



THE LIFE OF A PIRATE

They came aboard, all blades and screams. We didn't have any fight in us, and they took our provisions, our extra sails, all of our tools, and our fat sot of a captain's gold. Then they asked who the chief carpenter was. When everyone looked my way, they clapped hands on me and dragged me across to their ship. That was one year, ten battles, and twice as many ports ago. Had I known that I'd be better off on a pirate's ship than on a merchant's vessel...

"Well, it reminds me of part of a song the sailors sang when I used to cut planks for the Shipwrights' Guild: 'There's a ship that's a leavin' Quent, and on you'll quickly sign. The captain's a tyrant, the bosun's worse, but she'll a-suit ya fine.'"

—Mathis Trevain, Master Carpenter aboard the *Emerald Wake*

Those sailing under the fearsome flag of a pirate vessel live by different guidelines than those protected by the laws of the Inner Sea's nations. A pirate's life, for the most part, depends upon a foundation of respect and reputation, a scallywag's propensity for daring raids or flaming ruin having aftershocks extending far beyond the decks of his own ship. In the Skull & Shackles Adventure Path, characters find themselves thrust into the cutthroat lives of pirates. Their success, and potentially their survival, will depend on reputations garnered from their decisions, outrages, and panache. The following presents details and subsystems allowing GMs to track their PCs' increasing reputation, which has ramifications throughout the Adventure Path, as well as several other systems and side games to help simulate the day-to-day responsibilities and dangers of being Shackles pirates.

PLUNDER & INFAMY

The acquisition of wealth and the spread of grim reputations motivate pirates to deeds of daring and depravity. The following two subsystems present GMs with ways to gauge and track their PCs' success at achieving what all pirates desire most. Although the PCs' situation in "The Wormwood Mutiny" prevents them from gaining much in the way of plunder or infamy in this adventure, their fortunes rise considerably in future adventures.

PLUNDER

There's a difference between plunder and the gold pieces in a pirate's pocket. While gold doubloons and fabulous jewelry can be plunder, pirates are rarely lucky enough to encounter a ship with a hold full of such treasures. Typically, there are trade goods, foodstuffs, spices, and valuables of a more mundane sort. Such takes can fetch significant prices, but for scallywags more interested in looting than the specifics of what they loot, this system provides a way for parties to track their plunder without getting bogged down by lists of commonplace cargo and their values down to the copper piece. Aside from streamlining the collection of riches, this system also allows characters to increase their infamy, paying off crew members and spreading their wealth with more appealing dispensations of loot than what was aboard the last merchant ship they robbed.

Winning Plunder: What gains a group plunder is largely decided by the GM or is noted at the relevant points throughout the Skull & Shackles Adventure Path. Typically, at any point the PCs claim a ship's cargo, conquer an enemy's hideout, or find a significant treasure, there's the potential for a portion (sometimes a significant portion) of that wealth to translate into plunder. Plunder means more than five wicker baskets, a barrel of pickled herring, three short swords, and a noble's outfit; it's a generalization of a much larger assortment of valuable but generally useless goods

PLUNDER & INFAMY QUICK REFERENCE

The following terms feature prominently in the plunder and Infamy subsystems, and are called out for ease of reference.

Disrepute: The amount of Infamy the PCs have accrued through successful Infamy checks, which can be spent on impositions. Costs measured in Disrepute are marked with a price.

Infamy Check: A Bluff, Intimidate, or Perform check made to gain Infamy and Disrepute. The DC of this check equals 15 + twice the group's average character level. Spending plunder grants bonuses on this check.

Impositions: Incredible deeds and outrageous acts that grant the PCs a variety of benefits or impose crippling consequences on their victims. Higher tier impositions become available as PCs reach higher Infamy thresholds.

Infamy Threshold: Ranges measured in Infamy. Upon achieving new Infamy thresholds, additional impositions become available for purchase.

Plunder: An approximation of valuable but non-useful cargo. One point of plunder is worth about 1,000 gp, and takes up 10 tons of cargo capacity, unless otherwise noted.

Infamy: The highest total number of points of Disrepute achieved by making successful Infamy checks, representing the PCs' total reputation. This number cannot exceed the PCs' average party level $\times 4$ but rarely, if ever, decreases.

(and serves to help avoid bookkeeping on lists of random goods). Rather, a cargo ship carrying construction timber, dyed linens, crates of sugar, animal furs, and various other goods might equate to 4 points of plunder. Just as when awarding more standard forms of treasure, a GM doling out plunder should consider the challenge of winning the plunder and the actual value of the plunder if the PCs cash it in (see below). As a rule of thumb, GMs seeking to give the characters a minor reward might give them 1 point of plunder, while a major reward would be 5 points of plunder.

Plunder is not meant to serve as a replacement for more standard forms of treasure. GMs should still award characters gold and magic items to keep them prepared to face new challenges, whereas plunder serves as a useful shorthand for what varied mundane treasures are discovered and can be sold for values in gold. Characters can also buy plunder if they wish, though those who do so risk becoming known as merchants rather than pirates.

Value of Plunder: Plunder is valuable for two reasons: It can be sold for gold pieces, and it helps you increase your Infamy (Infamy is further detailed below). In general, 1 point of plunder is worth approximately 1,000 gp, whether



it be for a crate full of valuable ores or a whole cargo hold full of foodstuffs. Regardless of what the plunder represents, getting the best price for such goods is more the domain of merchants than pirates, and just because cargo might be worth a set amount doesn't necessarily mean the PCs can get that much for it. Exchanging 1 point of plunder for gold requires a PC to spend 1 full day at port and make an applicable skill check. Regardless of how much plunder the PCs have, one PC must spend a full day trading to exchange 1 point of plunder for gold. The PC trading also must be the same PC to make the skill check to influence the trade. The larger the port and the higher the skill check, the better price the PCs can get for their plunder. At smaller ports there's little chance of getting more than half value for plunder, unless a PC can employ a skill to make a better deal. At larger ports, the chances of finding a buyer willing to pay a reasonable price for cargo increases, and PCs can still employ skill checks to make even more lucrative bargains. PCs seeking to win a higher price for their plunder can make one of the following skill checks and apply the results to the table below: Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, or any applicable Profession skill, like Profession (merchant). A poor result on a skill check can reduce the value of plunder. If the PCs are not satisfied with the price they are offered for their plunder, they need not take it, but a day's worth of effort is still expended. They can try for a better result the next day.

The table below explains how much PCs can expect to get for their plunder in communities of various sizes, the skill check DC required to increase this amount by a set percentage, and the maximum amount buyers in a community can be convinced to buy plunder for. Each column is explained in brief here.

Community Size: The size of a community is determined by its population, noted in every community stat block and further detailed in the *Pathfinder RPG GameMastery Guide*.

Base Sale %: Every community is willing to buy plunder from the PCs, but not necessarily at its full value. This column lists the percentage at which a community is willing to buy 1 point of plunder (along with that percentage's expression in gold pieces).

DC to Increase Sale: This is the skill check DC required to increase the sale percentage a community offers for

plunder. Every community can be convinced to offer more for plunder (to a maximum sale percentage listed in the final column of the table below), but this requires the PCs to make a skill check. The DC of this skill check is 10 + an amount determined by how much the PCs are trying to increase the sale percentage. For example, if a PC is unwilling to accept a mere 20% of the value of his group's plunder when attempting to sell it in a hamlet, he can attempt to increase this percentage by 5% by making a DC 15 skill check. If he wants to attempt to increase the percentage to 30% (the maximum amount the hamlet can possibly pay), he must make a DC 20 skill check. Failure results in no increase, and this skill check can only be made once per day. In larger communities, the DC to increase these percentages rises, but the percentage also increases, as does the maximum percentage buyers can be talked up to.

