



NUMENERA

INTO THE DEEP

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NUMENÉRA
INTO THE DEEP



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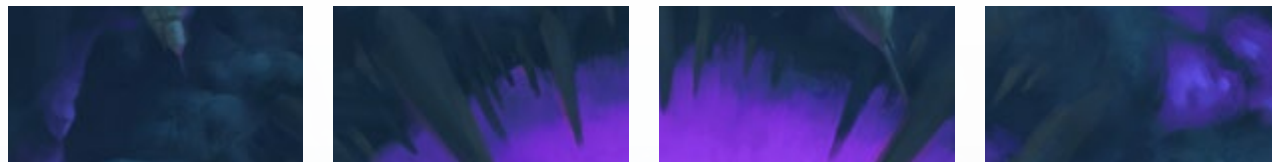
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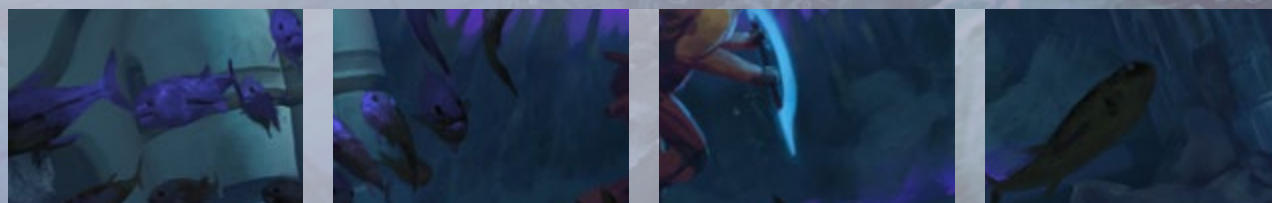
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INTRODUCTION

There is as much romantic mystery found beneath the sea as in the farthest reaches of space. When we conceived of doing a book about the worlds beyond the Earth of the Ninth World (*Into the Night*), we immediately knew that its natural companion would be a book about the ocean depths.

We'd already touched a bit on the deeps in Numenera. A significant portion of the

adventure *The Devil's Spine* is set in the so-called Deep Dark. We put a few marine creatures in the corebook, the *Ninth World Bestiary*, and the *Ninth World Guidebook*, and that latter book briefly describes a few locations that are deep underwater (it was the first meaty treatment of the octopi of the Ninth World, beyond the enigmatic, off-hand mentions of them in the *Numenera* corebook).

But in some ways, just as *Into the Night* couldn't possibly begin to cover every location in the rest of the universe, *Into the Deep* can't cover the entirety of the ocean by any means. There is far more room in the ocean depths than on the surface, and of course we've barely begun exploring all the surface in the Ninth World.

What we *can* do, however, is arm game masters and prepare players for what exploring the seas of the Ninth World might be like. That's what this book is all about. We wanted to focus primarily on underwater locations, but we knew there were a few interesting places to go on the surface of the sea as well. And most of the time, you've got to travel across the surface before you dive into the depths, anyway.

PLUMBING THE DEPTHS

Because the landmass of the Ninth World is primarily a vast supercontinent, to most of the world's inhabitants, the sea is a rumor or a myth. It's much too far away to be a part of their lives. For those that do live near or along the coast, the ocean is—if anything—even more unknown and hazardous than the wilderness around them. The Ninth World can be a dangerous place, but the sea heightens that danger level.



Anoetic cyphers are simple to use: a pill to swallow, a small handheld device with a switch to flip, or a bomb to throw.



Occultic cyphers are more complex and more dangerous, but they often have better and more interesting effects. An occultic cypher counts as two cyphers for the purpose of determining how many you can bear at the same time.



In the margins of this book, you'll find occasional "search terms," accompanied by this symbol. These are real-world, cutting-edge technological terms that can start you on a journey of learning more about some of the ideas you'll find in these pages. You don't have to know a thing about how suspended animation works to have cryogenically preserved creatures in your campaign. However, if you're interested, you might find further research informative and perhaps inspiring.



Throughout this book, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by this symbol. These are page references to the *Numenera* corebook, where you can find additional details about that item, place, creature, or concept. It isn't necessary to look up the referenced items in the corebook, but doing so will provide useful information for character creation and gameplay.

The Seas to the West



And yet most of the world is sea. The majority of the earth's solid surface lies 13,000 to 18,000 feet (4,000 to 5,500 m) underwater. Sailors and underwater explorers cross it or even plumb its depths. And it's those depths where things get particularly interesting.

What's down there? Ancient ruins? Gods? Secrets? Treasures? The answer might be yes to all of these things. And for a certain brave, adventurous sort, the question of what lies in the mysterious depths is too great a temptation to resist. These stalwart explorers typically base themselves in coastal towns, and their presence has had an impact.

In such towns and villages near the sea, **Aeon Priests**, tinkerers, and builders have developed, salvaged, or cobbled together various means to go deep underwater. Because of the presence of prior-world devices that have allowed people to

explore aquatic environments, some of the otherwise simple coastal folk have a surprising understanding of the challenges of diving deep below the surface, and they have some idea of how those challenges might be overcome. Insights like these provide some of the unique ways in which the numenera has shaped the Ninth World.

This means that in **Glavis**, you might have fisherfolk who use external **waterbreathers** and **pressure pills** to descend hundreds of feet on quick dives and collect fish and crustacean traps. Or in a village west of **Qi**, workers could employ **diving bubbles** to help them drill for a substance called **pellin**, found only in domelike pockets along the seafloor, which is used in maintaining the systems of the automatons known as **Zhev**. Or in **Kaparin**, the small but well-known crew called the **Redfleets** can use submersibles to traverse the ocean.

Glavis, page 168

Waterbreather, page 14

Pressure pill, page 14

Diving bubble, page 14

Invisible corridors, page 12

Qi, page 148

Aeon Priest, page 269

Zhev, page 268

Kaparin, page 167

Redfleets, page 167

Some explorers claim to have maps of the invisible corridors, but they are almost always woefully incomplete or bear significant inaccuracies.



Underwater cities are sometimes called oceaia.

WHY GO INTO THE DEEP?

The passage of deep time suggests that in the history of Earth (a billion years or more), the landmasses have shifted dramatically. What was once underwater is now dry land, and vice versa, which means that explorers are just as likely to find a remnant of the past on the ocean floor as on the land. Even if one presumes that there are ruins and mysteries beneath the sea, why go there, when there are ruins and mysteries on the land, and those are easier to reach?

That's a question that might answer itself, really. Every good explorer knows that you want to go where others have not yet been. The harder a potentially treasure-laden place might be to reach, the more likely that its treasures are still there.

Further, once you've overcome the survival challenges (detailed more extensively below), particularly using numenera solutions that are often so thorough and near-mystical that the challenges are utterly negated, operating underwater is really not as bad as it seems. In other words, while you need a way to breathe, and a way to survive the pressure and the cold—and most people do not have

those things—once you *do* have them, you should be relatively good to go.

It's possible to set up a campaign where the PCs have no choice in the matter. Characters kidnapped and brought to an underwater location may not have to deal with how they got there, but simply find themselves in a submerged city or structure. Perhaps they're captured as slaves or as the subjects of study. Getting back to the surface might be a big challenge, not only in terms of physically traveling (and surviving the trip) but also in finding the way, because orientation deep underwater is nothing like on the surface.

CREATURES OF THE DEEP

The creatures that live in the ocean far outnumber those that live on the land. Fish, crustaceans, mollusks, cnidarians, and more dwell in the depths. This book does not try to catalog them all. Rather, the GM should feel free to stretch her imagination, describing the most bizarre beasts she can think of amid what are perhaps more familiar fish and other sea creatures.



A few thoughts to help shape the underwater environment:

- True plants usually live near the surface so they can get sun. However, many marine animals (cnidarians, for example) can be mistaken for plants by the unknowing, and they can dwell at almost any depth.
- Many marine animals are predatory, and a great many of these are venomous.
- A creature's size is not always a good measure of the danger it poses.
- Most marine life will have no interest in PC explorers (much like on the surface).
- Nearer the surface, fish swim in large schools and packs. Deeper, more animals are solitary.
- No matter how weird things are near the surface, they're weirder the deeper you go.

SURVIVAL UNDERWATER

Underwater adventuring presents some real challenges to explorers.

DROWNING

If explorers can't breathe underwater, their expedition is going to be remarkably short.

If a character has no access to air, he will drown. After every three rounds with no air, he moves one step down the damage track until he is dead. There is no roll to make if it is impossible to get to breathable air.

Characters in a situation where they are able to struggle for air (drowning, but near the surface) can make a Might defense roll (probably difficulty 4) to get a lungful. If successful, they reset the process, but any steps moved down the damage track are not reversed until they rest and breathe easily. For example, if a drowning character fails five Might defense rolls but makes the sixth, he has moved one step down the damage track but reset the process so that he can fail three more Might defense rolls before moving another step.

PRESSURE

Once a character doesn't have to worry about breathing, the real danger becomes pressure. The deeper underwater you go, the greater the pressure on your body.

At about 33 feet (10 m) below the surface, sea water exerts twice the pressure on the body as air at surface level. For ease, we'll call the amount of pressure one feels on

the surface "1 atmosphere." For every 33 or so feet (10 m) of depth in sea water, the ambient pressure increases by an additional 1 atmosphere. So at a depth of 99 feet (30 m), the ambient pressure is 4 atmospheres—one caused by Earth's atmosphere, plus one for each 33 feet (10 m) of depth. Similarly, the ambient pressure 297 feet (90 m) beneath the surface is 10 atmospheres.

For solid objects, this added pressure is not much of a problem. It does affect a living character with air-filled spaces in her body like the mouth, ears, sinuses, and lungs. Air reduces in volume when under pressure and does not support those spaces against the higher outer pressure. At a depth of only 8 to 10 feet (2.5 to 3 m), this can cause pain and even damage to an unskilled, unprepared, or unprotected character. Worse, gases in breathable air, such as nitrogen and oxygen, become toxic at higher pressures. The effects of such things might be vomiting, hallucinations, or unconsciousness, in addition to straightforward bodily harm.

Without sophisticated technological assistance, it's extremely unlikely that characters can deal with this issue, which is really a multitude of issues with complicated mechanics. Suffice it to say that spending time below a depth of about 50 to 100 feet (15 to 30 m) of water is likely to move a breathing but otherwise unprotected character one step down the damage track after an hour or two. Below that depth, the time likely becomes minutes rather than hours.

OPERATING UNDERWATER

As anyone who has spent time in the ocean knows, moving, fighting, seeing, and doing anything else in the water is very different (and potentially more difficult) than doing those same things on land. Being in shallow water can make it hard to move, but it doesn't affect combat. Being in deep water can make things difficult, and being underwater entirely can seem as different as being on another world.

Deep Water: Being in water up to your chest (or the equivalent thereof) hinders your ability to attack. Attacks made in such conditions are modified by one step in the defender's favor. Aquatic creatures ignore this modifier.

As an optional rule, add a drowning character's Might Edge to the number of rounds between moves down the damage track. Thus, a character with a Might Edge of 1 would move down the damage track every four rounds rather than every three.

The effects of pressure and how they relate to air toxicity and other issues are too complicated to simulate realistically without becoming needlessly complex.

Underwater Melee Combat: For nonaquatic creatures, being completely underwater makes attacking very difficult. Melee attacks with slashing or bashing weapons are modified by two steps in the defender's favor. Attacks with stabbing weapons are modified by one step in the defender's favor. Aquatic creatures ignore the penalties for underwater melee combat.

Underwater Ranged Combat: As with melee combat, nonaquatic creatures have difficulty fighting underwater. Some ranged attacks are impossible underwater—you can't throw things, fire a bow or crossbow, or use a blowgun. Attacks with weapons that do work underwater are modified by one step in the defender's favor. Ranges underwater are reduced by one category; long-range weapons work only to short range, and short-range weapons work only to immediate range.



Steadfast, page 136

Ghan, page 145

Iron Wind, page 135

Rayskel Cays, Ninth World Guidebook, page 155



Search Terms:
sloop, cutter, cog, caravel, trireme



City of Bridges, page 145

SENSES

Starting about 650 feet (200 m) deep, the light is dim—about the same as twilight above the surface. Once you get to a depth of 3,300 feet (1,000 m), there's no sunlight at all. Murky water, of course, makes these conditions worse. There is dim light at best even in shallow murky water.

Sound travels well underwater, but it quickly becomes distorted because it moves much faster than in air. Even if a human could breathe and speak underwater, speaking intelligibly is almost impossible. Two characters must be directly next to each other to talk without some kind of communication device. Further, characters will find it almost impossible to determine the direction of sound while underwater. The difficulty of all perception tasks based on hearing is increased by five steps.

COLD

Water conducts heat much better than air does, which means that unprotected characters in cold water will lose heat far faster than in cold air. They take 2 or 3 points of ambient damage per round.

TRAVELING ACROSS THE SURFACE OF THE WATER

Many expeditions into the deep first involve traveling across the water's surface, probably on a sailing ship or boat. The *Steadfast* ports offer a wide variety of sailing craft options, but most are likely designed to stay fairly close to the coasts. These ships include sloops, cutters, cogs, and in some places, caravels.

Larger craft, such as the massive triremes of *Ghan's* navy and similar vessels, voyage well past the coasts, and even across the familiar seas to places like the *Rayskel Cays*.

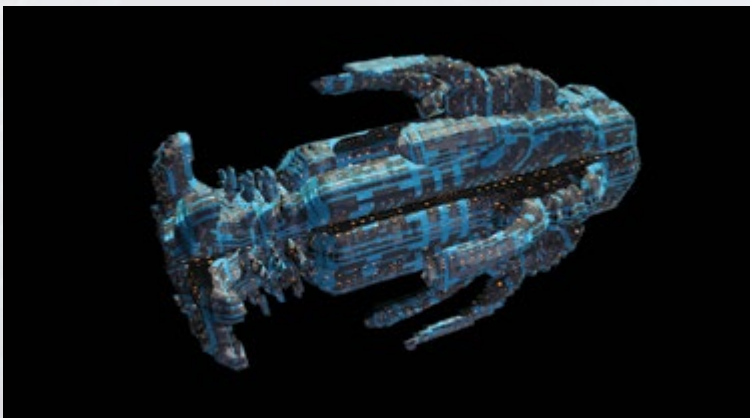
Dangers of such travel include, first and foremost, the weather. Storms can send a ship off course, damage sails, knock sailors from the deck, or, in some cases, capsize and sink the vessel. Worse, the *Iron Wind* moves across the sea as well as the land.

