

∞ Islands of the Known Lands ∞

Steelspire



There are a great many mysteries amid the islands of the southern seas, and even more that are completely unremarkable in every respect. There are a handful, however, that are well known and documented, and which are dreaded above all others. None among them are as sinister as the island simply known as Steelspire.

Geologically, Steelspire is little more than a chunk of volcanic stone and glass that breaks above the ocean's surface in a series of jagged, dangerous reefs that are largely devoid of any observable life. Left to its natural state, that would likely have remained true. That is not the case, however. Steelspire is so named because of a large metal tower that houses the island's only inhabitants, beings feared enough that even the most violent, ambitious, and ruthless pirate crews give the island a very wide berth and avoid the entire region altogether. While this may seem like typical pirate superstition, even the hardened merchants and occasional explorers who are familiar with the region acknowledge that there is ample reason for the pirates to feel as they do: ships have an extraordinary habit of sinking or disappearing in the region surrounding the island.

Steelspire is home to a predatory school of monstrous krakens, augmented by mechamagic and necromancy, who prey upon ships throughout the region. Sometimes the ships are destroyed outright, other times they are pillaged first, and still other

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times they are taken relatively intact, their crews and cargo taken away for some unknown but presumably horrific fate. None who have been taken in such a manner have ever been seen again.

FEATURES OF THE ISLAND

✦ **THE STEELSPIRE** – The sole visible edifice that gives the island its name is a massive metallic tower that is also known as Steelspire. The sheer amount of metal that must have been used in the tower's construction is mind-boggling, and the structure itself does not follow conventional building traditions; it more closely resembles the jagged volcanic rock of the island than it does a true tower. Its appearance suggests that it was not constructed via traditional means, but was perhaps assembled from various scrap via mechemagic, a known but exceptionally rare ability possessed only by a handful of extremely powerful individuals.

✦ **THE CATACOMBS** – Beneath Steelspire, there is a vast network of tunnels that honeycomb the physical island. Presumably created by the passage of magma, these tunnels are large enough to accommodate multiple people walking abreast of one another, and consistent enough to allow even the passage of small vehicles like a thunder cycle with minimal difficulty. Additionally, although there are few naturally occurring chambers of any size among the tunnels, earth magic has allowed artificial rooms to be carved out of the rock, ensuring that there is ample storage and lodging for the island's permanent residents, and dungeon space for their "guests."

✦ **STOREROOMS** – Among the various caverns carved amid the catacombs, there are a handful of especially large, ware-house like chambers that are completely full of various cargoes seized by Jeremortus's mechemagical minions from ships they have attacked. In each case, the cargoes have been carefully searched for the object of the mage's search, whatever enigmatic item that might be, then for anything that could be of use in the ongoing operation of Steelspire. Everything else, including many objects of significant value in the Known Lands, are locked away to keep them out of the way. Although few are aware of what takes place on this sinister island, the rumors of great treasures to be found there are not entirely inaccurate, given the contents of these storerooms.

✦ **THE DOCKS** – The only real mundane aspect of Steelspire are the docks that can be found within a yawning cavern on the island's coastline. Docks have been constructed there that allow small vessels to be moored for loading and unloading. A trio of small, three man boats are kept here to allow for excursions or fishing expeditions, although this latter practice has largely been discontinued with the advent of golemized rapacians present on the island. The height of the cavern in which the docks were constructed allow for even large vessels to be accommodated, although they can only enter the cavern at low tide; at high tide there is not sufficient clearance for them to make entry.

DENIZENS OF THE ISLAND

The Enslaved

The largest group of intelligent beings on Steelspire are those who have been enslaved and serve the will of the necromancer. These individuals are from ships captured by the wizard's powerful necromantic and mechemagical creations, brought to the island for the express purpose of serving him for the remainder of their lives. This does not typically involve a long period of time, for the conditions are brutal and unforgiving.