Maximum Sale %: This is the highest percentage at which a community can be talked into buying 1 point of plunder. Merchants in a community will never buy plunder for a higher price than this. Additionally, this column lists the skill check DC required to haggle buyers up to this percentage, and how much the percentage is worth in gold pieces.

Spending Plunder: In addition to its value in gold pieces, plunder is vital to increasing a pirate crew's Infamy. See the Infamy subsystem for more details.

Buying Plunder: Although gold typically proves more valuable and versatile than plunder, some parties might wish to exchange their traditional wealth for plunder. In any community, a party can buy 1 point of plunder for 1,000 gp. What form of goods this plunder takes is determined by the GM.

INFAMY AND DISREPUTE

Some pirates only do what they do for the promise of wealth, being little more than brigands of the waves. Others do it for the reputation, fearsomeness, and power that comes with numbering among the most notorious scallywags on the seas. That's where Infamy comes in. Numerous times over the course of their careers, the PCs—as members of a single pirate crew—will have the opportunity to recount their victories, boast of the treasures they've won, and spread tales of their outrages. All of this has the potential to win

Community Size	Base Sale % (GP for Plunder)	DC to Increase Sale	Maximum Sale % (Max DC & GP for Plunder)
Thorp	10% (100 gp)	10 + 5 per 5%	20% (DC 20; 200 gp)
Hamlet	20% (200 gp)	10 + 5 per 5%	30% (DC 20; 300 gp)
Village	30% (300 gp)	10 + 5 per 5%	40% (DC 20; 400 gp)
Small town	40% (400 gp)	10 + 5 per 5%	60% (DC 30; 600 gp)
Large town	60% (600 gp)	10 + 5 per 5%	80% (DC 30; 800 gp)
Small city	80% (800 gp)	10 + 10 per 5%	90% (DC 30; 900 gp)
Large city	90% (900 gp)	10 + 10 per 10%	120% (DC 40; 1,200 gp)
Metropolis	100% (1,000 gp)	10 + 10 per 10%	140% (DC 50; 1,400 gp)

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the PCs Infamy, but that alone isn't the goal. At the most basic level, infamous pirates have the potential to press-gang unfortunates into their crews, get repairs to their ships in nearly any port, and win discounts from merchants they'd prefer not to rob. As a crew becomes more and more infamous, however, its legend stretches across the seas, allowing it to garner support from other pirate lords, win more favorable vessels, and even rally whole pirate armadas under its flag. This system allows characters to track how their legend is growing over the course of the campaign, along with providing them tangible rewards for building appropriately piratical reputations.

Infamy and Disrepute Scores: In a method similar to the tracking system for Fame and Prestige Points detailed in *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Pathfinder Society Field Guide*, a party has two related scores, Infamy and Disrepute. Infamy tracks how many points of Infamy the crew has gained over its career—think of this as the sum of all the outlandish stories and rumors about the PCs being told throughout the Shackles. Infamy rarely, if ever, decreases, and reaching certain Infamy thresholds provides useful benefits and allows others to be purchased using points of Disrepute. Infamy is limited by actual skill, however, and a group's Infamy score can never be more than $4 \times$ the PCs' average party level.

Disrepute is a spendable resource—a group's actual ability to cash in on its reputation. This currency is used to purchase impositions, deeds others might not want to do for the group, but that they perform either to curry the group's favor or to avoid its disfavor. This score will likely fluctuate over the course of a pirate crew's career and can go as high as the group's Infamy (but never higher), and at times might even drop to zero. This isn't something to worry about, though, as a low Disrepute score has no bearing on a crew's overall reputation—on the contrary, it merely means they're making use of the benefits their status has won them. However, it does represent that even the PCs' legend can only take them so far, and if a group's Disrepute drops lower than the Disrepute price of a benefit, the crew must spend time building its Disrepute back up before it can purchase that benefit.

Winning Infamy and Disrepute: A few things are required to gain Infamy: an audience, a deed to tell about, and a flair for storytelling. Proof of the group's deed in the form of plunder doesn't hurt either.

To gain Infamy, the PCs must moor their ship at a port for 1 full day, and the PC determined by the group to be its main storyteller must spend this time on shore carousing and boasting of infamous deeds. This PC must make either a Bluff, Intimidate, or Perform check to gauge the effectiveness of her recounting or embellishing. The DC of this check is equal to $15 +$ twice the group's average party level (APL), and the check is referred to as an Infamy

check. If the character succeeds at this check, the group's Infamy and Disrepute both increase by +1 (so long as neither score is already at its maximum amount). If the result exceeds the DC by +5, the group's Infamy and Disrepute increase by +2; if the result exceeds the DC by +10, both scores increase by +3. The most a party's Infamy and Disrepute scores can ever increase as a result of a single Infamy check is by 3 points. If the PC fails the Infamy check, there is no change in her group's Infamy score and the day has been wasted.

Occasionally, deeds of exceptional daring or depravity might win a party increases to its Disrepute. This sort of discretionary bonus to Disrepute is noted in the context of an adventure or determined by the GM.

Infamy and Disrepute per Port: No matter how impressionable (or drunk) the crowd, no one wants to hear the same tales and boasts over and over again. Thus, a group can only gain a maximum of 5 points of Infamy and Disrepute from any particular port. However, this amount





RUM RATION

Aboard many ships, half a pint of rum is distributed to each crew member at dusk. The rum is staggeringly strong, and is often watered down to make grog. Characters drinking the ration are affected as though they had taken an addictive drug (see page 236 of the *GameMastery Guide* for details on drugs and addiction). The rum ration is doled out more to keep the crew sated and docile than for recreation. The penalty for selling or spilling the ration is six lashes, or six lashes from a cat-o'-nine-tails for a second offense. Deliberately tipping away rum on board a crowded ship without being seen requires a DC 10 Stealth check. While on merchant or navy vessels rum rations are strictly limited, on pirate ships, crew members can often request more rum if they please.

SHACKLES RUM RATION

Type ingested; **Addiction** minor, Fortitude DC 5

Price 2 sp

Effect variable; +1d4 alchemical bonus to Charisma and fatigued for 1d8 hours

Damage 1d3 Con

resets every time a group reaches a new Infamy threshold. Thus, once a group gains 5 points of Infamy and Disrepute in Quent, it can gain no further points of Infamy from that port until it reaches the next Infamy threshold, though the crew can travel to another port and gain more Infamy by boasting to a new audience.

Plunder and Infamy: Plunder can modify a PC's attempt to gain Infamy in two ways. Before making an Infamy check for the day, the party can choose to spend plunder to influence the result—any tale is more believable when it comes from someone throwing around her wealth and buying drinks for the listeners. Every point of plunder expended adds a +2 bonus to the character's skill check to earn Infamy. The party can choose to spend as much plunder as it wants to influence this check—even the most leaden-tongued pirate might win fabulous renown by spending enough booty.

Additionally, if a PC fails an Infamy check, the party can choose to spend 3 points of plunder to immediately reroll the check. The party may only make one reroll attempt per day, and spend the plunder even if the second attempt fails—some people just aren't impressed no matter how much loot you throw at them.

Spending Disrepute: A group's Disrepute can be spent to buy beneficial effects called impositions, though some impositions might only be available in certain places—such as at port—or might have additional costs—like forcing a prisoner to walk the plank. Spending Disrepute

to purchase an imposition requires 1 full day unless otherwise noted. When Disrepute is spent, the group's Disrepute score decreases by the price of the imposition, but its Infamy (and, thus, the group's Infamy threshold) remains the same. The prices of impositions and the Infamy threshold required to make those impositions available are detailed below.

INFAMY THRESHOLD

The following benefits are available to groups that achieve the listed amount of Infamy.