Celestial navigation is used most often by Ninth World sailors, but a few ships are equipped with magnetic compasses, or perhaps even more sophisticated numenera devices.

Most craft are relatively fragile (level 3 or 4). A few have enhancements, however, plated with advanced materials or outfitted with prior-world weaponry, defenses, or propulsion. These craft might be more like level 6 or 7. Most craft in the open sea can cross about 50 to 60 miles (80 to 100 km) on a good day. This varies from ship to ship, of course, and those with exotic propulsion systems might achieve far greater speeds. For example, something like the infamous *Seskii Spike*, a ship sailing out of the *City of Bridges*, has an air-suction system put together out of ancient parts by a woman named Tyresial. It is said to be able to cross 300 to 350 miles (480 to 560 km) in a day.

GETTING INTO THE DEEP

As hard as travel can be in much of the Ninth World, traveling to an underwater location is probably far more difficult.



REGIONS OF THE DEEP

As the PCs descend into the depths, the light fades quickly, moving from a backlit blue to a blackness so stark that even the brightest glowglobe can't invade the gloom. Each level is different and has its own set of challenges.

The Shallows: Close to the surface is what is sometimes called the Sunlight Zone, named because sunlight reaches it, and plants and animals can use it. This layer goes down to around 800 feet (240 m).

The Gloaming: Here, the light is fainter, the pressure higher, and the number of chlorophyll-based plants almost nonexistent. The level is filled with creatures that have adapted, either via natural mutation or genetic modification, to low-light living. Here, you will find creatures that exist nowhere else in the world, like the bioluminescent **alieds**, the squamous **sharkfin**, and the **black kalium**. This layer goes down to around 3,000 feet (1,000 m). This is sometimes called the Twilight Zone.

The Deep Dark: This zone begins around 3,000 feet (1,000 m). Complications of entering this layer include utter darkness, intense water pressure, near-freezing temperatures, and creatures that want to

eat you. Most scholars of the Ninth World consider this layer to be the deepest part of the ocean, although they are wrong. The Deep Dark is called the Midnight Zone by some.

The Abyssal: Between 13,000 and 20,000 feet (4,000 and 6,000 m) is the Abyssal. This layer is, in fact, most of the ocean. Life in the Abyssal is very strange, even by Ninth World standards. In most places, this is the area along the ocean floor. But there are deeper places still. The darkest trenches sink to 36,000 feet (11,000 m) or more.

Another way to look at this involves using broader categories of distance from the shore. In this sense, there are places close to shore, those that are far out to sea, and those in the unfathomable depths. These descriptions are more conceptual than based on precise distances. For example, there could be a place relatively close to the coastline that gets very deep, and a location in such a place might still be considered in the depths rather than close to shore. This is because these three categories speak more to a location's general nature, remoteness, and survivability than to its literal distance from land. In theory, then, places in the unfathomable depths are almost always

Glowglobe, page 82

Alied: level 1

Sharkfin: level 4, perception in water as level 5; Armor 2; bite deals 6 points of damage

Black kalium: level 5, Intellect defense tasks as level 7; health 20; makes up to four attacks as a single action with tentacles, each of which also inflicts 3 points of Intellect damage if the struck target fails an Intellect defense roll; uses telekinesis at long range to grab and move objects and creatures it could normally move





Navigation to a particular underwater site can be difficult without precise navigational tools because visibility can be very limited.



Redfleets, page 167

Kaparin, page 167

harder to reach and more dangerous than those close to shore or out to sea.

DIVING DOWN

To get to a particular undersea site, the most likely means is simply crossing the water's surface to a position directly above the site and then diving to it. Diving suits or some kind of submersible are desirable, obviously, to deal with the dangers involved and the needs of the divers.

Sometimes the craft used to cross the water's surface remain in contact with the divers, feeding them oxygen or power from pumps and generators on board. More often, the divers have complete autonomy, although the craft holds its position as best as it can for when they come back up.

UNDERWATER VEHICLES

The Redfleets of Kaparin use small submersibles called submergines. A few other, larger vehicles are known as well, both those that move through the water and those that crawl upon the ocean floor. Explorers who use such vessels probably have no surface craft at all, and their entire trip is beneath the waves. These vehicles are often slower than surface craft.

Submersibles seem like stealth craft to people on the surface, but to those who are already underwater, they are no such thing, often being noisy and relatively large.

All underwater vehicles are considered artifacts. They are prior-world creations, or—in very rare cases—Ninth World replicas of prior-world creations. The only widely known exception is the submergines, which were designed by a Redfleets founder, using knowledge gleaned from the numenera.

SOLO SUBMERSIBLE

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: An almost coffinlike vehicle

Effect: One human-sized occupant can survive at any known depth, warm and able to breathe, for up to a week before the vessel needs to surface. The submersible moves a long distance underwater each round and can travel up to 100 miles (160 km) in a day.

The submersible has a mechanical arm that the pilot can control to interact with the undersea world. Use the artifact's level, not the pilot's level, to determine what the arm can accomplish.

Depletion: 1-2 in 1d100 (check each day)



What's down there? Ancient ruins? Gods? Secrets? Treasures? The answer might be yes to all of these things.



SUBMARINE

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: A lozenge-like cylinder (more or less) 100 feet long and 20 feet across (30 by 6 m)

Effect: Despite the standard “form,” these large vehicles come in numerous shapes and configurations. Many have a bulbous chamber at one end or the other with extensive viewports.

Regardless of appearance, submarines normally require a crew of at least ten, and they work best with double that number. They can also carry as many as thirty more people or a lot of cargo.

Submarines fire underwater torpedoes up to 1 mile (1.5 km) that explode in a long radius and inflict the submarine’s level in damage. A submarine has 1d10 + 4 such torpedoes.

A submarine moves a long distance underwater each round and can travel up to 200 miles (320 km) in a day.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100 (check each day)

SUBMURGINE

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: A transparent cylinder (more or less) 50 feet long and 10 feet across (15 by 3 m)

Effect: Submergines are clearsynth bioships that can safely dive up to 5 miles (8 km) beneath the ocean’s surface and stay there for up to six years. A creature ensconced within a ship’s hull provides food and fresh water and recycles contaminants. The clearsynth allows the crew of five to fifteen human-sized people to see in every direction. Submergines of level 5 or higher have lights (including spotlights) and viewers that magnify and penetrate murky water, plus camouflage built into the transparent hull.

A submergine moves a long distance underwater each round and can travel up to 200 miles (320 km) in a day.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100 (check each day)





TELEPORTATION AND PORTALS

Some underwater locales are connected to each other or to surface locations via gateways allowing instantaneous travel. Some of these, even on the surface, are underwater—in a pool or something similar—to ease the transition. If not, or if some means of teleportation is used to get to an underwater locale, the traveler should be prepared to instantly deal with the pressure, the temperature, and the lack of air, or the trip will be short, painful, and ugly.

THE INVISIBLE CORRIDORS

Threading their way through the ocean are tunnels made of water. These tunnels, called the invisible corridors, were created long before anyone can remember and are maintained by forces beyond comprehension. The corridors range from 15 to 20 feet (5 to 6 m) across and stretch for thousands of miles, bending and branching in what seem like almost random patterns: a three-dimensional maze within the sea. The water inside the corridors is highly oxygenated—so much so that an air breather can safely breathe the water. Water-breathing creatures can adapt to these conditions, but the strange liquid sometimes causes them to act erratically—sometimes energetically, sometimes lethargically.

Perhaps just as remarkable, the water within the corridors is always at a pleasant temperature, and there are no dangers from pressure. Some have compared swimming or floating within the invisible corridors to being near the surface, but in truth it is more like being able to float in the air.

The invisible corridors can sometimes be seen from the outside or the inside, particularly in the Gloaming or the Deep Dark, because one will find creatures moving about the tunnels that would normally be found only in the Shallows. Not surprisingly, these creatures are very adept at sensing the edges of the corridors and keep from passing through them if it would be dangerous to do so. Strangely, even plants that require the sun can live in utter darkness within the corridors.

There is no barrier for a physical object or creature passing into or out of one of the invisible corridors, although there is an obvious transition. A character on the inside



who is not ready for the nonbreathable water, the temperature, or the pressure on the outside could instantly die when leaving the confines of a corridor.

Because the tunnels are so extensive, explorers from the surface can use these “underwater highways” to travel comfortably. The corridors don’t go everywhere, or even most places, but they do pass close to many major sites (although the route is likely quite circuitous). Perhaps the sites were established in places where they would be close to a corridor. Who knows which came first?

Some explorers claim to have maps of the invisible corridors, but they are almost always woefully incomplete or bear significant inaccuracies.

EQUIPMENT FOR UNDERWATER EXPLORATIONS

Many characters will obtain cyphers or artifacts to help them survive and operate underwater, but in coastal areas, one can sometimes find equipment devised by the locals that will serve as well. Using gleaned bits of knowledge or observations

of how prior-world magic operates, crafters, inventors, Aeon Priests, and others who are just extremely motivated have developed ways to fashion items out of materials at hand.

For purposes of the tables on the next page, “Equipment” items are fairly common, and “Special Equipment” items are much more rare—the products of particularly astute numenera tinkers. Some equipment and all special equipment is local. That is to say, just because one can find a pressure pill in the City of Bridges doesn’t mean the same is true in Ledon or a fishing village in between.

Some of this equipment can also be found in underwater cities and communities. Many such places have their own currencies (shins are uncommon) but also use a type of common trade currency called abadis. An abadis is a pearlescent lozenge about the size of a small nut. It is the secretion of a rare type of anemone, gathered by underwater explorers. Each abadis is worth roughly 2 or 3 shins. Webbing, which costs 8 shins on the surface, would cost about 3 abadis in an underwater setting.

Breathing water is a strange and even painful experience for an air-breather at first, as she must allow her lungs to fill with water. When she moves back into an air-filled medium, she must expel all the water in her lungs, usually through vomiting.



EQUIPMENT



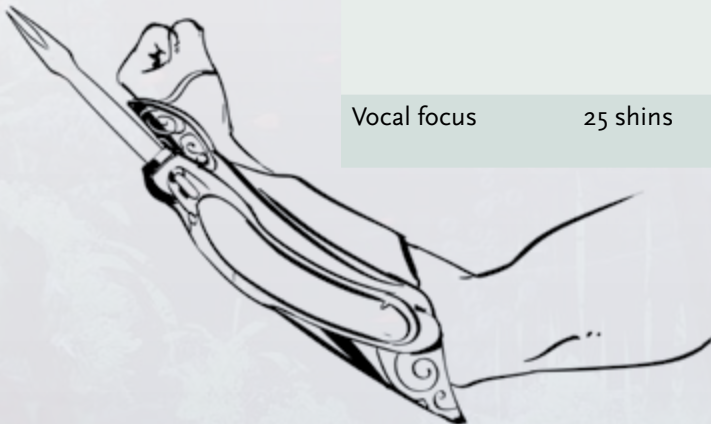
| Item | Cost | Notes |
|--------------------------|----------|--|
| Lead shoes | 2 shins | Weighted boots that slow movement to half but allow underwater walking. |
| Waterbag | 2 shins | Fits over an explorer's pack (or items of an equivalent size) and makes it waterproof and slightly more hydrodynamic. |
| Waterbreather (external) | 20 shins | Creates a seal over your mouth and filters the oxygen out of the water to make it breathable for ten hours. |
| Waterbreather (internal) | 30 shins | Injection that shoots a rice-sized device into your neck. After 30 minutes, the device opens, creating an internal filtration system that allows you to breathe water. Lasts for five hours. |
| Webbing | 8 shins | Small bottle of material sprayed between your fingers to create webbing. Lasts for one hour and doubles swim speed. |



SPECIAL EQUIPMENT



| Item | Cost | Notes |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|---|
| Diving bubble | 100 shins | Small round bubble converts water into breathable air for up to five people who are connected to it via a 50-foot (15 m) long retractable tube and ventilator. Protects from all pressure dangers as well. Each person must have his own tube and ventilator. |
| Diving bubble tube and ventilator | 5 shins | |
| Fish eyes | 20 shins | Pair of anti-fog, pressure-sensitive goggles to enhance underwater vision (turns darkness conditions into dim light conditions) and protect eyes. Requires ambient light to operate. |
| Pressure pill | 5 shins | Protects the imbiber from all pressure dangers for 28 hours. |
| Spraybreather | 50 shins | Tiny canister sprays an opaque gelatin that forms around your head and creates a permeable oxygen barrier, filtering breathable air from the water. Doesn't work above water. Lasts for 28 hours. |
| Vocal focus | 25 shins | Allows you to speak and be heard and understood at up to long range underwater. |





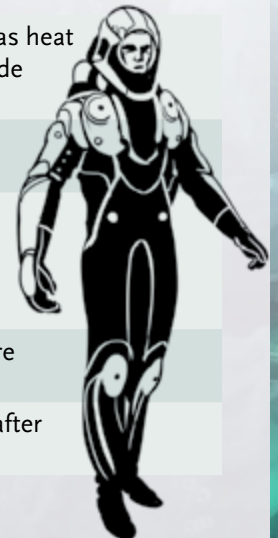
WEAPONS

| Item | Cost | Type | Notes |
|-------------------------|----------|---------------|---|
| Cawold | 5 shins | Heavy weapon | Similar to a greataxe; designed for great hydrodynamics and swifter movement in water. |
| Elbow harpoon | 8 shins | Medium weapon | Short-range propelled harpoon for underwater combat; returns to you through a cable-retrieval system. |
| Fin piercer | 1 shin | Light weapon | Dual-edged piercing weapon made of metal, 1.5 feet (50 cm) long. Designed for speed underwater, but feels off-balanced when used on land. |
| Narbos | 5 shins | Light weapon | Bottle of liquid metal that you paint onto your nails; the material hardens into pointed claws that inflict 2 points of slashing damage (or 3 points if you paint and use both hands). One bottle is enough to paint twelve nails, which stay on until clipped or broken off. |
| Sonar stream | 50 shins | Medium weapon | Projectile weapon that shoots a long-range sonar pulse that inflicts Intellect damage. The stream is pinpointed, so you must be able to see your target to aim and hit it. Works only when immersed in liquid. Shoots ten times and takes one hour to recharge. |
| Supercavitation bubbler | 10 shins | Medium weapon | Shoots high-velocity liquid projectiles that use cavitation bubbles to aim true and reach long distance. |
| 5 liquid projectiles | 1 shin | | |



ARMOR

| Item | Cost | Notes |
|-------------|----------|---|
| Bubblewrap | 20 shins | Offers buoyancy and pressure protection, as well as heat and cold protection for five hours. Does not provide Armor but can be worn over light armor. |
| Cool skin | 25 shins | Provides +3 to Armor against heat. Disintegrates after about a week. |
| Dive suit | 50 shins | Offers buoyancy and pressure protection, as well as heat and cold protection for five hours. Treated as heavy armor in all respects (and thus cannot be worn with other armor). |
| Scaled skin | 50 shins | Light armor that provides protection from pressure dangers and doubles swim speed. |
| Warm skin | 25 shins | Provides +3 to Armor against cold. Disintegrates after about a week. |



GMING UNDER THE SEA

Although your instinct while running the underwater portions of an adventure might be to make everything more difficult and complicated for the PCs, that's not really the spirit of Numenera. Sure, you could increase the difficulty of every movement and encounter by one or two steps to make everything harder, but that kind of gaming experience can quickly get frustrating and boring for everyone involved. Further, if going into the deep means everything just becomes far more cumbersome and difficult, no one will want to play.