At any given time, there are approximately two dozen enslaved individuals held in Steelspire. The lord of the manor is not interested in more than that, and once the threshold is reached, he no longer instructs his minions to take prisoners. When slaves die, mostly due to the conditions but occasionally from violence, new prisoners will be captured to replace them. The slaves have a chamber within the catacombs that is, in essence, a combination of a barracks and a brig. This chamber is guarded at all times by at least one servant and usually a mechemagical golem as well.

The Servants

A much smaller number of beings are present on Steelspire as the willing, or at least partially willing, servants of the island's lord. There are roughly a dozen of these individuals, all of whom are from the same tribe of rapacians that relocated here from the Sundered Desert to serve the mage who rules the island. Each of them has received extensive golemoid implants from their master, which has rendered them amphibious and well-suited to aquatic endeavors. While this seems exceptionally strange to those who encounter them for the first time, the natural strength and power of the rapacian physique has been augmented not only by golemization but also magnified by operating underwater; in short, these individuals are powerhouses the likes of which have rarely ever been encountered elsewhere in the Known Lands.

In addition to the sapient beings who serve the island's master, there are a number of golems that he has created that aid in defense and security. These golems are heavily enchanted to be tamper-proof, and not even the loyal servants of the mage have access to them or can give them orders. They can only be commanded by the master himself, and as such are insurance against any potential treachery on the part of his other minions. More than one slave rebellion has been utterly crushed by these powerful devices and promptly replaced with new "recruits."

The Created

Unquestionably the most dangerous denizens of Steelspire other than Jeremortus himself, there are a large number of mechemagical creations who serve the necromancer with absolute, unswerving loyalty found throughout the island. The most powerful are the enormous, nightmarish kraken that Jeremortus has rebuilt, augmented, or crafted entirely by their master. The exact number of these beasts is known only to Jeremortus, and is difficult to determine because there are an unknown number of them roaming the seas at any given time. However, there are never less than three present in and around the island at any given time. In particular, one remains within the cavernous port at all times, lurking just beneath the surface like a massive, unseen sentry. On at least one occasion, escaped slaves managed to reach the port in hopes of stealing a ship. They were all snatched up by segmented, mechemagical tentacles and dragged screaming beneath the water to their doom.

The golems that patrol within the tower and the catacombs are smaller and markedly less powerful than the kraken, but faster and more mobile, able to access areas where their larger counterparts cannot reach. While these golems cannot threaten opponents on the same scale as the krakens, they are more than a match for any single opponent and even larger groups, particularly those who find themselves within Steelspire without the normal resources such groups typically have access to.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Jeremortus, Lord of Steelspire

[NE MALE HUMAN WIZARD (ENCHANTER) 16]

Rumors of Steelspire claim that it is lorded over by a powerful, brilliant, deranged wizard who commands nightmarish creations to serve his every whim. This is mostly correct, but those few who have met Jeremortus would likely agree that while his actions and agenda are deranged, the man himself seems exceptionally calm and collected. Those who speak to him are struck by his civility and his obvious intelligence, but he is completely devoid of emotion, empathy, or anything resembling a sense of mercy or restraint. Those who are familiar with the workings of the intelligent mind would call him a sociopath, but of course no such individuals have ever survived meeting him to make such a diagnosis.

Jeremortus is unquestionably a genius in terms of his ability to innovate new magical techniques, but his agenda is completely inscrutable. He appears to have mastered numerous disciplines, including necromancy, mechamagic, and the skill of surgically attaching golemoid implants. He has spent years assembling a sizeable force of deadly krakens, including both natural krakens that have been golemized and some that are entirely mechanical in nature. His small fleet of mechano-krakens is known throughout the region, although their origin and even Jeremortus's existence is not. He deploys them at strange intervals and in specific patterns to patrol the seas, commanding them to destroy or capture ships they encounter during their voyage. Anything that is captured is returned to Steelspire for careful inspection by their master, although to date it appears that while Jeremortus is looking for something specific, he has not yet found it.