Title & Infamy Required	Benefit
Disgraceful (10+ Infamy)	Characters may purchase disgraceful impositions. The PCs may choose one favored port. They gain a +2 bonus on all Infamy checks made at that port.
Despicable (20+ Infamy)	Characters may purchase despicable impositions. Once per week, the PCs can sacrifice a prisoner or crew member to immediately gain 1d3 points of Disrepute. This sacrifice is always fatal, and returning the victim to life results in the loss of 1d6 points of Disrepute.
Notorious (30+ Infamy)	Characters may purchase notorious impositions. Disgraceful impositions can be purchased for half price (rounded down). The PCs may choose a second favored port. They gain a +2 bonus on all Infamy checks made at this new favored port and a +4 bonus on Infamy checks made at their first favored port.
Loathsome (40+ Infamy)	Characters may purchase loathsome impositions. Despicable impositions can be purchased for half price (rounded down). PCs gain a +5 bonus on skill checks made to sell plunder.
Vile (55+ Infamy)	Characters may purchase vile impositions. Notorious impositions can be purchased for half price (rounded down). Disgraceful impositions are free. The PCs may choose a third favored port. They gain a +2 bonus on all Infamy checks made at the new favored port, a +4 bonus on Infamy checks made at their second favored port, and a +6 bonus on Infamy checks made at their first favored port.

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IMPOSITIONS

The following benefits can be purchased by groups that spend the listed amount of Disrepute and have achieved the requisite amount of Infamy. Over the course of the Skull & Shackles Adventure Path, characters might find other ways to spend their Disrepute. GMs are also encouraged to create their own impositions using the following as guidelines.

Infamy Cost Imposition Benefit

Disgraceful Impositions

2	Yes, Sir!: For the next hour, the PCs' crew completes any mundane tasks they're assigned in half the expected time. This typically relates to Craft and Profession (sailor) checks made to prepare, maintain, or repair the ship, and cannot be applied to combat or more complex deeds like crafting magic items.
5	Captain's Orders!: As a standard action, a PC on board her ship can cast <i>fog cloud</i> , <i>heroism</i> , <i>make whole</i> , <i>quench</i> , or <i>whispering wind</i> with a caster level equal to her character level.
5	Walk the Plank!: The PCs may sacrifice one crew member or prisoner to grant themselves and their crew one of two bonuses: either a +2 bonus on all skill checks or a +2 bonus on attack rolls. These bonuses only apply while on board the PCs' ship and last until either the next day or when the captain leaves the ship. If a sacrificed character is returned to life, the PCs and their crew members take a –2 penalty on both skill checks and attack rolls for 1 day.
10	Get Up, You Dogs!: Every PC and allied character on the deck of the PCs' ship is affected as per the spell <i>cure light wounds</i> , as if cast by a cleric of the PCs' average party level. This imposition can only be used once per week.

Despicable Impositions

5	Lashings!: The speed of the PCs' ship doubles for 1 day.
5	Shiver Me Timbers!: While on board their ship, the PCs and their entire crew can reroll initiative or roll initiative in what would otherwise be a surprise round. The benefit of this imposition can be used immediately, but only once per week.
10	Besmara's Blessings!: As a standard action, a PC on board her ship can cast <i>animate rope</i> , <i>control water</i> , <i>remove curse</i> , <i>remove disease</i> , or <i>water breathing</i> with a caster level equal to her character level.
10	Dead Men Tell No Tales!: While on board their ship, the PCs can use this imposition to automatically confirm a threatened critical hit.

Notorious Impositions

5	You'll Take It!: The PCs can spend up to 5 points of plunder in 1 day at 50% of its value (regardless of a community's maximum sale %). This amount cannot be adjusted by skill checks.
5	Honor the Code!: The PCs and their crew gain a +4 bonus on all Charisma-based skill checks made against other pirates for the next 24 hours.
10	Master the Winds!: As a standard action, a PC on board her ship can cast <i>call lightning storm</i> , <i>control winds</i> , <i>mirage arcana</i> , or <i>telekinesis</i> with a caster level equal to her character level.
15	Chum the Waters!: For every Infamy threshold they possess, the PCs summon 1d4 sharks into the waters surrounding their ship. These sharks are not under the PCs' control and viciously attack any creature in the water.

Loathsome Impositions

5	Evade!: Teleport your ship 100 feet in any direction. This imposition can be used once per day.
10	You'll Take It and Like It!: The PCs can spend up to 5 points of plunder in 1 day at 100% of its value (regardless of a community's maximum sale %). This amount cannot be adjusted by skill checks.
10	Master the Waves!: As a standard action, a PC on board her ship can cast <i>control weather</i> , <i>discern location</i> , <i>hero's feast</i> , or <i>waves of exhaustion</i> with a caster level equal to her character level.
20	The Widow's Scar!: Choose one enemy to curse. You and your crew gain a +2 bonus on attack and damage rolls against that NPC for 1 week. The enemy is aware of the curse and who cursed her, and can end the effect with a <i>remove curse</i> spell.

Vile Impositions

10	More Lashings!: The speed of the PCs' ship quadruples for 1 day.
15	The Hungry Sea!: A PC aboard her ship may cast <i>elemental swarm</i> , <i>storm of vengeance</i> , or <i>whirlwind</i> as an 17th-level caster.
20	Dive! Dive! Dive!: The PCs' ship submerges and can travel underwater at its normal speed for up to 1 hour. During this time, the vessel is encompassed by a bubble of breathable air and takes no ill effects from the water—even most sea creatures keep their distance. The ship leaves no visible wake upon the waters above, but might be visible in particularly clear water.
25	Summon the Serpent!: One sea serpent comes to the aid of the PCs' ship. This sea monster is under the control of the PCs and serves for 10 minutes before disappearing back into the deep.



ROLES ABOARD A PIRATE SHIP

A pirate crew is more than just a mob of cutthroats on a ship; all crew members have specific roles and responsibilities, with harsh punishments being meted out upon those who shirk their duties. Listed here are some of the standard roles aboard a typical pirate ship. Not all of these roles might be represented on every vessel, but such details can help players understand their characters' daily duties.

Boatswain: The boatswain, or bosun (pronounced "bosun" either way), is responsible for the upper deck of the vessel and above. This makes the boatswain accountable for all rope, rigging, anchors, and sails. At the start of the day, the boatswain and those under her weigh anchor, raise the sails and report on the general condition of the ship's deck to the captain. As she oversees many of the ship's basic daily labors, the boatswain is often responsible for keeping discipline and dispensing punishment.

Cabin Boy/Girl: Servant to the captain and other officers, this low-ranking and typically young crew member assists other sailors in their duties and runs various errands across the ship, requiring him or her to gain a measure of understanding of almost all the ship's roles.

Captain: The ultimate authority on any ship, his word is law to all on board. The captain chooses where to sail, what to plunder, and who fills the other stations aboard the vessel, among many other command decisions. Leadership often proves perilous, however, as a captain is, above all, meant to secure success for his ship and crew. Failing to do so increases the threat of mutiny.

Carpenter/Surgeon: No matter what enchantments or alchemical unguents augment a pirate ship, its heart and bones are still wood. This simple fact makes the carpenter one of the most important positions aboard any vessel. Carpenters are chiefly responsible for maintaining the ship below the deck, finding and plugging leaks, repairing damage, and replacing masts and yards. As the crew member most skilled with the saw, the carpenter typically serves as a ship's surgeon as well—bones cut just as easily as timbers.

Cook: While the quartermaster normally allocates the rations, the cook and his apprentices make and distribute meals to the crew. Although some better-outfitted vessels employ skilled cooks to attend to the captain and the officers, many cooks are drawn from crew members who have suffered crippling injuries, allowing them to still serve even after such trauma.

