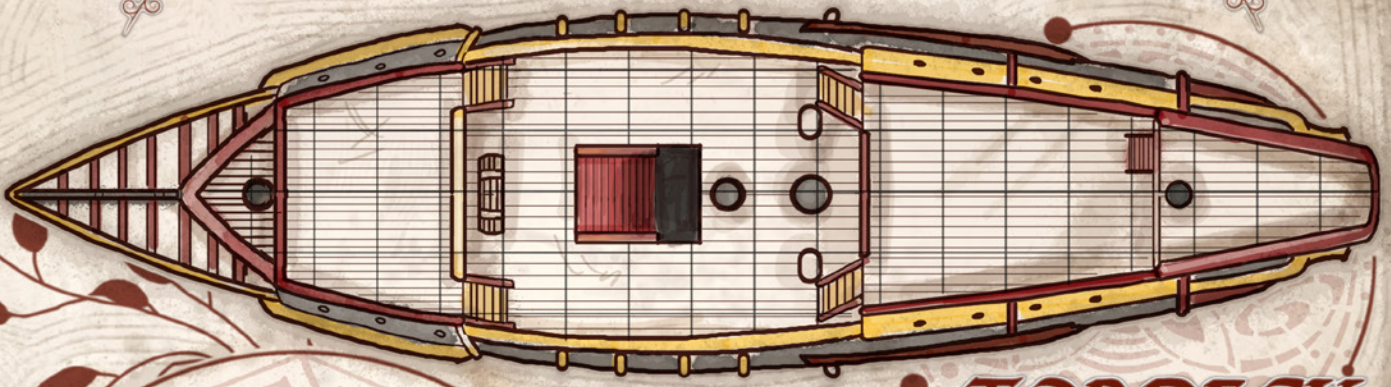
This divinely created flower can be carried, but must be worn for 24 hours to become attuned. The wearer of this divine flower gains advantage on **Strength(Athletics)** checks to swim. In addition, once per long rest, as a bonus action, the wearer of the bloom can gain the effects of *expeditious retreat* or *water breathing*.

The blessing of the lily may be transferred to another at a holy tree of Great Mother, following a 30-minute meditative ritual from the giver,

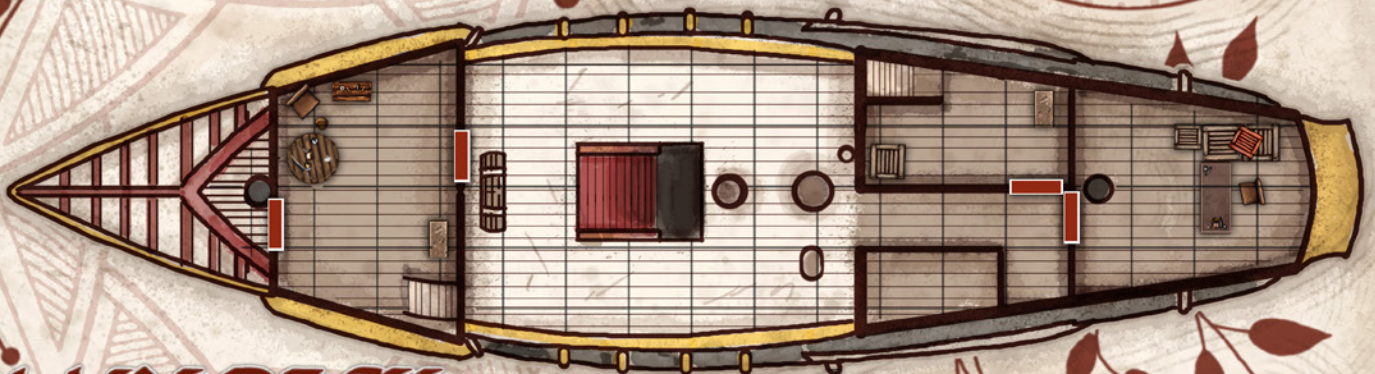
The blessing of the bloom also allows a wearer, as a reaction to cast *lesser restoration* targeting the wearer; when this magic is used, the Water Lily of the Goddess must be laid in a pond, lake, or the sea for 24 hours to regain this boon.