Instead of thinking of underwater adventures as more difficult than land adventures, try considering the ways in which underwater combat is different, especially in terms of flavor and story.

The goal shouldn't be to make the players fight harder, but to make them fight smarter. In the sea, working together to come up with innovative solutions is almost always better than attacking with more vigor—and will likely result in more interesting dynamics.

Some thoughts about making water adventures more interesting instead of just more difficult:

- Water makes it difficult to hear and communicate. What devices, powers, or other solutions could the PCs put into

place to communicate with each other more easily through the water?

- Visibility is likely to be limited. What dark creatures can come charging from the shadows, and how can the PCs prepare for that?
- Cyphers, artifacts, and mechanized weapons react differently in water. Some won't work. Others will work better. And still others might respond entirely differently than the PCs expect.
- Many deep sea creatures have never seen a human before and may not react as expected. They may follow the PCs for a while, trying to figure the humans out. On the other hand, they may decide that these swimming forms are food and attack without warning.
- Play up the weird. What's down there, and what does it look, sound, or feel like? Do a little research on the bizarre and scary creatures that exist in our modern-day ocean, and then increase the WTF factor tenfold.
- Underwater is a great place to use GM intrusions. Perhaps an unexpected current moves a PC a short distance away, a school of fish swarms around a character and blinds her for one round, or whatever breathing apparatus the PC is using becomes clogged.



Search Terms:

Frilled shark, goblin shark, frogfish, fanfin seadevil, sea pig, basket star, holothurian, vampire squid, axolotl, bathypelagic ctenophore



PART 1:



NEAR THE SHORE



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CHAPTER 1

THE ISLAND OF UNDOING

GM SUMMARY

The Island of Undoing is a large metal island located in the Sea of Secrets, 250 miles (400 km) northwest of the Island of the Last Migration. During the day, the island's shape is reminiscent of a metallic flower laid flat upon the water. At night, the island's petal-like structures fold up to form a tightly sealed bud in the very center.

Something on (or in) the island creates a noise that beckons to passersby, making them want to get to the island at all costs. Once someone sets foot upon the unusual metal shores, they discover that the island slowly leaches their health each night. On top of that, warring groups of humans and hostile creatures roam the land.

Despite all of the dangers, there are great treasures to be found here for those willing and able to overcome the odds.

WELCOME TO THE ISLAND OF UNDOING

In the dark of night, the grind of metal against metal inside the water. The hollow thunk of two boulders being smashed beneath the waves. The low squeal of wires flowing over with water. Repeated over and

over until they mash together into a song that is impossible to ignore.

To those nearby, the sound of the island is the sound of a siren's call, metallic and melodious. The first whisper from a new lover. The final death rattle of an old enemy. The lullaby of a parent long dead.

The Island of Undoing isn't alive, but it certainly sounds that way to those within hearing distance. The metallic island's long, echoing song is hard to resist. The theories are many. That the ghosts of past and present selves walk the island's glass and metal shores, haunted by their own failings. That every morning an ancient monster among the machinery unspools, tangling itself in the thoughts and fears of those within reach, and then builds irresistible songs from those fragments. That the island itself is the predator, a trap built long ago to lure beings that no longer exist within this world.

Whatever the purpose or plan, the island's call is nearly irresistible to those within its nearby waters. Vessel captains on course for farther seas suddenly find themselves turning toward a length of red and grey upon the water. Those with access to the ship railing find themselves jumping

Sailors have reported hearing the island's call from as far away as 3 miles (5 km). At that distance, the song is barely audible and seems fairly innocuous.

To those caught by the song, the waters around the island appear deep crimson. Those unaffected can't see the change in color.



Because of the island's constant and inexplicable draining of health from those nearby, living creatures lose 2 points of Might per night while on the island. This loss cannot be regained by regular healing or recovery rolls until the character is at least a long distance away from the island. Characters can be healed by devices, including cyphers and artifacts, or by special powers, such as someone with the Works Miracles focus. Many of the inhabitants are skilled at making healing devices that counteract the island's health drain. All other inhabitants have a way to shield themselves or counteract the drain.



Works Miracles,
page 75



overboard in the reddish-tinged water around the shores. Most never make it; the plentiful food source has also created a plethora of daytime predators that circle the waters, always on the lookout for the next to fall prey to the island's call.

Those who become entangled in the auditory net and set foot upon the island during the day may be surprised to discover that nothing more dangerous than flora and fauna awaits them. (And while these elements are certainly dangerous, they are less so than one might expect given the way in which the island beckoned the visitors ashore.)

As night falls, however, visitors quickly discover the island's true threat: during the dark hours, it draws the energy of living things to power its mechanisms. The song ceases as the light fades, rendering the nights so quiet and still that every shift, every step, every dying breath can be heard for miles. As it grows fully dark, the island closes up like a flower, creating a seemingly safe space within its core—albeit one that's almost impossible to leave.

Still, despite the dangers, the Island of Undoing offers much in the way of discovery, fortune, and opportunity for those who seek it. The entire island appears

to be a giant machine, full of hollows and hills ripe for excavation. The shores are strewn with wrecked ships, and the island's core is filled with the abandoned camps of those who were caught too long in its trap.

USING THE ISLAND OF UNDOING

The GM can provide a number of hooks to bring the Island of Undoing into a campaign, including the following.

- The characters are on their way to somewhere else when they or the captain of their vessel are snagged by the island's call.
- The characters' vessel rescues a survivor of an *echk* raid. He tells the story of the attack on his ship and asks the PCs to help him seek revenge for the loss of his family.
- On their travels, the characters meet a *Sarracanian* named Rous Tordar, who desperately wants a special plant called a delnato creepvine that's rumored to grow only in Callay Garden. Tordar will pay handsomely to get a living plant or two in his hands.

The island's call causes humans and other creatures to want to draw closer and closer. When characters come within sight or 1 mile (1.5 km), whichever comes first, they must succeed on a difficulty 6 Intellect defense roll to resist.

Echk, page 23

For whatever reason, those with extensive mutations sometimes find themselves nearly immune to the pull, even when they are very close to shore. Those with more than one mutation have an asset in resisting the call.

Sarracanian, page 226



Ziwoh the Redfin: level 4; Armor 2

Sewn lightning looks like a very stretchy thread made of crackling blue light. If you pull pieces of it apart slowly enough, it eventually splits into two threads. You can do this endlessly, as the original thread never seems to diminish. Sewing the thread through fabric requires a needle made of bone or stone. Touching the thread to metal of any kind “kills” the thread, causing it to dissolve into ash.



Mutation table,
page 128

Face dancing,
page 125

Banurno: level 4,
leadership and tasks
regarding knowledge of
the island as level 5

Gate guard: level 3



Jagged Dream,
page 224

Sense numenera,
page 125

Burdler: level 4; level 5 in
sensing numenera

Carril: level 3

Myph and Matese:
level 3, constructing
devices as level 5

GETTING TO THE ISLAND OF UNDOING

In most cases, the Island of Undoing gets to you, rather than the other way around. Once you're within its grasp, the island all but ensures that you will find your way to it.

Getting there from any civilization requires sturdy water or sky transportation, and the journey is long. While it seems prudent to arrive at night to avoid the song, that's when the island is locked tight, the walls of the closed bud rising more than 200 feet (60 m).

One sea captain, a double-headed mutant named **Ziwoh the Redfin**, runs a regular ship from various places on land to the Island of Undoing, taking on passengers for the low, low price of 5 shins. Of course, once you're already under way, he gently suggests that you might also want to purchase your own set of his specially crafted sound dampers for 20 shins each to ensure that you don't jump overboard and drown—or worse—at the island's first call. He also offers a serum that gives you two or more random **mutations** for a week. A drop of the serum costs 30 shins.

DELORMI: THE CITY AT THE CENTER

At the center of the island is Delormi. Sometimes called the City at the Center, Delormi is actually more of a village, boasting around five hundred people. When the island closes up at night, the city is smack in the center of the metal “bloom.”

Run by a **face-dancing** mutant named **Banurno**, the village is composed mostly of those who were sucked in by the island and found a way to survive there. Banurno is a good leader, able to keep people from panic and skilled at finding ways for everyone to use their talents to help improve the village. If you spend enough time with him, he might let on that he is a former member of a cult called the **Jagged Dream**.

Burdler, Banurno's second in command, is also a mutant, one with the ability to **sense numenera**. Short and extremely thin, Burdler spends much of her time fitting into tiny crevices to retrieve things her mutant abilities have pointed her toward.

The twin sisters **Myph and Matese** are likely the reason that the town and its people are able to persist. These two look

identical with their shorn heads, magenta-dyed clothing, and tool-gloves. Working together, they can turn almost anything into a healing device of some capacity. Their specialty is garnet tea, an oily red liquid full of nanites that you suck from a special device. The tea and the device cost 10 shins. Refills cost 2 shins. The tea restores 2 points of Might each day for three consecutive days.

THE TOWER OF LIFE

One of the main features of Delormi is a tall, thin machine. It rises nearly 25 feet (8 m) into the sky and is about 5 feet (1.5 m) square. It seems to be built mostly of fabric, but strands of blue lightning run between the bits of fabric, as if they sew the bits together.

The tower seems as old as the island, and no one remembers being here before it was built. It does appear to draw people to it; when Banurno first arrived here, people were already living around it.

The machine thumps quietly during the night, shaking the ground around it violently for about 100 feet (30 m) out. Those who are within the area of the vibrations for the entire night are not affected by the island's vampiric quality. For this reason, many inhabitants fight over their “vibe rights,” attempting to ensure that they and their family are within the machine's radius, despite the vibrating ground.

Most houses are also built from the fabric and sewn lightning. They are similar to the configuration of the tower, but not exactly the same. The houses do not prevent the loss of health, although many people have tried to replicate the machine's powers with them.

A large metal wall around the village keeps the island's many creatures from attacking. It's topped with bits of metal cut into points. The only gate is constantly watched by two **guards** at any given time. No one is allowed into Delormi unless they bring an offering, typically a piece of the island or an item that might be used to create a healing or protective device.

CARRILS

Recently, a small cult of worshippers formed just outside the village walls. These **Carrils**, as they call themselves, have come to believe that the island is the voice of their true god. They believe that it asks for a small bit of their health as their penance for

past wrongdoings and as a show of their faith. Most believe that when their god has taken all it can from them, they will be lifted into the farthest edges of the petals when it closes and remain there forever.

A few of the group members originally lived in Delormi, but the vast majority were part of a crew on a ship that wrecked here a few years ago. The ship had set sail from a port town in the **Steadfast** called **Glavis** to spread the gospel of their gods, **Relia and Bianes**, to the world. The wreck, and the death of many of the crew, caused most of the survivors to lose faith. When **Tiass**, the current leader of the Carrils, found them, they were eager to believe in a new and more present deity.

Tiass, a fiercely strong redhead who refuses to talk about her life before the island, is trying to find a way through Delormi's metal wall and destroy the machine inside. The island has told Tiass that the machine, and those who live within its protection, are blasphemers.

FLORA AND FAUNA

The majority of creatures that thrive on the island either have the ability to constantly regenerate their health or have good shields against the constant draw. The land is mostly various types of solid metal or metal covered in drit. There are occasional hollows where enough sand and soil have settled to make it look like ground. One such place is **Callay Garden**, on the northern section of the island.

Most plants on the island take the form of multicolored molds that cover the vertical surfaces, orange-hued rust plants that suck their nutrients from the rotting metal, and flylay, a tufted plant that grows on the backs of many of the island's larger-shelled insects. The flylays in particular are useful, as each contains a small bulb of fresh water at its center.

ANGUSKS

Angusks are giant lizardlike creatures with four prehensile limbs and a large snout filled with multiple rows of teeth. Although they walk on only four legs, they typically have up to twelve smaller legs in various stages of growth. The lizards have evolved so that when the island pulls its energy from them, they are able to guide that leaching

toward one of their legs. After a few nights, that leg withers and falls off, and a new one begins to grow. The following night, the island begins to draw from another leg.

CEPHALEEN SPIDERS

Cephaleen spiders, sometimes called god's assassins, are meat-eating spiders covered in golden-yellow hair. They can grow as large as a small **seskii**. The spiders each have a purple marking on their abdomen; although it seems as if no two are alike, it's difficult to know for certain, as cephalen spiders are exceptionally hard to kill.