Master-at-Arms: Concerned with the security of the ship, the fitness of the crew, and the dispensing of justice, the master-at-arms typically is one of the most feared and dreaded of a ship's officers.

Master Gunner: The master gunner is in charge of all shipboard artillery, ensuring moisture and rust don't ruin the weapons and that the crew knows how to use them. On

board ships with firearms, the master gunner maintains the vessel's cannons, firearms, and powder supplies; on ships without such weapons, she maintains the ballistas, catapults, and so on.

Quartermaster: The quartermaster oversees the supplies and items stored aboard the ship. She maintains the supplies of food and weaponry, oversees the disbursement of food to the cook, and doles out the rum ration to the crew.

Rigger: Riggers work the rigging and unfurl the sails. In battle, next to that of a boarding party, the riggers' job is one of the most dangerous, as they pull enemy vessels near enough to board.

Swab: Any sailor who mops the decks. Also used as slang for any low-ranking or unskilled crew member.

PIRATICAL PUNISHMENTS

To maintain the obedience and effectiveness of their crews, most captains enforce strict schedules and shipboard laws upon their vessels, all maintained by the swift dispensation of brutal punishments. The following presents (in order of severity) the game effects of a variety of typical nautical punishments, which the PCs have the potential to face or inflict during their piratical careers. Most of these sentences are meted out just before the evening meal, at an event typically referred to as the bloody hour. Victims are tied to the whipping post on the main deck and their backs stripped for punishment—with penalties doubled for those who resist. Although the victim is bound, the punishers simply lash their victims, and are not allowed a full-round action to make a coup-de-grace. A roll of 1 on such an attack is treated as a non-damaging fumble that still counts as a strike, much to the amusement of the crew.

Rope Bash: Little more than an admonishment—and occasionally used as a sign of endearment—a rope bash is a single attack with the hefty, sealed end of a ship's rope that delivers 1 point of nonlethal damage.

The Lash: This is an attack using a whip. Damage dealt by the lash during bloody hour is typically nonlethal.

Cat-o'-Nine-Tails: This is an attack using a cat-o'-nine-tails, also referred to simply as a cat—a Medium version of which deals 1d4 points of slashing damage on a successful hit. See page 18 of *Pathfinder Player Companion: Pirates of the Inner Sea* for more details on this weapon.

Confined in the Sweatbox: A cramped metal box left on deck and exposed to the sun, a sweatbox is terribly confining and replicates unbearably hot conditions. Each hour a character spends in the box, she must succeed at a DC 15 Fortitude saving throw or take 1d4 points of nonlethal damage. The DC of this save increases by +1 for each consecutive hour the character spends in the box. Any creature with fire resistance is immune to the effects of the sweatbox. Victims typically spend 8, 12 or even 24 hours locked up in the sweatbox.

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Keelhauling: The most frightful of pirate punishments is keelhauling, as it generally ends in death—often by decapitation. Being keelhailed involves being tied to a rope looped over a ship's keel and dragged down one side of a ship, underwater across the barnacle encrusted hull, and up the other side. Keelhauling takes several rounds and can be done either fast or slow. If done fast, the barnacles cut deep and flense the victim, dealing 1d6 points of damage per round. If done slow, shallower cuts are incurred, dealing 1d3 damage per round, but the risk of drowning increases (see page 445 of the *Core Rulebook*). In either case, the victim can make a DC 20 Reflex save each round to take half damage. How long keelhauling takes typically depends on the vessel, with a keelhauling on a ship like the *Wormwood* taking 6 rounds if done fast and 12 rounds if done slow.

PIRATE ENTERTAINMENTS

With time on their hands and precious few places to go, Shackles pirates have come up with an astonishing array of pastimes.

One way pirates amuse themselves is through songs and stories. Pirates love a good sea chantey, and characters with Perform skills quickly find themselves popular members of the crew (although pirates aren't generally big on Chelish Opera). If a character succeeds at a DC 20 Perform check, he gains a +2 circumstance bonus on all Charisma-based skill checks made to interact with any listener among the crew for the next 24 hours. A Perform result of 9 or lower, however, indicates that the next time he attempts to use Perform to entertain the crew, everyone ignores him unless he makes a successful DC 15 Bluff or Intimidate check before doing so.

Aside from telling stories, singing songs, and other recreations (all of which might be simulated with the Perform skill), these pastimes have two things in common: they are dangerous, and they are played for money. When betting on any of the following games, the minimum bet is 1 gp, and the maximum ready cash any NPC in the lesser crew is likely to have is 20 gp. Some people are bad losers—the ramifications of this are left for the GM to decide.

Arm Wrestling: Not merely typical arm wrestling bouts, such matches are usually conducted on a barrel top covered in broken glass, knives, or caltrops. Participants make opposed Strength checks, with the higher result determining the winner, and the loser taking an amount of damage equal to 1d2 + the winner's Strength modifier as his hand and arm are pushed onto whatever lies on the table.

Hog Lob: Participants lob a lead ingot covered in a greased piglet skin, the "hog," as far across the deck as possible. This game is resolved by d20 checks between any number of players, who agree on a bet beforehand. The hog counts as an improvised weapon, imposing a -4 penalty on all rolls using it unless the thrower has the Throw

Anything feat. Checks are resolved as attack rolls using the character's CMB. Characters toss the hog a number of feet equal to their adjusted rolls; for example, a character who gets a result of 22 throws the hog 22 feet. Some pirates claim to have participated in games played against Asmodeus using a live hog.

Heave: This potentially deadly drinking game is played with rum and takes place between any number of pirates, who bet to predict the winner beforehand. Each pirate drinks a half pint of rum in one swig. Doing so forces participants to make a successful DC 15 Fortitude save or have the damage dealt by the rum ration increase by +1 (see sidebar; this is in addition to the normal effects of the rum ration). This DC increases by +3 for each consecutive drink. Pirates then take turns drinking until only one is left standing. Some tales tell of entire crews drinking themselves to death through this game, leaving ships of drunk ghosts wandering the shipping routes.





BESMARA

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

—BESMARA'S CODE

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TEMPLES AND SHRINES

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

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

A PRIEST'S ROLE

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

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





CUSTOMIZED SUMMON LIST

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

Summon Monster II

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

Summon Monster/Nature's Ally V

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

Summon Monster/Nature's Ally VI

Tylosaurus (*Bestiary* 2 91) (N)

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

BESMARAN FAMILIARS

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

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

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

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

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

HOLY TEXT

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

APHORISMS

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

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

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

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

HOLIDAYS

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

RELATIONS WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

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

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

NEW DIVINE SPELLS

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

ADVANCED SCURVY

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

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S

Range touch

Target living creature touched

Duration instantaneous

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

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

CLOUD OF SEASICKNESS

School conjuration (creation) [poison];

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

Casting Time 1 standard action

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

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

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

Duration 1 round/level

Saving Throw Fortitude negates; see text; **Spell Resistance** no

This spell functions like *stinking cloud*, except as noted above and that the vapors make creatures sickened instead of nauseated.