As a child long ago, Jeremortus was apprenticed to a gifted wizard in his home nation of Le'Ciel. His master perished in an unfortunate accident, and Jeremortus was apprenticed to another, but no one ever reached the level of respect he had for his first master. After the Darkfall, when Jeremortus was traveling abroad in the Known Lands, he received a visit from his master's spirit. His master spoke of the Darkfall and the horrors it had unleashed and would continue to unleash. It spoke to him of an ancient relic, something from the time before the Great War, that could aid in ending the Darkfall, and implored him to find it. Thus began Jeremortus's quest, and the driving force behind the chaos and suffering he has brought to the southern seas as a result. Is his quest born of madness? Or is he truly on a quest to save the world from the hordes of the Darkfall? No one, not even Jeremortus himself, knows for certain.

Anolissa

[NE FEMALE RAPACIAN BRAWLER 11]

Chieftess of a small tribe of rapacians, it was Anolissa who led her people into the service of Jeremortus after she and the mage reached an agreement, the details of which are known only to the two of them. There were some among her tribe who rejected the idea and challenged her; those few who survived her wrath fled and found others to take them in. Those who followed her underwent extensive modification and Jeremortus's hands, and several perished in the process. Those who survived, however, found themselves more powerful than ever before, and capable of surviving underwater indefinitely as a result. Now amphibious, Anolissa and her kinsmen proved capable of hunting the seas in a manner that they never could in the desert.

Nothing in the world matters to Anolissa as much as power. She joined the tribe she now leads as a youth after leaving the one to which she was born, so she has no birth-kin within the tribe. She has never taken a mate, at least not more than temporarily (a rather uncommon practice among the rapacian tribes of the Rhanate), and has no children. She took the position of leadership by dint of her prowess as a warrior and her ruthlessness in dealing with threats to the tribe. Her leadership has always been militant, but has kept her people safe and prosperous when many other tribes have foundered. Those who questioned her agreement with Jeremortus were dealt with harshly, because she has never met a being as powerful and as driven as the necromancer. In him she sees the closest thing she has ever known to a god, and her devotion to him is somewhat akin to worship. At least until some weakness arises that makes her suspect that she can take his place, at least.

Golemized Kraken

CR 10, XP 6,400

N Huge animal (aquatic)

Init +7; Senses low-light vision; Perception +22

Defense

AC 22, touch 11, flat-footed 19 (+3 Dex, +11 natural, -2 size)

hp 102 (12d8+48)

Fort +15, Ref +13, Will +5 (+2 vs poison and disease)

Defensive Ability ink cloud (20-ft. radius)

Offense

Speed swim 60 ft., jet 260 ft.

Melee bite +14 (2d6+7), 2 arms +14 (1d6+7), tentacles +12 (4d6+3/19-20 plus grab)

Space 15 ft.; Reach 15 ft. (30 ft. with arms and tentacles)

Special Attacks constrict (4d6+10)

Statistics

Str 27, Dex 17, Con 21, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 2

Base Atk +10; CMB +19 (+23 grapple); CMD 32

Feats Combat Reflexes, Great Fortitude, Improved Critical (tentacle), Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Multiattack, Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Perception +22, Swim +15

SQ Steam Reserve 17 (Su), True Golemoid (Ex)

Ecology

Environment any ocean

Organization solitary

Treasure none



Ssirren

[CN MALE RAPACIAN FIGHTER 4]