They have two sets of fangs on the top of their mouth, so their bite leaves four perfectly lined-up puncture marks. After 28 hours, the skin around the bite swells and turns purple in a pattern that matches the one on the spider's abdomen.

Rather than build webs and wait for prey, cephalen spiders spin out their webs as lassos, chasing down and catching prey on the run. Each round, they can run a short distance and throw their lasso web. They have a biomechanical heart that restores up to 1 point of the spider's health per minute—more than enough to compensate for the island's effect.

ZUNAK

Known just as *them* by most people who actually talk about them, these abhumans live in the crevices and crannies of the island. They are heterogeneous, but most have flat, almost featureless faces and some type of tail.

Wildly bloodthirsty, zunak relish in hunting and killing for the sport of it. Typically traveling in groups of four or five, they sometimes join forces and hunt in packs as large as twenty. Their hunting cries are a complicated series of chilling call-and-response whistles and growls that carry for long distances across the island.

Zunak seem to have developed a tolerance for cephalen spider poison and often build their camps close to the hairy creatures' nests. Not only do they roast and eat the spiders for sustenance, but many of their weapons are crafted from scavenged webbing. Bows, snares, and nets are sometimes used, but the most common weapon is a web flail: a long bit of web with something heavy and spiked attached to the end of it. Zunak also use the webbing to create clothing and bags.

Steadfast, page 136

Glavis, page 168

Relia and Bianes, page 168

Seskii, page 258

Tiass: level 5

Cephaleen spider: level 6; Armor 2; regains 1 point of lost health per minute; uses a level 6 lasso web to snag prey; venom is a level 4 poison that inflicts 4 points of damage every hour until the victim makes a successful Might defense roll, checking each hour

Those who have the good fortune to kill a cephalen spider, or come upon the body of a dead one, can scavenge up to 100 feet (30 m) of strong, sticky webbing from inside the corpse. The webbing provides an asset to all tasks related to climbing.

Poison, page 95

Zunak: level 4; Armor 1

Callay Garden, page 23

Angusk: level 3; Armor 2; bite does 3 points of damage

Carrils call zunak the felled, believing the abhumans were once their god's favored messengers but have fallen from grace. Truly devout Carrils spend many an evening attempting to understand and transcribe the howled "messages" of the hunting creatures.



Unlike other living things, zunak don't seem to be affected by the island's health-draining nature, due to either a natural resistance or a created protection.

PLACES TO EXPLORE

BENEATH

A number of **large round doors**, each about 6 feet (2 m) across, dot the island's landscape, suggesting that something lies beneath the metal. The doors have no visible handles or obvious locks, but upon each is inscribed three symbols. They look like the symbols found on the stomachs of the cephaleen spiders.

Anyone who's been bitten by a spider and whose bite mark has turned into one of the symbols on a door can open the locking mechanism just by pressing her flesh to the indents of the matching inscription.

On the other side of the doors are long, square tunnels with metallic walls, ceilings, and roofs, about 20 feet (6 m) on each side. The tunnels seem mostly undisturbed and largely unexplored. They open into rooms of a variety of sizes and shapes, and seem to go on endlessly. It's very easy to get lost,

and the most obvious sign that anyone has been there before is the occasional long-decaying skeleton or abandoned belonging.

A number of creatures make their homes in the dark winding of the Beneath, possibly because there is no health drain here. The occasional creature from above finds its way down through some unknown opening, but either it doesn't stay long or it gets lost in the tunnels, where it wanders until it dies.

Long-winged bats swoop through the shadows by the dozens. They're insect eaters and not aggressive, but their blazing exhale risks lighting hair and clothing on fire. Those who watch closely might be able to tell that the bats use their spew of fire for directional guidance. A confused or lost bat is a true danger, as it's likely to set a room ablaze trying to find its way out.

Blind canines travel the halls in packs of three or four, hunting the skittering **dirshmice** and the long-winged bats. The canines are pitch black and nearly silent. Because they are used to hunting their prey from beneath, they can slink almost flat to the ground while moving at surprising speeds and then spring upward to grab their prey in their paws or jaws. They're sometimes called shadow dogs, although if

Large round door: level 9

Long-winged bat: level 2; echolocation cry releases a fiery blast that can quickly set flammable materials alight

Blind canine: level 4; bite and claw do 4 points of damage

Dirshmouse: level 1

there is any light at all, their four large white eyes give off an eerie reflection.

Automatons the size and shape of tumbleweeds, sometimes known as **tumbletons**, are also common. They zip along the corridors as though they have a purpose and place. Following one, however, often turns out to be a dangerous wild goose chase as they turn back on their trails, disappear and reappear, and release chemical clouds in their wake. A “dead” tumbleton can be carefully broken apart to reveal interesting and often usable mechanisms inside.

The hallways are filled with the constant sound of running water, but the air is dry. It is entirely possible—likely, even—that dying from thirst is just as large a risk as that from the creatures that dwell in the dark.

CALLAY GARDEN

On the northern side of the island is a cliff just offshore where the giant red **ormvora whales** beach themselves to die. No one knows why—perhaps they too heed the call of the island, possibly as part of a unique mating ritual, or maybe some deeper, more ancient relic guides their way—but each year, hundreds of whales throw themselves upon the shore and then wiggle their giant bodies, snakelike, until they reach the edge of the cliff, where their weight and gravity cause them to plummet off.

The hollow beneath the cliff is so riddled with whale carcasses that a giant garden has grown up. One of the few places on the island where plants thrive, Callay Garden has become a sacred place for many islanders. The stark contrast of the surrounding steel against so much vibrant green makes it almost hard on the eyes.

Not surprisingly, it's much harder on the nose. The stench—and the possibility of being crushed by a falling whale—keep people away unless they must approach out of necessity. However, the prospect of fresh edibles entices even the most sensitive of noses. Botanists, **Sarracenians**, and other experts with a focus on plant life will find plenty here to keep them interested, including the rare predilict plant, the so-called crocodile cactus, and the ever-bearing rodimo fruits.

Predators, too, appreciate the garden, although for entirely different reasons. The stink of rotting meat and fat draws them from all over the island.

The stomachs of the fallen whales are filled with treasures they've accidentally ingested from the sea. A man named **Sayir** has built an enterprise at the outer edge of the garden, selling equipment, treasure, and other useful items he's harvested from the whales. His prices are quite high, and everything smells like the inside of a dead whale, but his offerings are often unique.

DEATH COVE

Tucked into a small cove near Callay Garden is an odd structure—a half-island, half-stationary ship that rests on the water. Upon it, towers of warped metal rise from blue-lit bottoms, each one ending in a thistle-shaped roof. The creatures that live here are humanoid and look like humans, but one would be hard-pressed to call them such, for they left their humanity behind long ago. Not abhumans except in their own brutal minds, the **echk** rob, steal, cheat, and plunder without remorse.

Nearly a hundred **echk**, dressed in heavy bone and metal armor, call Death Cove home. It's impossible to tell their gender, true size, or much of anything else about them, as their armor covers them from head to toe. Even their faces are hidden behind skeletal masks. They carry stolen weapons that they've often upgraded—not to be more deadly, but to be more painful, gruesome, or menacing. Fast deaths are not their preference, although death of any kind is reason for rejoicing.

Those who've traveled the world enough to run across other pirates, such as the **Jaekels** of Aras Island, might find the similarities remarkable, as both groups favor simple but brutal weapons, paint their skin in symbols from the blood of their prey, and place great value on bodily experimentation. However, that is where the similarities end. The bloodthirsty nature of the **echk** is so rampant and furious that it makes the Jaekels seem downright restrained by comparison. The **echk** have been known to take out entire ships full of passengers and crew on one of their raiding parties, just because they could.

These parties attack in groups of a dozen, riding on **water striders**. These long motorized boards can carry up to three people and are fast, silent and easily maneuverable.

Tumbleton: level 4; releases a cloud of chemicals that does 2 points of Intellect damage to everyone in short range

Sayir: level 3; bargaining, scavenging, and haggling as level 4

Echk: level 5, all tasks related to being in or on the water as level 6; Armor 4; medium ranged weapon that is modified to have one effect in addition to damage when used by a knowledgeable **echk**. Roll 1d6 for each weapon's effect.

1–2 *Fear force* (causes victim to flee for one round on a failed Intellect defense roll)

3–4 *Blind ray* (causes victim to go blind for one round on a failed Might defense roll)

5–6 *Brain blaster* (victim suffers 1 point of Intellect damage and cannot take actions for one round on a failed Intellect defense roll)

Ormvora whales have large bioluminescent teeth that grow up to 20 feet (6 m) in length.

Ormvora: level 8; Armor 3

Jaekels, page 169

Sarracenians, page 226

Eating the predilict plant raw provides an asset to mental powers such as telepathy for one hour. Eating it boiled is not recommended.

Rodimo fruits are small, round, and spiked. They glow similarly to ormvoras' teeth, but with a slightly paler light.

Water strider: level 5; cover 100 feet in one round



Echk steal anything they can get their hands on, except people—people they just kill. The echk have very little use for other humans, unless they are convinced that a particular person is of great value to them for the knowledge or experience. “Dagger in, blood out!” is a common echk battle cry.

The one saving grace to anyone running from the echk: the cruel humanoids will not put foot on dry land, other than their own island. In fact, they seem almost fearful of land and the creatures it contains.

There are many rumors of the echk, told and retold by sailors and others who spend their lives upon the seas. That the

echk towers are filled with unnecessary treasures and junk and everything else they’ve stolen, the objects piled so high and deep that it’s hard for the echk to live in the remaining space. That a giant silver water snake guards their hoard of treasures and commands the echk to do its brutal bidding. That under the bright light of the new moon, the echk turn into giant silver snakes themselves and course across the water toward unsuspecting sailors.

Who knows what of the echk is true, and what is fable? Only those who’ve been face to face with an echk’s brutal blade can say. And they don’t survive to tell.

THE ISLAND OF UNDOING HEARSAY

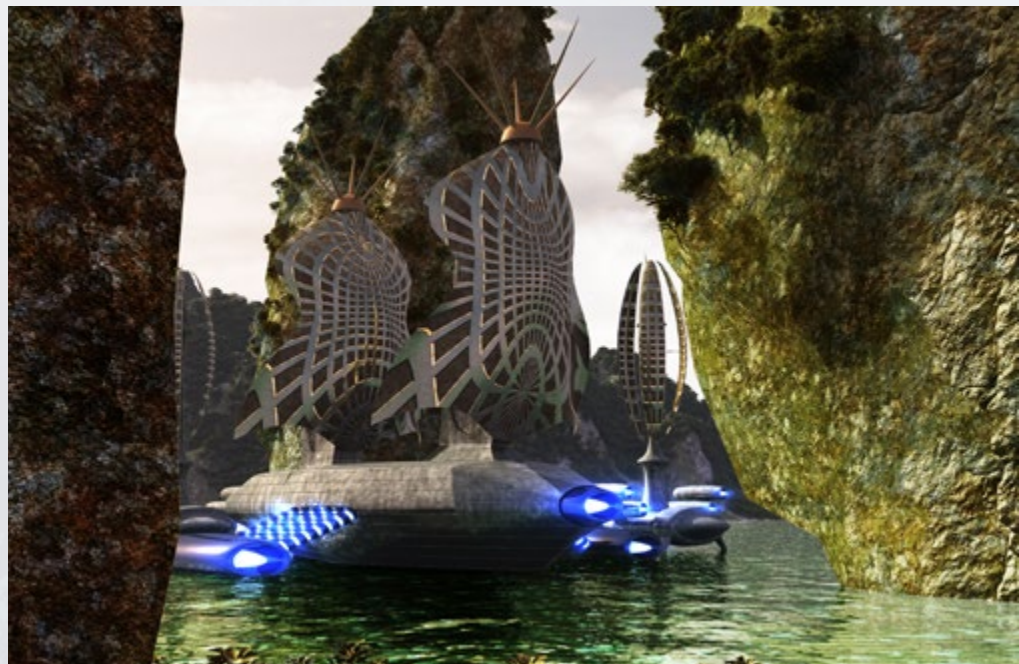
Antivenom: A Carril was recently bitten by a cephalen spider. He believes that because he’s not dying the proper way, he has fallen out of his god’s favor, so he seeks to forestall his death. He says he can make a large amount of antivenom—enough to share—from a red sea star that is harvested just off shore.

Shipwreck: A large ship has crashed on the west side of the island. A group from Delormi is heading to check it out. Half of them want to save any survivors. The other half want to loot and pillage the wrecked vessel, survivors be damned.

THE WEIRD OF THE ISLAND OF UNDOING

Cold Reception: Along the southeastern shore, a large block of what appears to be extremely durable and strong ice recently washed ashore. Anyone who attempts to break it or move it develops a sheen of frost over his skin for 28 hours.

Yesterday’s Sorrow: At twilight of some evenings, a shimmering yellow arc appears in the sky. Golden drops fall from it. Anyone touched by a drop is suddenly overcome by intense sadness for a previous crime, loss, or tragedy.



CHAPTER 2

THE DROWNED CITY OF CLE

Cle is a prior-world city that met its end in a self-triggered cataclysm that sunk it. Portions of the city remain in brooding, water-filled silence. A handful of new explorers arrive every year, thanks to rumors of immortality-granting artifacts located in drowned city vaults.

GM SUMMARY

A previously extinct race of creatures dubbed cleoids are using “tainted” devices to resurrect themselves in Cle. Tainted artifacts and cyphers found in the city can transform unwitting explorers into freshly awakened cleoids, in both body and mind. Newly awakened cleoids recall the ancient genocide visited upon their race in a prior world. Now in the Ninth World, cleoids seek to renew themselves by transforming ever more victims into cleoids. When enough cleoids have awakened, they will likely spread out from Cle. But for now, the threat of this powerful race of creatures remains in the drowned city.

CLE BACKGROUND

An **Aeon Priest** named **Darnet** found Cle. Darnet and his exploration team discovered that disturbingly appalling creatures lurked in the ruined, partly drowned chambers. On the other hand, they also discovered a trove of cyphers and artifacts that had miraculous life-sustaining abilities. (It was rumors of such treasures circulating around the *Steadfast* that brought Darnet in the first place, though those rumors failed to mention the guardian entities, which he called “cleoids.”)