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

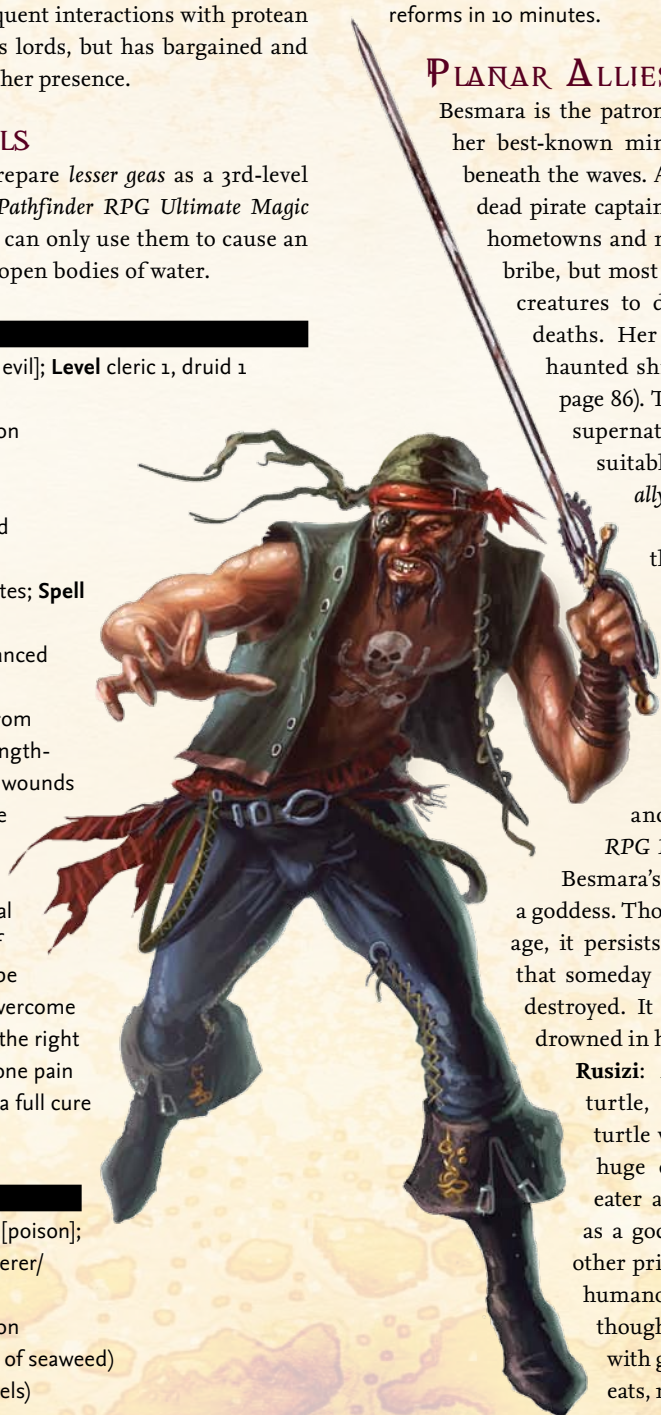
PLANAR ALLIES

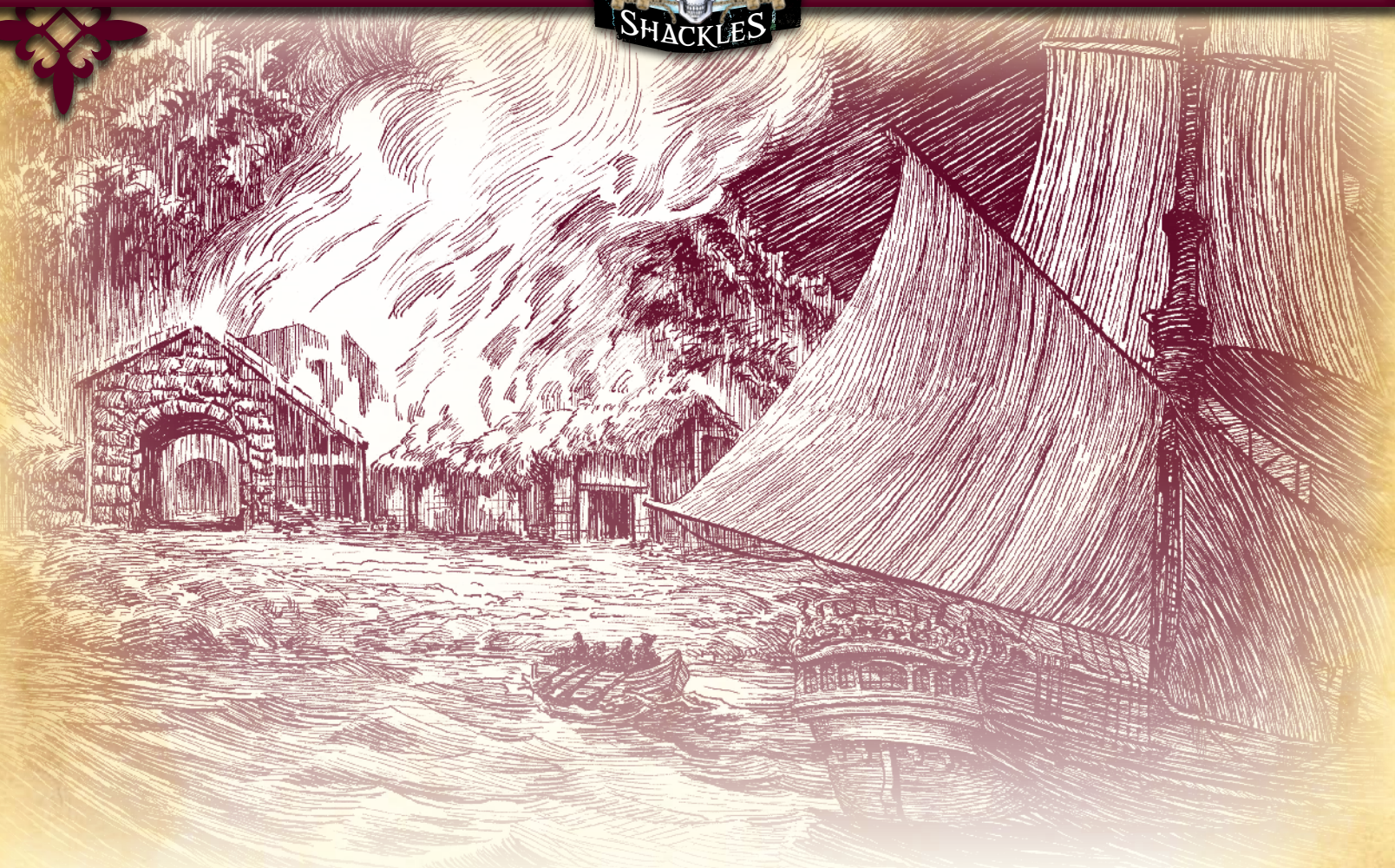
Besmara is the patron of sea monsters, and all of her best-known minions are great beasts from beneath the waves. All Besmaran priests know of dead pirate captains who are legendary in their hometowns and may call them with the right bribe, but most prefer to conjure nightmare creatures to drag enemy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

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

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

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





HELL COME ASHORE

Pathfinder's Journal: The Treasure of Far Thallai 1 of 6

As we dropped anchor, Moonplum burned. Blanketing smoke rose from the outpost's ruins. Caught by a rare westerly harmattan, it drifted out over the blue-gray waters of the Fever Sea. Warm soot fell like hail onto the *Aspidochelone's* foredeck.

Seagrave, the saltiest of my four unwilling adjutants, offered me his spyglass. Lines of grime incised his bloated face. Shells, clay beads, and bits of golden coin hung in the tangles of his beard. His night-blue greatcoat, worn in cussed defiance of the tropical heat, smelled of mutton grease, old blood, spilled rum, ordure, and the combined sweat of several decades. He wore stink as a wizard wears a warding spell.

"Looks like the *Whelk*, ma'am," he said, pronouncing the word in the sailor's manner, so that it verged on *mum*. As

fully as Siren Call had bounded his will, I could never stop Seagrave from calling me that, to say *captain* as he ought. Where once I would have corrected him, now I recognized my annoyance as small-minded. To withhold from him this tiny rebellion would be ungiving.