As the youngest member of Anolissa's tribe of rapacians, Ssirren has the most unique perspective among his people. He was not yet fully mature when his tribe left the desert and relocated to the southern seas, and he had to wait a short time before he could receive his golemoid implants as his kinsmen did. This simple fact has colored his entire worldview. His memories of the desert are the carefree memories of a child enjoying himself, while his earliest memories of the island are toiling away with menial labor within the tower as he served some purpose while the others became acclimated to their new implants and their new duties. The Rhanate, in Ssirren's memories, is a beautiful homeland that he has been torn away from. The island, on the other hand, is a mirthless, frigid rock that is just as much a prison as a home. Over the years he has come to deeply resent both his chieftess and the magician who holds sway over the entire tribe, and he dreams of overthrowing their rule to lead his people back to their homeland. This is, of course, a grossly implausible idea that is complicated by the fact that the implants all his people now bear make them ill-suited for desert life, but Ssirren is still young and has only begun to discover the depths of his resentment.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

- ❖ The characters are on board a vessel that is attacked by one of Steelspire's mechano-krakens. There is a pitched battle, which the characters may win or lose. If they win, investigating the kraken's remains may give them some indication that it came from Steelspire. If they lose, they can hide among the ship's cargo as it is drug back to the island, and they can gain entrance without anyone knowing they are there. For the first time in its history, there would be a credible threat to the powers that be in Steelspire.
- ❖ A dead or non-functional mechano-kraken is found adrift in the sea, well away from the region normally marked as dangerous to Steelspire's predations. The creature shows clear signs of having been involved in a significant combat, and appears to have been tinkered with after the fact.
- ❖ An associate of the adventurers disappears while sailing the south seas, and there is no sign of his or her vessel ever having arrived at its destination. Rumors abound of pirates throughout the region, but there are no known crews operating in the region where the ship disappeared. Hunting down scuttlebutt, the adventurers hear of the stories of Steelspire and its predations on ships in the region. If their associate is alive, he or she is on Steelspire. And if they are dead, then the man responsible is also on Steelspire, waiting for justice for a thousand deaths just like that one.

EXPANDED ADVENTURES ON STEELSPIRE

The denizens of Steelspire work best as significant antagonists for any group of heroic adventurers. Depending upon their nature, the practice of impressment and enslavement, not to mention the wholesale destruction and murder that is employed by Jeremortus and his minions may sufficient to incense even the most jaded individuals and lead them to rally their forces against the wizard. Unfortunately, that is at best an extremely difficult prospect; Steelspire is designed from its very concept to be an impregnable stronghold against any who would thwart the necromancer's plans for the future.

Perhaps the most viable means that an enemy might have to move against Steelspire and its master would be an ally on the inside. This is unlikely, however, as there are precious few individuals within Steelspire that are not devoted to their lord. The exceptions, of course, are the slaves being held there against their will, and the would-be revolutionary rapacian youth, Ssirren. If those who would bring Steelspire down somehow became aware of Ssirren, or more likely he became aware of them, it could be a potential alliance that could end in the defeat of Jeremortus and the end of Steelspire. Many other outcomes are equally possible, of course, and few of them pleasant, but without risk there is no hope of great things being accomplished. Fortunately for the adventurers, making contact with Ssirren is easier than most others associated with Steelspire.

Ssirren is essentially a gamma among his tribe, and as such he is rarely ever afforded chances to perform duties for Jeremortus or even Anolissa directly. Instead, he often performs mundane or unpleasant tasks that are required of the tribe. His most frequent duties that take him outside the island itself include hunting for food (typically underwater fishing for large specimens that can feed multiple tribe members) or foraging for any overlooked useful items among ships that the mechano-krakens have sunk during their forays into the open sea. It is this fact that presents the most significant opportunity for adventurers to meet and gain an ally in Ssirren.

The number of ways in which adventurers and seditious rapacian golemoids could meet and begin the infiltration of Steelspire are numerous and varied. Rather than establish a linear path to follow to present such a campaign option, instead we present a list of different components by which a single narrative can be constructed.