CLEOIDS

Cleoids are extinct, but their influence lurks in certain tainted cyphers and artifacts. Creatures who find and use these compromised objects are gradually transformed into shelled monsters with mental abilities of ferocious strength, unless they’re strong enough to resist the change. Remembering the genocide that brought them low, newly born cleoids want revenge against all things. But first, they need to renew their race by any and all means.

USING THE DROWNED CITY OF CLE

The GM can use Cle in a campaign in several ways to engage character interest or attachment, including the following hooks.

- The PCs are tracking down **Darnet** because his wife died after a long illness in the village of *Halfstar*, and they volunteered to be the messengers of the sad news.
- Rumors of the wondrous artifacts and cyphers that prolong life, renew vigor, and even render a regular character into an immortal being have reached the PCs.
- The PCs uncover an old map (an oddity that projects a map onto a nearby surface) that shows the location of what could be a prior-world city just off the coast, suggesting that something valuable could be under the waves.
- The PCs find themselves in Cle by accident. The only way to get out of the city is to explore it, looking for exits and dealing with whatever threats materialize.



Cle pronunciation: *clay*

Cleoid, page 27

“Drowned” cities once thrived above the water before rising seas sucked them beneath merciless waves. Such sites are further buried in sand, mud, and the detritus of yet older ruined structures.

Aeon Priest,
page 269

Darnet: *level 5, defends and resists mental effects as level 6*



Aeon Priests belong to the Order of Truth.



Order of Truth, page 222

Cleoid, page 27



Varjellen, page 121

Cleoids have partly translucent spiral shells, spiny water wings, a whipping tail, and a hideous face whose eyes glow with mental supremacy.

TAINTED ARTIFACTS AND CYPHERS

Unless an artifact or cypher was brought into Cle by a recent explorer, such as the Blade of the Sun, it is probably tainted. Anyone who uses such a cypher risks initiating cleoid transformation. A taint on an affected object isn't obvious even to someone who identifies the cypher or artifact, though someone might be able to trace back the origin of the transformation with some study (and a successful difficulty 4 Intellect task). Cyphers, artifacts, and other devices brought into Cle do not become tainted; only those found within the structure possess this nightmarish quality.

Tainted objects are identified as "Tainted Cypher" or "Tainted Artifact" in their titles. A tainted object remains tainted until it is used (like a cypher) or destroyed. Someone trained in the numenera who discovers an object's taint can attempt to remove the malefic effect with a successful Intellect-based roll with a difficulty equal to the object's level, though on a failure, she would be subject to the effect of the taint (cleoid transformation).

CLEOID TRANSFORMATION

If a character uses a tainted artifact, which is an artifact with a cleoid transformation risk, she must make a difficulty 5 Might defense roll or begin the transformation process. The process isn't immediately

noticeable, nor is it obviously traceable to the tainted tech. The effect described for each step in the transformation occurs after a character makes a recovery roll.

When the process begins, the character's abilities improve. At first, she likely doesn't realize that anything bad is ultimately in store for her. After each benefit noted below is gained, the character can choose to attempt a new difficulty 5 Might defense roll to end the process. If she succeeds on three of these before she fails (or chooses to forgo) three, the transformation reverses, and the character eventually returns to her original state (unless another tainted artifact, cypher, or effect triggers the transformation anew).

DARNET AND HIS TEAM

Darnet, Aeon Priest: Darnet, a thin man with a shaved head, was trained in a village called Halfstar, which specialized in maintaining artifacts that prolonged life. A few years ago, those artifacts finally failed, and several people who'd been helped by the process fell ill. Darnet's wife Delona was one. He immediately set off looking for something better hinted at in explorers' journals from hundreds of years earlier, and he found Cle. With him came another Aeon Priest named Kasanth and a glaive called Yellow Sword.

Kasanth, Aeon Priest: Five Aeon Priests resided in Halfstar. They worked as one when times were good. Kasanth, a *varjellen*, was considered an oddity among

CLEOID TRANSFORMATION TABLE

| Recovery Rolls | Transformation Effect |
|-------------------|--|
| 1 action | Add 1 to the points regained when making a recovery roll |
| 10 minutes | +1 to Might Pool |
| 1 hour | +1 to Speed Pool |
| 10 hours | +1 to Intellect Pool (hallucinations featuring a "friendly" consciousness helping the character) |
| Second 1 action | +1 to Armor (character begins to grow a snail-like shell) |
| Second 10 minutes | +2 to Might Pool (hallucinations and nightmares grow worse, and when character is impaired or debilitated, an alien presence takes over her mind and attempts to convince allies to come with her to find more tainted cyphers in the garbage vault) |
| Second 1 hour | +2 to Speed Pool (except for the rigid shell, character's flesh becomes slimy and partly translucent) |
| Second 10 hours | Character emerges from next recovery roll completely transformed into a cleoid; nothing of the original character remains |



outsiders, because visitant Aeon Priests are a remarkable thing. When their artifacts failed beyond all repair, Kasanth set off with Darnet to search for a solution. Though humans have a tough time determining it, Kasanth usually adopts the female gender. In fact, she was pregnant when she, Darnet, and Yellow Sword set off to find Cle.

Yellow Sword: A female human glaive of uncommon size and strength and many golden body markings, Yellow Sword decided to serve Darnet and the other Aeon Priests after they saved her daughter from [cragworm](#) venom. She wields a massive artifact shaped like a yellow greatsword that can break into two separate weapons that she fights with simultaneously.

Klarmac Dal: This male human man-at-arms with an alarmingly deep voice was hired from a nearby fishing village as a guide for the expedition.

CLEOID

The city of Cle is located 3 miles (5 km) off the coast of the Beyond near Harmuth. Its uppermost chambers lie under 30 feet (10 m) of water plus a layer of silt and slow-moving sea life, including an

especially robust colony of spiny sponges. The tumbled terrain beneath the waves seems unremarkable, though characters with experience in undersea landforms can see evidence of a series of islands near the mainland, all now collapsed or sunken.

ENTERING CLE

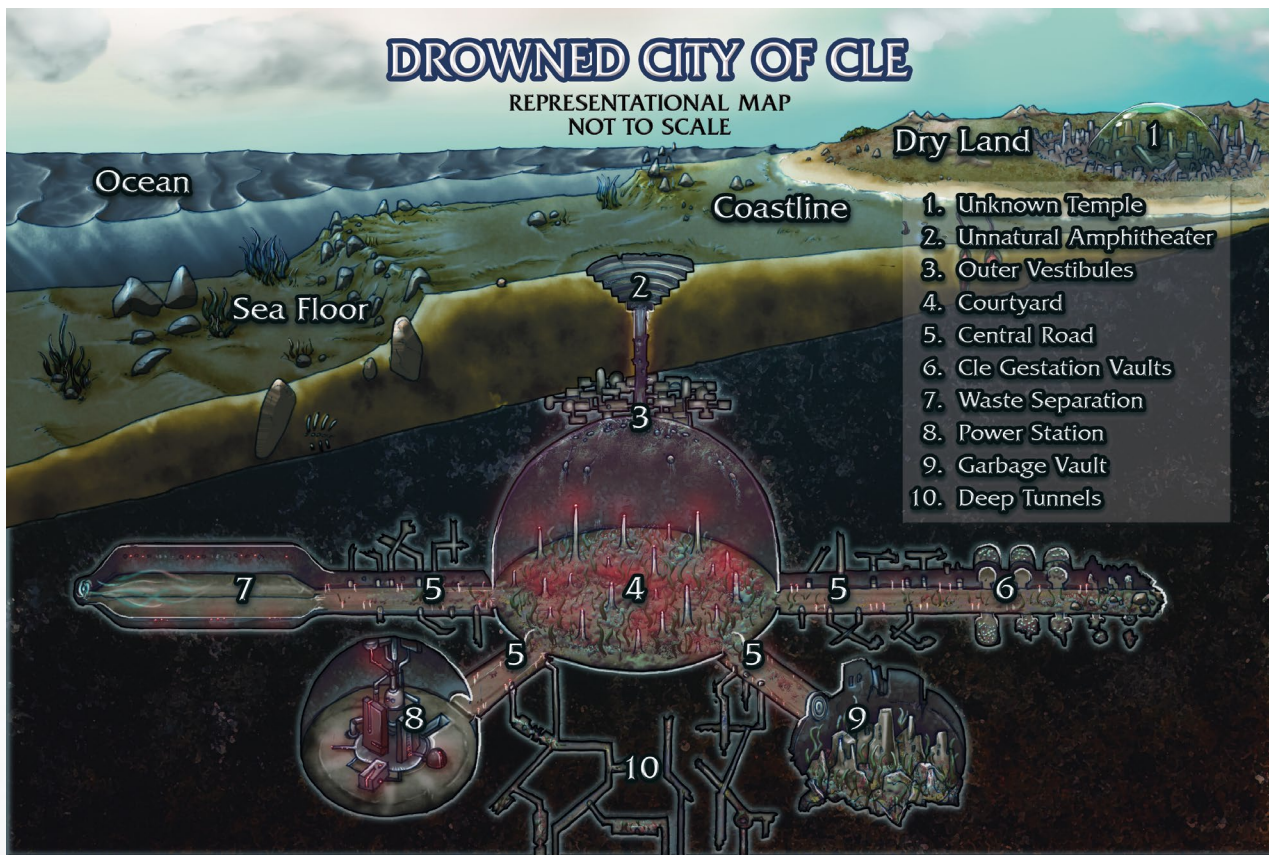
With a map, knowledge of the proper landmarks, or just a discerning eye, a character can find one external entrance directly above Cle on the seafloor, described under Unnatural Amphitheater. Another entrance is located in a ruin several miles inland, described under Unknown Temple. Otherwise, the PCs might use one of the means suggested in the introduction to travel to Cle via the [deep tunnels](#). If they use some sort of instantaneous travel to gain entry, such as a gate, they probably arrive in the courtyard.

CLEOID ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

A few areas within the city retain bubbles of breathable air and other areas are half drowned, but most sections are completely filled with water. Luckily for surface creatures exploring Cle, the drowned

[Cragworm](#),
page 236

[Deep tunnels](#), page 32



Invisible corridors, page 12

areas are saturated with the same breath-enabling, pressure-equalizing quality possessed by the *invisible corridors*. Thus, surface creatures can generally survive in the city without drowning or freezing.

1. UNKNOWN TEMPLE

Located several miles inland, a larger ancient ruin contains a sealed dome of brittle synth (level 4). The dome's interior walls depict an island city that might well be of the prior worlds. Though dust and other signs of a great passage of time is evident, some tech in the chamber still functions. Investigators can salvage 3d6 shins and a couple of random cyphers (but not tainted cyphers like those described later). If they make a difficulty 3 Intellect roll to understand the numenera, explorers discover how to energize a temporary portal that transfers anyone in the dome to the unknown island city. Of course, the island city depicted has since sunk, so when PCs appear, they do so underwater in the outer vestibules.

2. UNNATURAL AMPHITHEATER

Approximately 30 feet (10 m) beneath the surface, the seafloor dips in a series of steplike depressions that culminate 20 feet

(6 m) deeper on a chunk of silt-covered material that is similar to a dais. By day, light from above illuminates the depression so that anyone within short range of it has a chance to notice the potential artificial nature of the formation. If that realization is made, study of the central cavity reveals a sealed circular hatch beneath a layer of silt. Opening it (a difficulty 5 Might task) reveals a drowned tube 10 feet (3 m) in diameter leading downward. The tube descends at least a long distance.

3. OUTER VESTIBULES

Marine plants overgrow this series of chambers. Dim light illuminates most of the area, filtering up through the water from holes in the floor, which are obviously the result of past collapse and damage, not natural.

A search among the marine plants infesting the connected rooms uncovers various defunct mechanisms, as well as 3d6 shins and a couple of cyphers (including a regeneration engine cypher). The same search also reveals an explorer's pack, partly rotted from exposure to water, but abandoned only within the last few months.

Weird Event: One PC feels a strong sense of wrongness in the area generally, though

Weird Event GM Intrusion: *The character must succeed on a difficulty 6 Intellect defense roll or be convinced that an ally is just on the verge of transforming into a flesh-eating monster, a sensation that lasts for several rounds.*

whatever lies farther down seems to be the actual source of the feeling. If the character takes the time to explore the feeling, she has a daydream-like experience where one of her allies transforms into a mind-eating monster.



REGENERATION ENGINE (TAINTED CYPHER)

Level: 1d6

Internal: Pill, ingestible liquid

Wearable: Adhesive patch that activates when slapped

Usable: Injector

Effect: Each time the user uses a cypher, an artifact, or a special ability from her type or focus during the next 28 hours, she also restores a number of points to her Pools equal to the regeneration engine's level.

4. COURTYARD

This massive underwater open area is lit by red crystal globes that top lamplike pillars. The pillars are scattered randomly and reach to varying heights. Collapsed corridors, domes, and other structures litter the wide floor, which approaches a half mile (1 km) in diameter. The entire area is overgrown with marine plants and animals.

The courtyard also holds a floating, rotting corpse. The corpse is human, male, and obviously the subject of much violence. Investigation shows that the body's slimy, partly translucent appearance might be more than mere rot; the man was apparently a mutant. The man's possessions identify him as Klarmac Dal, a man-at-arms contracted by Darnet. In addition to rope, rotting food, and 20 shins, Klarmac has a mind rejuvenator cypher.



MIND REJUVENATOR (TAINTED CYPHER)

Level: 1d6 + 2

Internal: Pill, ingestible liquid

Wearable: Adhesive patch that activates when slapped

Usable: Injector

Effect: Substance adds +1 to the user's Intellect Edge for one hour. In addition, the user's maximum Intellect Pool increases by 4 for three days.

Weird Event: A character misjudges an innocuous-looking marine plant. Plant tendrils wrap around him and hold him fast, requiring a difficulty 5 Might roll to break free. While the character is held, he can mentally hear what his companions are thinking.