"Who commands it?" I asked. No fact concerning a ship, captain, or crewman of the Shackles eluded Seagrave's mind. He absorbed the scuttlebutt of our piratical isles as a fish breathes through its gills.

"Josiah Common," answered Seagrave. "Otherwise known as Josiah Tongue-Cutter, Sy the Fork, or Tragic Joe."

"The one with the glass eye?"

"Aye, ma'am. Some say he has two glass eyes. But that's only a jest."

"And to which of the pirate lords does he owe his charter?"

"Used to sail for Tessa Fairwind. These days, the Wolf."

Seagrave meant Avimar Sorrinash, lycanthrope commander of a lycanthrope crew. My argument today was not with him.

"Does this Tragic Joe league himself with our man?"

"They ran starboard-to-port against the Rahadoumi navy, and in raids as far north as Varisia."

The *Whelk* was a low-slung war sloop. Spiraled tiles on its prow mimicked the shell of the predatory mollusk that was its namesake. A mere handful of sailors patrolled its deck. They spyglassed us as we spyglassed them.

Seagrave licked his sun-chapped lips. "Shall we blast it with fire-spitters, or just come along and board?"

"Neither."

He communicated his disappointment in a *basso profundo* grunt. It would have carried great weight, were he still a captain.

"If the internal peace of our free pirate nation is to be disturbed, it won't be our doing," I told him. "But if the Fork's crew come at us..."

A grin surfaced from the dark sargasso of Seagrave's beard. "Aye, ma'am."

The crew rowed ashore in five boats—I in one, one of my adjutants in each of the others. The debris of charred, shattered piers drifted by. We beached our boats near a mixed stand of palms and cottons.

Rira, the only woman among my adjutants, stalked toward me, boots sinking into silty soil. The pounding sun highlighted each strange detail on the mask that forever concealed her face. It grimaced at the world with a sea monster's features: goggling eyes, fanning fins, and flaring, toothy lips. A green patina darkened its dull gray surface. Behind it trailed a bleached and dreadful mane.

From the neck down, Rira affected the prideful finery of a pirate queen. Her neckline plunged aggressively, daring others to stare. Tattoos whorled across her burnished skin.

With the tip of her cutlass she gestured down the shore. She moved with an exaggerated deliberateness, as if the magic of my ancient sword yoked her physically. "I found the *Whelk*'s boats. We'll scuttle them, yes?"

I shook my head. "If we want Common's crew to go, we must preserve their means of departure."

Rira balled her fists.

"Were there signs of other boats?" I asked.

"Come and gone, Challys Argent." Where Seagrave tweaked me by calling me "mum," Rira dropped honorifics altogether, insisting on my full name. This odd expression of contempt washed over me now, as it did with the old salt.

I permitted myself a curse—a weakness acquired from my crew. "Then we're too late."

"We're not turning around? Your crew keen for action."

I led the procession into town. "We may not have him, but we can find out where he went."

As the burning structures of Moonplum grew clearer through the smoke, I saw how great an overstatement it was to call the place a town. It was less a port than a hope for the future. A sparse collection of storehouses and cottages huddled down the length of a muddied laneway, not far from the ruined docks. The lane terminated at the foot of a wooden temple, its vivid paint not yet scourged by alkaline air.

An earlier self might have mourned the folly of Moonplum's founders. Its location near a wide river mouth would seem favorable for shipping, with ready access to riches hewn from the Mwangi Jungle. Instead, its accessibility to the sea merely placed it within easy grasp of my sea-raiding compatriots, whose home islands lay only a few hundred miles to the northwest. Well-placed ports were farther away, and better defended.

The attacking fleet waited till the aspiring magnates of Moonplum had taken in goods worth stealing, then landed with swords and fire. Only a single wonder pertained: that they'd disciplined themselves long enough for the locals to build this much.

A series of screams cut short my postulations.

At one time the terror and pain in them would have sliced through me as well. In the Shackles I learned to hide such reactions, which serve only to announce oneself as prey. Over the course of my years on the *Aspidochelone*, I perfected this concealment. Now my pity is so well hid even I cannot find it. I have transformed myself into a grouping of angles and calculations.

I sped my pace to a cautious trot, cutlass at the ready. The faint heat of the four active geas crystals in its hilt radiated into my hand.

Otondo loomed at my left, grinning. "A scrap," he drooled.

Otondo, once captain of the brigantine *Ravager*, stood ten and a half feet tall in his shaggy boots. A bony ball of a bottom-heavy head, all jaw and little cranium, balanced on a frame of rippling muscle, with no neck visible between them. Corded veins crisscrossed gray-green flesh. They pulsed so strongly that an astute visitor could count out his heart rate simply by looking at him. Black pinprick eyes stared from beneath a thick and rolling brow. Otondo carried the largest cutlass I had ever seen, specially smithed for his ogre-sized hands. He was as heavy as my next three biggest men put together.

"Remember," I said to him, "the Rule still applies."

His blunt-toothed smile faded. "I hoped you wouldn't say."

"It always applies, universally."

"How about a little leeway, Cap'n?"

The ogre's attempts to ingratiate would induce shudders, were I still the shuddering type.



"No leeway whatsoever. No eating." I brandished Siren Call's hilt. His crystal, the one that held a sliver of his soul, brightened. Otondo's complexion dulled. He shrank back, his face that of a scolded dog.

"One day..." he growled.

When I increased my step, he fell back, muttering. A mocking chuckle whispered through the group. It could only be Adalbert Aspodell, the fourth of my murderous aides. Otondo responded with a canine growl. I plunged on; it was me their jockeying was meant to goad.

For a complement of fifty, we proceeded with admirable silence. The first of the buildings we passed had been reduced completely to smoldering planks. Up ahead, crew from the *Whelk*—and, for all I could tell, stragglers from departed vessels—lurched between still-extant structures. Each hunched under the weight of something looted: jugs of rum, kegs of ale, casks of salt fish. One pirate bore on his shoulders a plush, outsized chair. Two of the men carried young boys. Their immediate fates I declined to contemplate in detail. If they survived, they too would become pirates aboard the *Whelk*, perhaps one day completing the circle with like abductions in a similar doomed town.

Drunk on brandy and bloodshed, the crew of the *Whelk* took us in with molasses-slow comprehension. It dawned on them that they were dispersed, while we of the *Aspidochelone* stood in good formation. That they were tired and dulled, while we were square awake.

Otondo was at my side again. "A little provocation, Cap'n?"

Were incipient violence a perfume, he'd have reeked with it—as would the other three.

"At this revel, we are uninvited guests," I told them. "Let us act with matchless etiquette."

A portly, mutton-chopped pirate dropped an ornate sandalwood box and lunged our way. With one hand he wiped at his mouth; with the other, he drew his blade. "Who are you and what are you doing here?"

"I am Challys Argent, captain of the *Aspidochelone*, and this is my crew."

He squinched his face in disapproval. "The Pathfinder captain?"

I bowed. "The same."

He spat. The wind blew his sputum toward me. Otondo tensed. He checked my boots. The missile had landed short of its target. I held out my free hand to him, keeping him in check.

The *Whelk* crew assembled themselves behind their spokesman.

"You did not sign on to our raid. You are nothing but late-lilies. We did not fight and die so that a pack of sea hyenas might show up to trump our loot."

"I would surmise that you fought and your victims died. Regardless, you may rest assured. We are not here to

steal from fellow fliers of the black skull flag. Such would contravene the code of our Hurricane King."

"Save your lies for fools. Why else would you come here?"

"For what Pathfinders always seek. Information. Where is your captain?"

Mutton-chop straightened his spine. "I am captain of the *Whelk*."