Circumstances of Meeting Ssirren

- ❖ **HAPPENSTANCE** – The most likely means by which adventurers might encounter Ssirren is purely by accident, most likely when he is on one of his longer-ranging patrols to gather food for the island. The presence of a golemoid rapacian equipped for aquatic operations is remarkable in its own right, and occasionally the young lizardman likes to take over small fishing ships to make his job easier. Any small ship on the sea, such as one that adventurers might own or employ for transport, could be targeted by his hunting. Any adventurers capable of defeating him in combat would spark his hope that they might be able to defeat the forces of Steelspire, and he could sue for peace in the interest of establishing such an arrangement. Alternatively, any adventurers who are operating underwater via magic or a steam-powered submersible could encounter Ssirren on the hunt in that manner, leading to a similar confrontation as described above.
- ❖ **DELIBERATE** – Depending upon the reputation of the adventurers, Ssirren may seek them out specifically for the purpose of helping him free himself from Jeremortus and the tribe. In this case, he will carefully observe them as much as possible to try and find out information he can use to entice them into aiding him. This will allow him to customize the motivations described below based on their tendencies.
- ❖ **RENEGADE** – It is possible that Ssirren's seditious thoughts will be discovered by his tribemates before an opportunity presents itself to ally with external forces. In this event, he will be forced to flee the island to avoid being put to death for his treachery. Fortunately, his position in the tribe benefits him in this one instance: his smaller size and less extensive implants ensure that he is faster and has longer range than his pursuers. Ssirren will seek out anyone he thinks might be able to defend him against his pursuers, and adventurers are a sure bet. Once they intercede on his behalf (as opposed to witnessing his brutal demise at his tribemates' hands), the adventurers will be regaled with tales of Steelspire, the treasures it holds, and the evils perpetuated within.




Motivations for Cooperation

✦ **AVARICE** – Simply put, the idea that there are vast chambers filled with stolen cargo in Steelspire would be enough to tempt some adventurers into making a foray onto the island; Ssiren's description, while exaggerated, is accurate in that it would be sufficient to make a man or even a group of men wealthy several times over. This alone could be impetus for most adventurers to head toward Steelspire, and would transform the encounter into a kind of heist adventure that would prove both entertaining and difficult.

✦ **IDEALISM** – It is an exceedingly simple matter for Ssiren to recount the horrors that Jeremortus has perpetuated during his time at Steelspire, and it requires no imagination for him to do so; an abbreviated litany of his deeds is more than enough. Any noble or altruistic adventurers would be appalled at the tales Ssiren can tell, and even without independent verification they paint an incredibly dark and sinister portrait of events. Those who accept them as truth will likely feel obligated to at least investigate, although they will have few allies willing to undertake such a dangerous endeavor; even if most of what is said about Steelspire is rumor, the portion that is true is enough to deter most.


✦ **VENGEANCE** – The extensive predations of Jeremortus and his minions has cost countless lives throughout the region, and any adventurers who hail from the area either know someone or perhaps even are related to someone who has been killed or at least disappeared as a result of his krakens. Even some who were not a result of his endeavors have been blamed on him, so great is his reputation as a boogeyman throughout the southern seas. Anyone relatively local would likely be eager to strike back at Jeremortus, needing only inside information such as that provided by Ssiren to make an attempt.



Circumstance of Approaching Steelspire

✦ **DIRECT APPROACH** – Possibly the least intelligent manner of broaching Steelspire would be a direct attack, which would pit a small group of admittedly skilled and innovative adventurers against a hardened target with golemoid and mechamagical enforcers, commanded by a powerful arcanist. Any approach would by necessity begin as a naval attack, to which Jeremortus would deploy his mechano-krakens, followed by his golemoid rapacians if the former were to prove ineffective. If the party were to survive to make landfall, the remainder of the rapacian tribe and the golems would be ready to defend their home, possessing both superior numbers and, in all likelihood, superior firepower and physical acumen. Jeremortus himself would enter the fray only as a last resort or if the party were eventually worn down to the point that he could incapacitate them and take them captive to torment them for his difficulties.