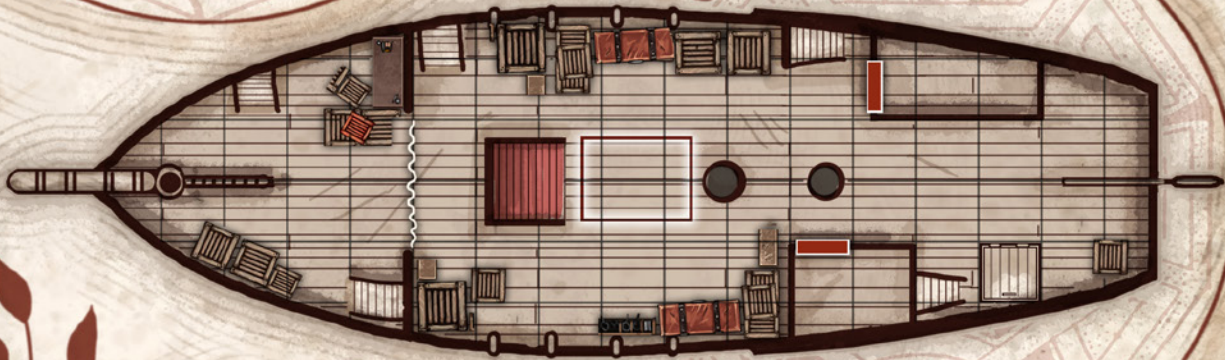
AUTUMN LEAVES



TOP DECK



MAIN DECK

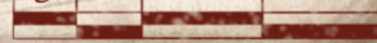


MAIN HOLD



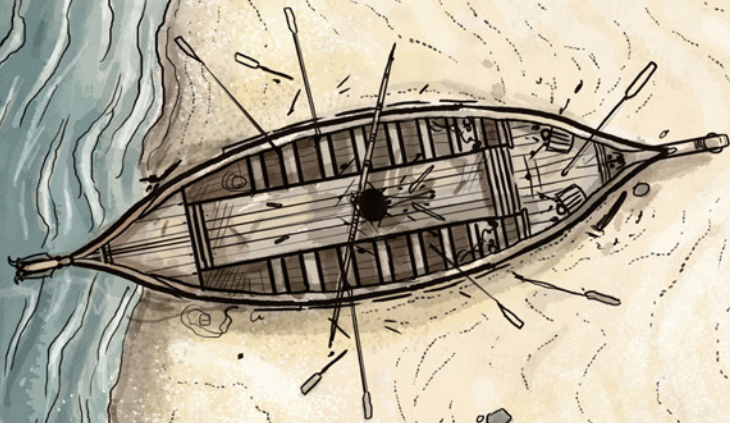
LOWER HOLD

5 SCALE IN FEET



BLANDO





SCALE IN FEET







CORRUPTED KELP

BLANDO



SCALE IN FEET

GM AID - COMMUNITY POINTS TRACKER

Encounter A 1:

Per Guard contingetn defeated: -1 _____
 Reimburse Carlyetta for fines: +1* _____
 *or reduce point lost for defeating guards
 by half (round down) _____

Encounter A3:

Half the party completes pre-drill training
 session: +1 (max +3) _____
 Unsuccessful PC forgoes additional training:
 -1 per PC, per drill _____
 PCs use magic without huffing, crew:
 -1 per PC who "cheats" _____

Encounter B1:

Solve mystery of the mushroom: +2 _____
 Intimidate cook: -1 _____

Encounter B4

Per crewman saved from Octopus: +1
 (+2 if in water) _____

Encounter C2

Diplomatically improving the conditions of
 Digory's indentures: +1 _____
 Intimidating Digory: -1 _____

Encounter C4

Fail to escort indentures to Pembroke: -1 _____

Encounter C5

Win vote: +1 _____
 Return Brandy: +1 _____
 Use of Intimidation: -1 _____

Encounter D3

Exchange Hostages: +1 _____
 Negotiate return visits for Meatball to
 Pembroke and foster ongoing alliance with
 Vikmordere: +2 _____
 Slay/Defeat Vikordere raiders: -1 _____

Encounter E3:

Recover Hostages, before other activity in
 accordance with elder's wishes: +1 _____

FINAL COMMUNITY POINTS TOTAL: _____

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THE TIES THAT BIND

SHATTERED HEARTS ADVENTURE PATH

BY MICHAEL ALLEN

The first adventure in the Shattered Heart Adventure Path, designed for four to five PCs of 6th level.

Still reeling from the twin disasters of the Great Schism and the Hoyrall Wars, the halfings of Picollo are a people cast adrift from ancient traditions. A cleric of the Great Mother strives to restore four great holy sites to the goddess, and in doing so restore the bedrock of halfling society.

The PCs leave the snow-swept plains of the Klavek Kingdom for the warm shores of distant Picollo to restore the first of these great temples, being among the very few permitted to access to the closed-off island. Bigotry, bribery, deal-making, and self-interest prove just as challenging to overcome as flesh and blood obstacles. Sea monsters, raiders and ancient traps at mystical sites all test the PCs' skill before they slip under the waves to confront the corruption at the heart of the water temple of the Great Mother.

Also Included in this adventure:

- Richly detailed relationships with recurring NPCs.
- Politics, mystery, and skill challenges to test the players' (and PCs') versatility.
- A method to track the PCs' influence on the future development of Picollan society.
- A new minor artifact and an ancient magical boon.
- Notes on scaling for parties of 6 or more.