"I am told that honor belongs to Josiah Common. And, as everyone knows, one to two of his eyes are made of glass. Whereas yours, one as bloodshot as the other, do not fit the description."

"I am Captain Strane Trafton. Joe Fork-Cutter met his final tragedy in the course of the raid. We now mete out vengeance, for the crime of undue resistance."

"And I don't suppose Josiah might have been done in by a confederate's blow?"

"What do you insinuate?"

"Was your raid not designed and led by Kered Firk?"

The name had scarcely left my mouth when a line of flame burst from the back ranks of the *Whelk* crew. I caught a flash of a brass spell-spitter—fashioned, as per the local vogue, not as a normal wand, but with a grip like that of a crossbow or pistol. I ducked the burst, though it grazed the brim of my tricorne hat, setting it ablaze. As I pulled the burning item from my head, battle cries rang and the two sides ran to engage. My hair flew free, impeding vision. I leapt back to miss the arc of an incoming ax. It was Trafton, engaging captain to captain with a most uncaptainly weapon.

I weaved and turned in search of a patch of unimpeded ground. The Moonplum laneway became the stage for a wild scrum. Though the battlers had as much room as could be desired, they fought like pirates, instinctively clumping themselves into a space the size of a galleon's deck. But here there was no rigging to seize, no railings to climb upon, no shark-filled waters to heave the foe into. Flashing my cutlass in a series of unpredictable feints, I forced Trafton back. My blade caught his weapon hand. He shrank from me, grimacing in pain. A white line across his knuckles transformed into a red one. I planted a boot on his leg and sent him toppling. He landed on his spine in the mud and slid, coming to a halt near Otondo, who exchanged blows with a burly counterpart. The ogre glanced back to note the rival captain's presence. Trafton saw his vulnerability and tried to roll. As he thrust at his primary foe with his enormous cutlass, Otondo casually stepped on the new captain's throat. Trafton's larynx cracked, sending a qualm through friend and foe alike. As he choked and died, the melee resumed. The death of a second captain in one day buoyed my crew with homicidal glee, and the *Whelk's* with vindictive rage.

This fight offered us nothing. I needed distance from it, to see if I could call it to a truce. Sidestepping an incoming

rapier thrust, I leapt onto the porch of a smoldering, emptied warehouse. Charred planks wobbled beneath my heels.

My crew arranged themselves to support their four most potent killers. They gave Otondo a wide berth as he muscled his way through the opposition. He sliced a man's head clean off, then kicked the decapitated body to down a second enemy. The ogre speared his cutlass through the slaughtered man and into the live one, who then joined his comrade in death.

Seagrave waded into the thickest concentration of foes, parting them as a prow cuts through waves. He took blows unflinchingly, the armor hidden beneath his foul greatcoat turning blades aside. The old salt leveraged his bulk to power his blows. Striking as often with elbows, fists, and kicks as with his sword, he bowled down pirates to and fro.

Crew from the *Aspidochelone* ranked around Rira to protect her spell-weaving hands from jostling distractions. She conjured balls of multicolored force and sent them spinning through the fray. They unerringly sought her chosen enemies. With each anguished cry or welling bruise, a spiteful chuckle echoed from her mask.

Adalbert Aspodell, who favored a nobleman's rapier over the expected cutlass, danced lithely around the fight's periphery. With a dolphin's grace he stabbed opportunistically. His attacks set aside force in favor of cruel precision. He flicked his blade's razor tip between ribs, across throats, into eardrums. Throughout the display he held his high-cheeked, mocking features in an attitude of wry detachment.

Led by these four, my crew sent the *Whelk's* reeling. As one, the losers dispersed. Bruised and bleeding pirates ran for the beach, for the jungle, and into the remains of buildings.

"We hunt them down?" Otondo asked.

"Only him." I pointed. A tall pirate of elven aspect dashed for the palms, silk tunic billowing. From a scabbard on his hip, the hilt of his spell-spitter gleamed. It was he who tried to set me aflame. "He's one of Firsk's, I'll wager." Rira sprinted after him, followed by Otondo. "Keep him in condition to talk!" I called.

The crew fell to looting, plucking up the prizes dropped by our rivals. As rightful as these appropriations were, I tasked them to delay in favor of a search for survivors. They took the wounded to a warehouse the fires had only lightly touched. Our priests, Jeffret and Cold Bendani, attended the injured. They venerated green-haired Gozreh, the ever-changeable god of seas and sailors. They incanted her healing magics, sealing wounds and washing away pain.

I left them to their work. The raiders had dealt with their victims savagely; it seemed unlikely that any would be in immediate shape to speak.

Alert for reprisals, we strode to the temple. The four sides of its tower bore the colorful sigils of deities. Gozreh's faced the coast, as is customary, represented by an inward-curling length of seaweed. Also represented were the golden key of Abadar the merchant, the blue butterfly of Desna the traveler, and Erastil the provider, who was locally symbolized by a golden boat, its sails filled by Gozreh's winds.

"I enjoy being teased as much of the next man," said Adalbert Aspodell. "More so, in fact. Yet isn't it past time to tell us what you're after here?"

"We seek Kered Firsk," I told him.

"Yes, yes, that you've said. But there must be a good reason behind this. You don't follow the wake of the Monster Captain on a whim."



"Otondo isn't pretty, but he's effective."

"I'll tell all when fact has been sifted from speculation."

A laugh purred in his throat. "You think me a gull."

"In what sense, Aspodell?"

"You might tell something. Never all."

A foreboding creak issued from behind the temple doors. They hung askew on their hinges. The sound mingled a wooden groan with a metallic clatter.

I stepped into a vandalized foyer, over the shards of a mirror knocked from its frame. A version of myself stared back at me from each of the pieces. In this strange context my own features surprised me. I saw hollow cheeks, raised veins, wires of muscle, and gold-flecked eyes. My face was all edges and planes, its former softness jettisoned long ago. Years under the pitiless sun of the Fever Sea had bronzed my skin and worn into its surface a network of tributary wrinkles. What I beheld, I did not dislike. On the deck of a pirate ship, austerity begat authority. Yet there had to be swagger, too, and this was supplied by a cascade of coppery hair. Garments of fine fabric and simple cut bespoke both wealth and practicality. Top salts will sign on with a hard captain, but never a poor one.

Velvet curtains clung tenuously to a bent and broken rod. When I beheld what waited inside, I swayed as if physically struck.

Nearly a dozen people hung from the temple rafters, suspended on lengths of chain. Rust and gore reddened the links. The victims had been stripped bare, or nearly so. Then their skin had been flayed from their bodies. Most had none left at all. A few had been flensed selectively, as if their torturer had grown bored or distracted partway through.

The tableau of carnage summoned a tumble of buried recollections. With them coursed phantom sensations: the cooler ocean breezes that swept the coast of Varisia, and the goosebumps they brought. I pictured myself as but a strip of a girl, kneeling on the rocky shores near the towering archive where I was born and raised. My mind's eye laid them out before me: dozens of lifeless bodies, blood soaked through their scholars' robes. My mother, my father, my uncles and cousins and friends. The raiders had come when our protectors were gone. They sacked the tower, burned the books, threw the tapestries into the sea. They destroyed that which was priceless, and exulted over the few coffered coins they pried from our meager

treasury. For murder's sake they murdered. Of all of us, only I had successfully hidden from them.

I chilled in that hot Moonplum temple, feeling the ghost touch of the rain that pelted my skin so long ago as I waited for the return of the Pathfinder ship. I heard again the vow I mouthed when finally they appeared. No longer would I follow the tradition of my family and my ancestors, seeking truth in the pages of books. I would be like our patrons, the men and women of the Pathfinder Society, who went out into a brutal world, seizing knowledge with

sword and spell. And along the way, when I found those who followed the creed of pillage and destruction, I would visit their cruelty upon them tenfold.