5. CENTRAL ROAD

The same red lights found on the courtyard columns occur at irregular intervals along this road. Marine plants, rubble, and various mechanical hulks and devices (which are perhaps vehicles used by the people who once lived in the city before it sank) litter the road. Various side streets and tunnels give off the main way, though most are partly or totally collapsed. Investigation of one or more of the relics garners 3d6 shins, but nothing more substantial.

Weird Event: A female voice hails the PCs. Swimming toward them is a huge glaive who gives her name as **Yellow Blade**. She says that she came into the city of Cle with two Aeon Priests, Darnet and Kasanth (and, she admits, a man-at-arms called Klarmac Dal). She says she was separated from her group and has been looking to reunite with her companions ever since. Anything more than that, she claims not to know. She's

GM Intrusion: *The weird marine plant attacking the character not only holds him fast, but also injects venom that attacks his brain each round, inflicting 1 point of Intellect damage (ignores Armor). However, instead of being painful, the damage seems intensely pleasurable.*

GM Intrusion: *Yellow Blade suspects that the character has realized her secret, and attacks.*

Yellow Blade: *level 5; health 22; Armor 2; attacks with two blades (Blade of the Sun) as level 6, inflicting 4 points of damage with each blade as a single action; can mentally attack a target in long range like a cleoid; carries a life rod artifact*

The Blade of the Sun artifact was brought into Cle and is not tainted.

LIFE ROD (TAINTED ARTIFACT)

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Synth rod with elongated snail-shell shape

Effect: If the rod is touched to a character, she regains 10 points in one Pool, gains the ability to see in the dark and in silty water as if in bright light within short range, and, if elderly, is reduced in apparent age by ten years.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

BLADE OF THE SUN

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Golden great sword or twin golden long swords

Effect: This two-handed sword functions as a normal heavy weapon or as two one-handed medium swords. The wielder can change the artifact conformation as part of any other action. The difficulty of attacks made with the weapon (or weapons) is decreased by one step. The blades emit bright light (daylight) within short range upon command.

If the wielder becomes separated from the artifact, the weapon returns to her if she can find any other bladed weapon to grip as a temporary stand-in. The first time the wielder attacks another creature with the stand-in blade, Blade of the Sun manifests, replacing the stand-in.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20 (Check each time the blade returns to its current owner.)



Cleoid transformation, page 26



Reforging, page 121

Cleoid, page 137

GM Group Intrusion:

The cleoid personality takes control of Kasanth for several rounds, and it tries to ambush the PCs, sabotage whatever task they attempt to accomplish, or betray them to Darnet.

Kasanth: *level 5; Armor 2; attacks with speargun artifact as level 6; carries a corpse reviver cypher*

lying; in truth, she has been **transformed** into a cleoid mentally, and she is on the way to being transformed physically as well.

6. CLE GESTATION VAULTS

This series of shattered structures, like rounded treasure vaults, each contain masses of gelatinous eggs in stasis. In some cases, the eggs are visible through transparent synth; in others, the synth barrier is shattered, though the eggs remain in stasis.

Investigation reveals that any particular vault can be voided by fiddling with the controls and making a difficulty 2 Intellect roll. When a vault is voided, seven glistening eggs, each larger than a human, are shunted out into the central area. Each contains a rapidly gestating cleoid, which hatches over the course of the next few minutes (one every minute), unless the PCs halt the process by smashing the hatching eggs. The hatchlings are reduced strength **cleoids** (level 2).

Kasanth: Kasanth, the varjellen Aeon Priest, has taken shelter in an empty gestation vault. She emerges to investigate the sounds of PC activity. Kasanth explains that she and her compatriots contracted some kind of plague in Cle, one that began to transform her friends into monsters.

Thanks to her varjellen biology, she proved partially immune, though she has to concentrate each day—using her **reforging** ability—to keep the changes at bay. Kasanth doesn't realize that the source of the "plague" is the tainted cyphers that she and her companions collected in the city. On the other hand, she can fill in other pieces of information regarding the city's background to PCs who are interested.

Aid Requested: The varjellen Aeon Priest asks the characters to help her detonate the whole city from the ancient power station, where the thing that was once Darnet has holed up. Kasanth says blowing up the city has the best chance of ending the cleoid threat now and in the future, by destroying all tainted cyphers and artifacts in Cle.

Weird Event: Sometimes while she's speaking, Kasanth pauses and winces as if in pain, and portions of her anatomy shift about in a varjellen-like fashion. She tells anyone concerned that it's all okay; sometimes she just needs to spend more time concentrating on keeping her situation in check. Kasanth says she can feel an alien mind within her own clamoring to get free. Luckily, she claims, she's more than varjellen enough to handle it.



**CORPSE REVIVER
(TAINTED CYPHER)****Level:** 1d6 + 2**Usable:** Synth spike**Effect:** Restores life to one corpse (if dead no longer than one minute and still essentially in one piece) or restores a number of points equal to the cypher level to a character's Pools.**SPEARGUN****Level:** 1d6 + 2**Form:** Handheld device with a few simple controls**Effect:** Emits miniature, self-propelled spears at targets within long range through airy or aqueous environments. The difficulty of hitting a target is decreased by one step due to the self-aiming feature of the tiny spears. Living targets hit by an attack move one step down the damage track from a toxic poison in each spear.This device is a rapid-fire weapon and thus can be used with the [Spray](#) or [Arc Spray](#) abilities that some characters have, but each round of ammo used or each additional target selected requires an additional depletion roll.**Depletion:** 1 in 1d10**7. WASTE SEPARATION**

A faint current sucks into the mouth of this drowned passage, tugging at the characters and any loose objects. At the mouth, the current is so gentle that even relatively small objects released in the water are not pulled in, unless they happen to be naturally buoyant. Just past the mouth, the current is stronger, pulling any object or creature along that doesn't resist it (a difficulty 1 Might task). At the far end, a circular arch set in the corridor contains a vertical swirling whirlpool that is the source of the current. Anything entering it seems to pass through easily enough, though to where is not apparent. In fact, objects that enter are separated into their constituent elements. Those elements are spat out in handy pelletized form from a niche in the side

wall. (Creatures that enter take 10 points of damage each round and must succeed on a difficulty 6 Might task to swim free.)

8. POWER STATION

This area exists within a bubble of trapped, breathable air. A central synth mechanism extends into both the floor and the ceiling. The mechanism pulses with ancient energy, the residue of the power that once fueled an entire city. It is the source for lighting that still casts red glows across the courtyard and along the central road. It also enables the same breath-enabling, pressure-equalizing quality as that possessed by the invisible corridors.

A character who spends about ten minutes studying the synth mechanism and who makes a difficulty 5 Intellect roll gains a limited amount of control over the power and environmental functions of Cle. With that control, the character could turn off the lights, turn off the effect that makes the water breathable and equalizes the pressure, and achieve similar effects. More dramatically, a character with control who spends ten rounds and makes a difficulty 5 Intellect roll could blow up the entire city of Cle. (If this "self-destruct" selection is activated, PCs have only a few minutes to clear out of the city before it is pulled into a crushing implosion that rocks the nearest portion of Beyond coast like a minor earthquake.)

Weird Event: Darnet. The Aeon Priest Darnet is holed up in this chamber—or, at least, what Darnet has become is here. It is essentially a cleoid that retains Darnet's physical head. However, the mind within that cranium, though it possesses all the knowledge the Aeon Priest had, is all cleoid. As a cleoid, Darnet plots how to best spread the influence of his transformation far and wide in order to create more cleoids. He decides that PCs who enter the power station have a role to play. He may pretend to be cowed by them, or offer them a few random cyphers (tainted) from the garbage vaults, if they agree to leave and cease the ridiculous fighting. He lies, indicating that all he and the other cleoids want is to be left in peace and isolation.

If fighting breaks out that Darnet can't end through diplomatic lies, he tries to adjust a control on the power core that shuts down the field that provides oxygen

The speargun artifact was brought into Cle and is not tainted.

Spray, page 30

Arc Spray, page 31

Weird Event GM

Intrusion: *Darnet summons another active cleoid to help him defeat the PCs.*

Darnet: *as cleoid; bears bio-stabilizer artifact*



Drowning, page 7

Maintenance automaton: level 4, tasks related to maintaining the numenera as level 7; Armor 1; swim a short distance each round; manipulator grip attacks as level 3

Deep Dark, page 9

and low pressure to the water filling the station. PCs who don't have their own protection and means of breathing begin to **drown**. Flipping the control back is something PCs can do if they make a difficulty 3 Intellect-based roll; however, the process requires two rounds to fully re-engage.

BIO-STABILIZER (TAINTED ARTIFACT)

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Harness that attaches via spine tendrils

Effect: While wearing the harness, the wearer gains +1 to Armor and has an asset on Might defense tasks. In addition, he can choose to ignore the effects of becoming impaired or debilitated. Finally, he can choose to ignore the effects of death itself for a limited time.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20 (Check for each minute spent either impaired or debilitated, and for each round the user would otherwise be dead.)

9. GARBAGE VAULT

Accessing this area requires a character to make a difficulty 5 Intellect-based roll to disengage the sealed doors.

The area is not so much a vault as a massive, drowned chamber filled with the detritus of a collapsed city. If the vault were in open air, it would be nearly impossible to move through the tiny mountains of overgrown material. But swimmers can hover over the mounded material, some of which is debris, chunks of synth, and, here and there, bits of functioning tech. PCs who search through the vaults can pull out a couple of random cyphers and one random artifact after a few hours of searching. Objects found in these piles are from the original builders of Cle, but some are tainted (roll a d6 per item discovered; on a 1-2, the item is tainted).

While in the garbage vault, characters who activate any device that has a power charge draw the attention of a school of **phayclor** looking for easy access to energy.

Phayclor, page 148

10. DEEP TUNNELS

Excavations beneath the city of Cle existed prior to the city's submergence. These deep tunnels provided routes for networks of tech that supported the city above. Nearly all of those mechanisms are defunct now. A handful of marine-adapted **automatons** that have seen better decades patrol the tunnels. The automatons keep sea life—both plants and animals—from colonizing, repair what tech they can, reinforce tunnel structures, and clear collapsed tunnels. Unfortunately, there are far too few automatons left to keep ahead of things. They generally ignore intruders, unless those intruders attempt to salvage shins or cyphers from the various panels and related tech. If activated to defend the integrity of the tunnels, 1d6 + 2 maintenance automatons appear every hour to eliminate a detected threat. (Characters can find a total of 3d6 shins and maybe a cleoid eye artifact if they spend a few hours salvaging in a tunnel.)

Getting lost in the tunnels is a real concern for those who don't know the routes. However, eventually—in about 100 miles (160 km)—the tunnels provide access to various locations in the **Deep Dark**.

CLEOID EYE (TAINTED ARTIFACT)

Level: 1d6 + 2

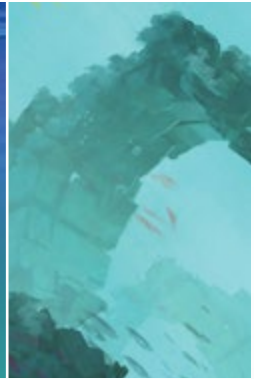
Form: White orb the size of an eyeball

Effect: Serves the user as a prosthetic eye, though only by sacrificing one of the owner's original eyes. In addition, the eye grants the owner several abilities, including the ability to see underwater and in the dark for up to ten hours at a time, the ability to see invisible creatures for up to one minute at a time, and the ability to command the actions of a creature within immediate range who meets the eye's gaze for a period of one minute.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

CHAPTER 3

THE NULLIFIED HARBOR



Not far—relatively speaking—from the islands known as the Rayskel Cays lies an undersea locale known by some as the Nullified Harbor, and by others as the Garden of Garralos. Filled with a variety of aquatic flora and fauna, it also has a surprising number of shipwrecks of ancient providence, and something even stranger—but possibly more rewarding—farther below.

GM SUMMARY

Below the waves lies a graveyard of sunken ships. Why are they all clustered together? No one knows. But the area is surrounded by undersea life. The wrecks offer interesting opportunities for exploration and treasure-seeking, although not without a variety of dangers. Perhaps most interesting, however, is the large cavern below the seafloor, reached only by passing through a series of ancient archways. This machine-filled cavern promises respite—and long life—for weary travelers, if they can figure out how to bring the prior-world mechanisms to life.

REACHING AND SURVIVING THE NULLIFIED HARBOR

The Nullified Harbor lies about 350 feet (106 m) below the waves. Here, the daylight is dim but not so much that the plants of

the garden don't thrive. The network of the **invisible corridors** goes nowhere near the Nullified Harbor, and thus those tunnels cannot be used. Traditional diving methods are required, with gear enough to not only provide the means to breathe but also cope with the dangers of increased pressure. Most explorers from the surface will likely wish to use one of the southern islands of the Rayskel Cays, 130 miles (210 km) away, as a base of operations.

The garden is well lit day and night by a species of bioluminescent barnacle called garrala, which gives the garden its name. Although not as deep as some undersea

Invisible corridors, page 12

USING THE NULLIFIED HARBOR

This location serves as a fantastic motivation to get PCs to go into the deep. Salvaging numenera from the sunken vessels is a straightforward hook, and the mysteries of the garden are alluring as well. But tales of the secret to immortality—that's a goal for almost any explorer to go through whatever it takes to reach. GMs can use even an off-handed reference to the Nullified Harbor in a conversation taking place anywhere, above or below the waves, to draw explorers in.