✦ **STEALTHY APPROACH** – A much wiser and more likely to succeed approach would be attempting to gain entry into Steelspire without alerting its denizens. This plan is vastly more likely to succeed with the rogue rapacian's assistant, but most adventurers can likely conceive the essential plan without additional aid. Notable attempts might include traveling to the island underwater, hiding away in valuable cargo on a ship sailing in a region identified by Ssiren as targeted by the krakens, or using magic in some way to mask their approach until they are inside the island. Unfortunately, many choke points within Steelspire itself are warded against magical intrusion, so at a dramatically appropriate time the adventurers will likely find themselves revealed or exposed in some way.



Condition of the Island

✦ **WEAKENED** – There are times when supplies ebb, multiple guardians of Steelspire are on extended patrol, or even several of its mechanical monstrosities require maintenance. These times are not common, but they are no longer guarded against as they were when Steelspire first began its operations in the area, either; most of Jeremortus's indepen-

dent minions have become complacent in their belief that nothing can threaten them. Although attempting to take the island will remain an extremely difficult process, it will be simpler in that there will be significantly fewer defenders if attacked during one of these periods. Ssiren will be able to identify when such a time will occur, as well as estimate how long it will take the patrolling mechano-krakens and rapacians to return once recalled.

✦ **TYPICAL** – The most likely situation is that matters at Steelspire will be taking place as they normally do, with no appreciable variance. Roughly one half of the mechano-krakens and the rapacians will be deployed at any one time, and a small number of golems will be inactive for servicing while the rest remain at their posts to defend the island from any potential attack or infiltration.

✦ **PREPARED** – In the event that Ssiren has been cast out and the denizens of the island know that he is on the loose somewhere, Steelspire will be on a state of high alert despite how unlikely they regard the young rapacian as a threat. If this is the case, then all the mechano-krakens will be present, with three guarding the interior chamber and the rest patrolling the area. Likewise the rapacians will have been recalled to ensure the island is well protected, and all golems will be prepared for combat. Slaves and prisoners will either have been sedated, seriously restrained, or killed outright to ensure there will be no aid from within, all depending upon the usefulness of the captive in question. The island is very much in siege mode and on high alert, making effecting an entry extremely difficult.



Potential Outcomes of the Conflict

✦ **DEFEAT** – Jeremortus and his forces represent a significantly powerful threat that could ostensibly overcome even the hardest of adventurers, a feat they have accomplished many times in the past. Steelspire is a formidable fortress even without taking Jeremortus himself into account, and it may well occur that the adventurers prove unable to reach the upper heights where the wizard conducts his rituals. If the adventurers caused enough problems for the wizard, namely the disruption of his quest or the destruction of his resources (which amounts to the same thing), he may be angry enough to dispatch some of his rapacians to pursue them wherever they go and attempt to kill them.

✦ **VICTORY** – Despite that Jeremortus is an incredible powerful opponent, and one who commands significant resources, he is nevertheless at least partially mad, and clever adventurers can doubtless find a way to exploit this weakness and bring an end to his tyranny over the seas. The most likely means of defeating Jeremortus is of course destroying him utterly, a difficult proposition at best. In the event that this is achieved, however, the adventurers will still need to deal with the remaining infrastructure of Steelspire. The golems will continue to function, and the rapacian tribe that serves the wizard remains as well, complicit as they are in innumerable counts of theft, slavery, and murder. Dealing with all of this may prove as difficult as defeating Jeremortus in the first place.

✦ **TRUCE** – Perhaps the least likely potential outcome, it is nevertheless possible that the adventurers could, through their force of arms and magic, prove to Jeremortus that they are significant threats to the Darkfall. Despite that he believes his own quest is the only way to truly end the cataclysm, he does recognize that others can be a force against it as well, and if he becomes convinced that the adventurers are such individuals, he may sue for peace to prevent mutual destruction (or, more likely from his perspective, the destruction of the adventurers and the loss of his resources in the process, delaying his quest further).

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