"Hooves of Asmodeus!"

Aspodell's exclamation pulled me from memory. His face had lost its usual sardonic aspect.

"Not quite," I said. "This was certainly homage to an evil deity. But not the God-Fiend. It was a priest of Rovagug that did this. Note the patches of exposed bone."

"I'd prefer not to."

"No?"

"A man of my proclivities respects certain boundaries. Butchery of this ilk goes far beyond them. I would not like to do this to anyone. Except you, of course, when the magic of that damnable sword lapses and I'm free to avenge my enslavement. But that goes without saying."

I treated the provocation as unworthy of reply. Pushing away revulsion, I peered closely at one of the hanging bodies. There I saw a sigil I despised, a yawning mouth from which the legs of a spider sprouted. "Whoever did this carved the sigil of Rovagug into the surface of their bones. While they lived."

"Ghastly," Aspodell swallowed. "And the fellow who did this—you're sure we wish to encounter them?"

"That I am."

To my shock, a splutter vented from one of the supposed corpses. Blood spurted from his nose and into his mouth. He moaned, barely conscious.

"Get the priests," I told Aspodell. He slipped from the temple; I remained with the survivor. He was young and had been well muscled before the flayers started in on him. Blood obscured his features, and the extent of his injuries.

Unintelligible words spilled from the wretch's faltering lips.

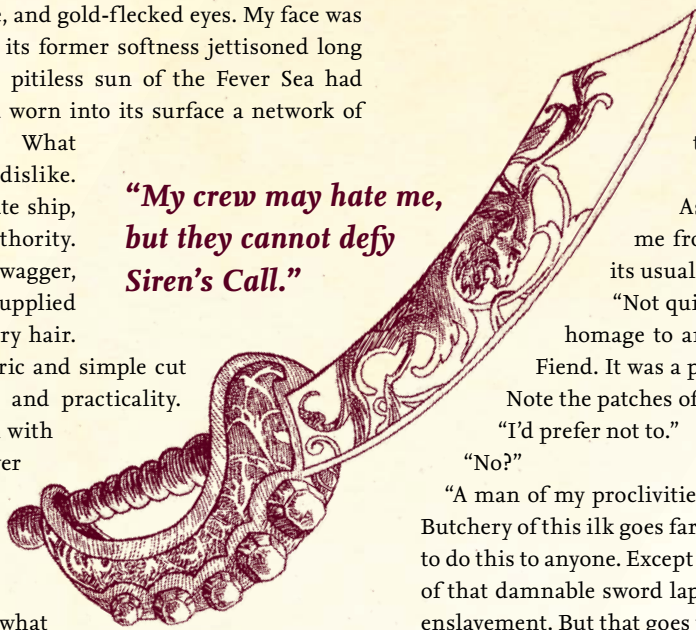
"Do not try to speak. Let us heal you first."

"Ww-wwon't l—lll..."

I searched my mind for soothing words but found none.

"Won't live..." he managed.

***"My crew may hate me,
but they cannot defy
Siren's Call."***





"Hush, boy." Had there been a part of him that was safe to touch, I would have laid a calming glove on it.

"Twill," he said.

"Twill?"

"Www—wanted to know..."

"He was looking for a man named Twill?"

He assayed a slight nod of the head.

"Had Twill been here?"

His next gesture I took also for a nod, though it could have been a twitch.

"But he was not here when the pirates came."

He seemed to shake his head, then stopped moving altogether. I took him for dead, but when Jeffret and Cold Bendani arrived, they set to work reviving him.

"Better without the chains, Captain," said Jeffret, a wan man with hair the color of a pantry moth.

"I'll see to that, ma'am," said Seagrave, who had returned with the healers and Aspodell. "No luck so far finding the fire-thrower," he said incidentally as he sized up the arrangement of columns, joists, and rafters. Withdrawing a pair of spikes from his belt, he hugged a wooden pillar and began to shift his bulk improbably up its length. I had seen him perform acts of unlikely balance many a time before, never ceasing to marvel at his agility. He reached the rafter and swung himself up on it with graceless ease. The rafter trembled, setting the suspended bodies to juddering. He clambered on hands and knees till he reached the chains that held the perhaps-living victim. With his left hand he found a new equilibrium. With his right, he pulled loose his cutlass. "Ready down there?"

"Aye," replied Jeffret. He and Cold Bendani positioned themselves to catch the poor fellow.

Seagrave brought his cutlass down on the chain. Sparks flew. The magical blade howled like a mistral wind, and the chain fell in two pieces. The sea-priests took the wretch's weight. On contact, he convulsed, without regaining consciousness. They carried him out of the temple on a sling of scavenged canvas, and the rest of us followed as Seagrave shinnied back down the column.

"Another dead end, then?" asked Aspodell.

"Quite the contrary," I said. "Before we lost him, he said the one word that explains all: Twill."

Aspodell knocked drying muck from his boots. "The significance of which you will now go on to explain."

"Twill can only be the famed lockbreaker Twill Ninefingers. No other Twill could be worthy of Kered Firsk's attention. He's the best lock man within a thousand miles."

"I believe I heard him spoken of as such, back in Drenchport," interjected Seagrave. "Never met him."

"And what does it tell you," asked Aspodell, "that he seeks this locksmith?"

"When Kered Firsk returned to the Shackles, a rumor came with him. Right, Seagrave?"

"Word has it," gruffed the fat pirate, "that he dug himself up a legendary treasure, out on some far atoll."

"If he seeks Twill Ninefingers, I know what it is. The Treasure of Far Thallai."

Aspodell's pose of studied disinterest melted away. "Thallai?"

Seagrave's features widened. "Thallai," he whispered, as if it were a name that did not bear too loud an airing. "Many have sought it."

"So much so that doubt pertains to its existence," said Aspodell.

"The sea coughs up many a wonder," said Seagrave.

"A golden cask with an impregnable lock?"

I nodded. "Impregnable to ordinary folk, but to one as skilled as Twill..."

"Which, if opened," continued Seagrave, "becomes a gateway to an unearthly paradise. Where untold wealth lies scattered about, gold and gems as common as sand, ready for any man brave enough to scoop it up."

"And there is nothing a worshiper of Rovagug, who is mindless destruction personified, would like more than to find and completely despoil an untouched paradise," said Aspodell.

"Absolutely so," I answered.

Aspodell lit up with uncharacteristic rapture. "If legend is to be believed, Far Thallai is much more than a beach scattered with gold and gems."

"You say that like it's nothing," said Seagrave.

"Thallai is a place of innocence and beauty," said Aspodell. "Inhabited by beings of stunning physical perfection, to whom distrust is foreign and wariness perverse." He drifted into a pensive pause, then started. "We cannot allow Firsk the Flayer to open that cask."

"Naturally not! We must be the ones!" A fresh flood of sweat boiled from Seagrave's sooty face. It ran in rivulets, soaking into his noisome greatcoat.

I moved upwind of him. "I'm not sure I'd trust you, Aspodell, with lissome beings incapable of suspicion."

The ex-nobleman scowled. "I was not always corrupt, you understand. In a place like Thallai a man could remake himself." His voice grew faint. "Perhaps that's what Kered Firsk seeks as well."

"You would reform, in Far Thallai?"

"After my last bad act—which, my dear, would be gutting you."

In the hilt of my sword, his geas gem glowed. I reached for it, prepared to exert its discipline on him, but he stilled himself. "At any rate, you can now explain what Kered Firsk seeks, but we are no closer to finding him."

"Not so."

"No?"

"The way to get Firsk the Flayer is through the man he seeks. Instead of chasing the Monster Captain, we find Twill Ninefingers."