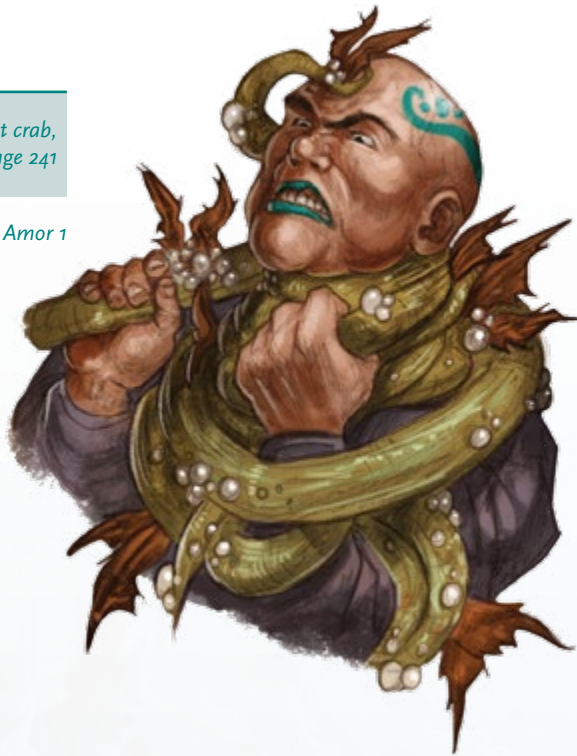


Knowledge of the Nullified Harbor is traded as a valuable commodity in coastal towns and taverns catering to sailors. Much of it, however, is false information, inaccuracies, or outright lies. Few know the truth, and few of those have found a way to make use of the information, but for those who have, it has saved lives.



Ghost crab,
page 241

Britner: level 1; Amor 1



locales, it is still deep enough that the greatest danger to explorers comes from the pressures of being so far underwater. The waters of the Nullified Harbor are surprisingly warm—which is to say, cool but not dangerously cold.

FLORA AND FAUNA OF THE GARDEN

Aside from the garrala, a common sight in the garden is the violet-leaved eval plant, which grows as a long vine. Even more interesting, however, is the marrudi, a rare sort of leafy plant that is almost transparent. When collected and properly brewed, a patch can produce 1d6 + 1 viable doses of a drink that increases Might Edge by 1 for a week. On the more dangerous side, hidden amid the more typical plants are the **spirril**, ready to grasp at available prey.

Swimming amid the flora are a wide variety of fish, including the golden **varramoy**, a species with eyes located all around its wide body. The **perou** is a dangerous nuisance fish that harms almost any powered device it can touch by draining it of energy. (Woe to the diver using a device to breathe or negate pressure issues.) Preying upon the varramoy and other fish are **chardu eels** and **tharnicun**, the latter being predator fish with multiple mouths. Another predator is the **issik**, a carapace-covered, sharklike creature with lightning-fast reflexes.

Spirril, page 152

Varramoy: level 1,
perception as level 5

Perou: level 2; drains an
exposed level 4 or lower
device of power in one
round

Chardu eel: level 3;
bite inflicts 4 points of
damage

Tharnicun: level 3; makes
three bite attacks (or one
bite that inflicts 6 points
of damage) as a single
action

Issik: level 4, attacks and
Speed defense as level 5;
Armor 3

Crawling along the seabed, explorers might find a variety of crustaceans, including **ghost crabs** and the brilliant green-shelled **britners** with their twelve spiderlike legs. Britner eggs are valuable baubles, each usable as a shin in most places.

Other barnacles, anemones, and similar creatures cling to the various shipwrecks as well.

THE SHIPWRECKS

The Nullified Harbor gets its name from all the sunken vessels lying wrecked in one place—like a harbor whose very essence has been nullified. These wrecked craft are clearly all ancient, but some seem far older than others. Most have distinctly different designs, as if built by entirely different civilizations.

Most of the wrecks are corroded skeletons of ships and submersibles (and possibly flying craft), with just a few metal spars jutting up from the sand. Many others are empty shells, providing home to marine life. A few, though, still contain ancient treasures in the form of shins, oddities, and even cyphers and artifacts.

The wrecked ships are plentiful, and each is different. If characters explore some, roll randomly (or choose) on both the Nature of the Wreck table and the Complication table.

THE NULLIFIED HARBOR'S SECRET

Within the confines of the garden lies the true treasure of the Nullified Harbor. In fact, when knowledgeable sailors and aquatic explorers refer to the respite of the harbor, they're not really talking about the shipwrecks or the surrounding garden at all, but something more secret. This location is not an obvious thing to find. In fact, it looks very much like a series of three large stone arches, covered with underwater plants and creatures, including the bioluminescent garrala found elsewhere in the garden.

THE THREE ARCHES

In the middle of the harbor, three stone archways rise from the seabed, each 20 feet high and 8 feet wide (6 by 2.5 m). They are spaced about 100 feet (30 m) apart. Although there are no nearby shipwrecks, the garden itself does a pretty good job of concealing these archways.



NATURE OF THE WRECK

| | |
|-------|--|
| 01–40 | Empty shell: nothing of value |
| 41–50 | Mostly empty shell: a patch of marrudi grows |
| 51–60 | Mostly empty shell: 1d6 + 10 shins |
| 61–70 | Mostly empty shell: clutch of 2d6 + 10 britner eggs |
| 71–80 | Lair: an intelligent and not automatically hostile creature (like an octopus , a vraoordun , or an automaton) lives in the wreck |
| 81–90 | Some components intact: 1d6 + 10 shins, 1d6 random oddities, 1 random cypher |
| 91–96 | Many components intact: 1d6 + 10 shins, 1d6 random oddities, 1d6 random cyphers |
| 97–99 | Treasure trove: 1d6 + 20 shins, 1d6 random oddities, 1d6 + 1 random cyphers, 1 random artifact |
| 00 | Repairable craft: the wreck is not so badly damaged. With about fifty hours of work, a few level 4 replacement parts, and four Intellect-based rolls (difficulty 6), the characters might salvage a functioning submarine. |

[Octopus](#), page 146

[Vraoordun](#), page 157

COMPLICATION

| | |
|-------|---|
| 01–50 | No complication |
| 51–65 | Unstable wreck: at some point, all within must make Speed defense rolls or take 4 points of damage. |
| 66–70 | A school of a dozen perou |
| 71–75 | A pack of 1d6 + 3 issik |
| 76–80 | A spiny scishan |
| 81–85 | A stinging cloak |
| 86–90 | A hostile disassembler |
| 91–95 | A jybril |
| 96–00 | Skeane scavengers |

such platforms in the harbor, each about 12 feet (4 m) across. The edges of the silent cavern, 300 feet (100 m) across, are covered in strange metal and synth machinery. Parts of these workings also glow softly, but for the most part the machines seem long dead.

The ceiling is 100 feet (30 m) above, the floor an equal distance below, but both are dark, so that distance remains unknown. The darkness is absolute—even a dropped torch or glowglobe winks out.

Time spent on the platform is beneficial. Characters' Pools are restored at a rate of 1 point per two minutes. They are infused with nutrients at a slow but steady rate. It's likely that after an hour or so, even a character at death's door is hale and healthy. She even feels well rested as though she has slept a full night. All recovery rolls are reset.

To do anything else in the harbor, a character will have to reach the machinery, which probably means getting to a wall. That most likely entails jumping from platform to platform. Each platform is about 10 to 12 feet (3 to 4 m) from its closest neighbor. That means that the jumps, assuming a bit of a run, range from a difficulty of 5 to 7. Some of the leaps will be toward platforms lower than the current one, decreasing the difficulty by one step, while some will be to higher platforms, increasing the difficulty by one step. Five or six jumps will get a character to the machinery at the wall.

Obviously, characters able to fly will have a much easier time of it.

As a GM intrusion, one or more characters in an unstable wreck might find themselves caught within it.

[Spiny scishan](#), page 151

[Stinging cloak](#), page 153

[Jybril](#), page 141

[Skeane](#), page 59



[Disassembler](#), page 238

Characters who wish to avoid the tongue (perhaps not expecting entry into the harbor to be quite so startling or strange) can attempt to do so with a Speed defense roll. It is a level 7 creature in all respects. Success means that the tongue does not grab the character, and it resets into the ocean floor.

Characters who fail at a jump fall. They have one chance to land upon or grab a lower platform (a level 4 Speed task). If that fails, they suffer 10 points of damage from the fall.

A visitor must pass through all three archways within just a few minutes of each other before she can discover the safety offered by the location. Once she has done that, the seafloor below her ruptures, and a 20-foot (6 m) long biomechanical tongue lashes forth, wraps around her, and drags her underground. The hole quickly seals up behind it.

This process is preprogrammed somehow by mechanisms of the prior worlds. It is the only known way of entering the Nullified Harbor.

SAFETY IN THE HARBOR

The true Nullified Harbor is not for the safety of ships, but for sailors—that is to say, for living creatures. It is a massive, dry, underground cavern at least 200 feet (60 m) below the ocean floor. The tongue deposits a character on a circular platform of soft, glowing metal. There are many

THE MACHINERY

If a character reaches the sides of the cave, she can find purchase and maneuver across and up and down without much trouble, with plenty of handholds and places to stand. There, a number of control panels can be found. These could be looted (yielding $1d20 + 5$ shins and one or two cyphers), or they could be used to gain access to the chamber's various functions.

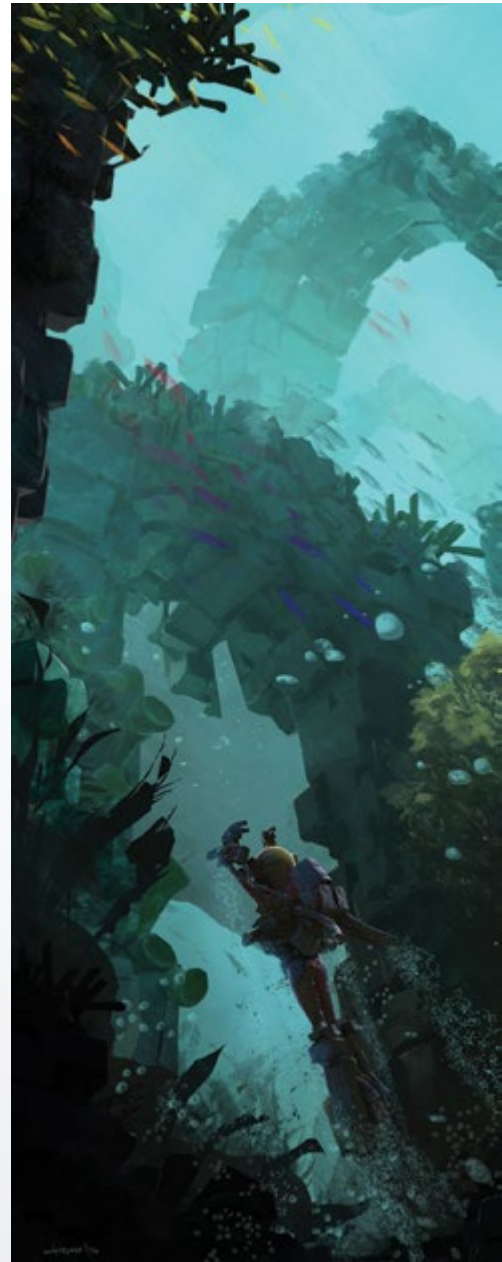
The machinery here controls the tongue and the rejuvenation, both of which are currently set on automatic. This can be altered, putting a character in direct control of what the tongue does (up to and including having it return and take a character to the garden) or granting the ability to turn off the healing and restorative function of the platforms. The machinery also includes an even more amazing function: the lengthening of the target's lifespan. If the controls are properly set, in addition to the other boons, a platform will restore a character to a healthy, youthful state (at the point of about full adulthood—for a human, that's about 18 or 19 years old), and increase life expectancy by about 50% (for a human, that might mean living to be well over 100).

The life extension and age restoration requires about six hours on a platform. Halfway through the process, someone must readjust the various controls.

Interacting with the machinery is difficult, even for those skilled in such things. Characters might note that after a while, it seems as though the interface works against them. This is because there are two semi-intelligent systems interwoven here, and they do not cooperate or get along. Whatever a character does, one system attempts to comply and cooperate, and the other does not. This is all internal—nothing physical.

In the end, what it means is that every time a character wishes to do something—identify the functions of the machine, operate the machine, and so forth, she must succeed at two different rolls: one with a difficulty of 5, and the other with a difficulty of 7.

Any time a character fails a roll, the lights of the room fade to black for a second and all living creatures in the room suffer 3 points of ambient damage and move one step down the damage track from the dangerous radiation loosed into the chamber.



THE FLOOR (AND THE EXIT)

The way to exit the harbor is on the floor, in the darkness. With no way to illuminate this area, explorers will likely have to stumble about in the dark. Eventually, however, they may find a pentagon-shaped raised platform. If they stand atop it, they immediately appear in one of the three archways above, teleported. Of course, they are suddenly underwater and had better be prepared for the transition, or the exit may be their final exit.



NULLIFIED HARBOR HEARSAY

Down in the Dark: In the unnaturally dark floor of the underground cavern, there's said to be a passage that leads to a deeper cavern still, with more machinery and more wonders.

Buried Danger: The mystery of all the shipwrecks is said to be a device, buried under the ground in the garden, that draws in craft and disables them. If it actually exists, it could be a powerful weapon.

Harvest Time: A learned sage claims to have discovered a recipe for the cure of a terrible island disease, but it requires the spines of a rare anemone that dwells in the Garden of Garralos. She will pay for samples, should anyone be able to obtain them for her.

THE WEIRD OF THE NULLIFIED HARBOR

Shipwreck: One of the shipwrecks appears to be a fully intact submersible craft. In fact, it has illuminated lights on its hull and has the appearance of something that could start moving at any moment. But it's been sitting like that for at least a century, if the stories are to be believed. No one has been able to get in or communicate with anyone who may be inside.

Automaton: A humanoid automaton was seen wandering amid the shipwrecks and brought to the surface, where it immediately transformed into a biological human and then died. Now another walks amid the garden.



When knowledgeable sailors and aquatic explorers refer to the respite of the Nullified Harbor, they're not really talking about the shipwrecks or the surrounding garden at all, but something more secret.



CHAPTER 4 JORIA

GM SUMMARY

Joria is a city located on the back of a behemoth crustacean known as a granthu. The city moves with the creature, slowly traveling from the Deep Dark to the Gloaming to the Shallows on a roughly fifty-year orbit.

The inhabitants are highly adaptable humanoids known as Jorians. Typically shy but curious, they are masters of camouflage and disguise. Although they have and use weapons, they are more likely to slip away into the shadows—or disguise themselves as a bit of ocean floor—than to fight.

Jorians think of the granthu the same way other people might think of Earth. The creature is their planet, orbiting through a watery solar system. It rules the weather, the seasons, and everything else about their lives. It is their world, literally and figuratively.

They believe there are other worlds out there, similar to their own, that carry the rest of their species, and they search for these places constantly. A special group of Jorians, known as blue mazars, keep extensive records of this ongoing search, inadvertently creating a much-sought-after cache of oceanic knowledge.

WELCOME TO JORIA

The underwater city of Joria is ever-moving. Located on the back of a behemoth crustacean called a **granthu**, the city is at the whim of the creature's feeding and migratory patterns. It moves slowly and steadily, a movement that Jorians barely notice (much like land dwellers don't notice the movement of Earth), but non-Jorians will likely feel the movement slightly nauseating at first, akin to being on a storm-tossed boat. During its migration,

the creature spends an average of thirty-five years in the Deep Dark, fifteen years in the Gloaming, and only a month or so in the Shallows.

The city is partly built on top of the granthu but also part of the creature itself. The first floor of Joria lies beneath the creature's exoskeleton. The structures are massive—tall, thick walls built of molded

"I do believe there are other peoples such as ourselves, out there in our world. That there are other granthu such as our own. And that someday the orbits of our granthu will overlap and we will come to meet and know our true kithkind." ~Diu

While in the Shallows, the granthu molts, shedding patches of its algae-covered shell until it reveals the new, pink exoskeleton beneath. It does not molt in the places where the city is built.

Granthu: level 10; health 1,000; Armor 7

USING JORIA

Due to the far-reaching nature of the Jorians' call for their kithkind, their large body of oceanic knowledge, and their openness to receiving visitors, it's likely that the player characters would hear about them or the city at some point. It's easy to incorporate that hint of information into a campaign.

The most likely scenario is that the PCs or someone they know needs to gain unusual information about the ocean and has heard of the blue mazars and the Mazarium. The trip is long and dangerous, and most will pay a decent sum to ensure their safe voyage.

Perhaps the characters run into someone who was born in Joria and wants to return there before he dies. He has spent much of his life tracking the granthu's migration and believes it will surface sometime soon. Or perhaps a scientist tracking and documenting the world's largest creatures has heard rumors of the granthu and wants to prove its existence. He'll pay well for anyone who can help him find it. Additionally, the PCs could meet someone who claims to be kithkind to the Jorians and is trying desperately to find a way to visit the city.



stone, large metallic orbs, membranous orbs made of mesh and synth, and triangular towers. About half of the interior of the city is filled with water and half is filled with air and pressurized, another testament to the Jorians' ability to adapt quickly and easily across environments.

Most Jorians have the skills to repair and keep up the building structures, but not to design or create new ones. Some believe that their ancestors built the city, but that the knowledge of how to do so has been lost through the generations. Others believe that the granthu built the city for them.

It's not known whether the granthu is the only one of its kind, or whether there are additional such creatures in the world. Jorians believe that other granthu do exist, and thus so do others of their species. They seek constantly to find their kithkind. Much of their technology is created with an eye toward finding and contacting these other Jorians.

Blue Mazars: A special group of Jorians known as the **blue mazars** is entrusted with keeping extensive records of the ongoing search. In doing so, they have accumulated a large body of work that explores the ocean in great detail.

The Peacebringer and the Warholder: The city is always led by an elected couple, one of whom is called the Peacebringer and the other the Warholder. The current leader-couple is composed of a Jorian named **Heu** and a human named **Shyphe**.

Heu, the Peacebringer, is particularly skilled in persuasion, mediation, and diplomacy. It's the Peacebringer's job to calm rising tensions and diffuse difficult situations.

Shyphe, the Warholder, was rescued from a boating accident and brought to Joria as a child. Shyphe, who is blind from the accident, specializes in mobilizing and motivating those around her. It's the Warholder's job to incite citizens into strong action when necessary.

JORIANS

Jorians are humanoids with skin the color and texture of malleable wet stone. Their skin tones range in hue from light grey and silver to dark green and near-black, depending on their environment. Their dark eyes are covered with protective lenses that adapt to the amount of light.

Heu: level 4; persuasion, mediation, and diplomacy as level 5

Shyphe: level 4, motivation and mobilization as level 5

The inhabitants of Joria firmly believe the world holds many other cities like their own, but they are in different orbits and haven't yet come close enough to be seen or contacted.

Blue mazar: level 4, oceanic knowledge as level 6

Deep Dark, page 9

Jorian: level 4; camouflage, mimicry, stealth, deception, and adaptation as level 6

Jorian names are typically a single syllable and end with a vowel sound.

Gloaming, page 9

Shallows, page 9



The Truth, page 133

Most Jorians have a crest of thick, strong tissue that grows atop their head. If left unadorned, the crest is off-white and mostly flat. Many dye their crests brilliant colors and mold them into unique shapes. Some colors and shapes signify rank and class, while others are an expression of creativity or rebellion.

Jorians move through the water via two elongated undulating fins that run down the sides of their bodies, starting at the tops of their necks and ending around their ankles. Their hands and feet are lightly webbed, but they use their limbs for direction rather than for propulsion. The combination of long limbs and undulating fins allows them to move swiftly and silently in the water. They prefer to flee and hide rather than fight, and they are masters of mimicry and camouflage, blending into their surroundings and appearing to be something they are not.

They're omnivorous, subsisting mostly on the chemosynthetic plants that they grow, and supplementing their diet with whatever creatures and plants they can harvest and properly preserve.

Although best suited for living in the **Deep Dark**, which is where the granthu spends the majority of its life, Jorians are highly adaptable to their surroundings. Their lungs fold up like accordions, becoming small in the high-pressure atmosphere of the Deep Dark, and then expanding to accommodate lower pressure and higher oxygen levels.

Even for a race as adaptable as Jorians, the change in sea level has undesirable side effects. When the granthu begins to rise into the warmer, more oxygenated waters of the ocean (the area called the **Gloaming**), Jorians begin to feel lightheaded and overly warm. A yellow fungus called blossom sometimes grows on their skin, beginning around their ears, eyes, and mouth. All of these symptoms begin to pass in a matter of days, as the Jorians' bodies adjust to the new surroundings. Their lungs expand slightly, their metabolism begins to run at a slower rate, allowing them to stay cooler, and their eyes begin to adjust to the lighter waters.

The last section of the orbit is the **Shallows**. While here, the granthu may even rise above the water for short periods of time. The Jorians' skin begins to produce a protective coating that shields them from the increased sunlight, the lenses on their eyes darken, and their lungs expand to their full size and capacity.

Jorians can live up to 150 years, but many expire after their second return to the Shallows. They find the transition back to the depths more difficult the second time and often succumb to the high pressure and cold temperatures on the return journey.

Most Jorians speak **the Truth** reasonably well, as well as a smattering of other languages picked up from visitors.

VISITING JORIA

Finding the city of Joria on purpose is quite difficult. Although the granthu doesn't move very quickly and it's hard to miss a creature of that size, its migratory pattern is haphazard. And with an "orbit" that spans around fifty years, it's hard to track and predict its long-term pattern.





Only one Jorian, Fea, made the complete journey from the Deep Dark to the Shallows three times. Born in the Shallows, which is unusual for Jorians, she returned again at age 50, at 100, and at 150. She died of respiratory failure shortly after.

It's more likely that people find the city of Joria by accident. And people often do. Motion trackers or heat-seeking instruments easily detect the granthu while it is in the Gloaming or the Shallows. The Jorians put out a strong signal in an attempt to contact their kithkind, and many a scouting party or adventuring crew has heard its message (even if they might not have understood it). Additionally, any vessel exploring underwater might come upon this giant creature with an unusual structure on its back, particularly when the granthu passes near or directly through the [invisible corridors](#).

The granthu isn't likely to attack humans or vessels approaching the city unless it feels threatened, and honestly it's hard to threaten a creature of this size. It eats meat, but it prefers to scavenge the remains of whales and other large sea creatures. Humans and their devices are mostly too small to be on its radar as threat or food. They're more likely to be accidentally knocked over or crushed as the creature makes its way to wherever it's going next.

Although many visitors come to Joria, very few stay for long. Land dwellers in particular find the creature's odd swimming movement jarring, and most are not able to adjust to the changes in sea levels. But "long" is relative in the life of a granthu and a Jorian—a land dweller could live in Joria for fifteen years in the Gloaming before needing to worry about surviving the Deep Dark.

At first, Jorians can be a bit off-putting to newcomers due to their instincts to run and hide at the first sign of a potential threat. However, once they get past their fear response, they warm up to visitors and are kind and thoughtful hosts, particularly to anyone with stories of the outside world that could lead to a connection with their kithkind.

THE LAYOUT OF JORIA

Joria is much larger than its number of inhabitants would imply. The city could easily hold up to three times as many citizens as the 12,000 it currently has. Many spaces are unused or abandoned. Empty areas are closed up to prevent other creatures from moving in and taking over those spaces, but regular sweeps must still be done to maintain the barriers and make sure there are no openings for stowaways. Most Jorians would not say it, but they hold out hope that the extra space in their city will someday be filled with kithkind.

The air-filled, pressurized areas of the city are protected by a series of four [ciliumways](#). A ciliumway is a round door with a frame made of living coral. The eggs of a creature called a winglash are "planted" in the coral. When the creatures hatch, they root into the coral and grow long cilia that wave and sweep across the door, creating a displacement curtain that keeps water out and keeps air and pressure in. The doorways need constant upkeep, including regular planting of new winglash eggs, but four of them placed together do the job of keeping most of the sea from entering the air-filled spaces.

THE MAIN

The main is located at the front of the city, under a large membrane of mesh and synth. This common area is filled with air and houses a large market, community spaces, and water gardens (mostly filled with chemsynthetic plants, but they also create devices that produce synthetic sunlight in order to grow small quantities of edible algae and seagrasses).

Spreading out from the main in all directions are long, high-ceilinged tunnels that lead to various smaller communities. Each community has its own schools, manufacturing spaces, small markets, chiurgeons, and other services. Some of these communities are open to the water, and others are air-filled.

Invisible corridors,
page 12

Ciliumway: level 5





Gastric juices taste as you'd expect—sour and metallic. They burn your throat and the insides of your mouth and cause fierce headaches. They're also wildly addictive, causing a few days of excitability and sleeplessness and then putting users into short-term comas, where they experience vivid hallucinations depicting scenes from their past. Breaking an addiction requires a difficulty 3 Might defense roll every day for five consecutive days. Failing a roll means starting over.

MAZARIUM

The Mazarium is located near the center of the city, in a large oval building that is air-filled and pressurized. It is here that the blue mazars keep their extensive records of travel, searches, creatures, weather patterns, weird structures, and more. The floor is a work in progress, a carved map of the ocean—or at least as much of it as the Jorians have seen. It's clearly a map upon which many hands, and probably many generations, have labored, as some parts are finely drawn and detailed, and others are more crude. The walls, too, are covered in etched notes, drawings, and diagrams in various languages, all detailing some unique element of the ocean.

It's rumored that there is a second, deeper set of canals beneath the first. Sealed round holes in the floor seem to support this rumor.

THE CANALS

Over the years, the granthu's thick exoskeleton has grown around and inside the city, much as a tree grows around an object left against its trunk. Now the first tier of Joria is actually below the surface, an air-filled space carved deep into the creature's shell. This area is known as the canal surface or, more often, just the canals.

These long, winding tunnels and low-ceilinged rooms are dirty and dank, and they smell sour and metallic, as they're located in close proximity to the granthu's digestive gland. Although it's clear that they were once a regularly used part of the city, that no longer seems to be true. Leftover furnishings, belongings, and devices can





be found in the canals, although many such objects have succumbed to the salt, sweat, and mold of the tunnels.

Some residents still call the canals their home, but they are few and far between, and are mostly juicers—addicts who get high from licking the gastric juices seeping from the walls. The number of addicts is disproportionately non-Jorian, with a lean toward former land dwellers, as Jorians are less likely to become addicted to (or perhaps less likely even to try) licking gastric juices.

THE TRIANGULAR TOWERS

The triangular towers are three-sided stone structures that rise above the rest of the city. There are three towers, and the Jorians use them to send out their homing signal—a single repeated message searching for their kithkind. The towers are charged through a direct connection with the granthu's ganglia, which seems to boost the signal and allow it to broadcast indefinitely. The communication is two way, allowing incoming messages between the outgoing ones.

THE EVOLO SPHERE

Inside one of the large globular buildings near the front of the city is a room that holds only one object: the evolosphere. The sphere is made of translucent metal and filled with cerulean liquid. Inside are five humanoid creatures called vunds that are fused together by their long yellow hair. The legends say that each of these finned and scaled creatures long ago braided one of their long locks into each of the other's. Now they swim eternally, their tangled heads creating an inner circle, while their long tails sweep slowly through the water.

Most people consider the vunds the keepers of Joria's history and the alleged watchers of its present and future. No one knows how old they are, what their names are, or even how to communicate with them—other than by keeping track of their changing colors. The color combinations present a pattern too complicated to be easily understood. Although it was once believed that everyone could read the vunds' color language, now only one Jorian, a self-proclaimed vund expert and human named Kinderi, even takes a guess at it. Kinderi was born in Joria and stayed on after

Vunds: level 9

Whenever Jorians have visitors who speak a unique language, they ask the visitor to record the kithkind message in that tongue and then add it to the end of the broadcast, so that everyone hearing it can understand it.

Kinderi: level 3, knowledge of anything in or around the evolosphere as level 4; wears a sparksuit, a crafted exoskeleton that protects against 3 points of electrical damage

"Living death crabs" is likely another name for ghost crabs.



Ghost crab, page 241

"I have been stung by those bastard jellyfish hundreds of times. Hundreds. But it is all worth it, despite the fact that I'm beginning to lose feeling in my face and fingers." —Kinderi

Jellyfish: level 5; electric tentacles deal 5 points of damage

JORIA HEARSAY

A Dangerous Cure: A chiurgeon named Fue believes he's found a cure for gastric acid addiction. One of the ingredients he needs is the freshly plucked heart of a **living death crab**, but the creatures are far too tough for him to take on alone.

The Truth Is Out There: A Jorian named Gea, who mans the honing signal in one of the triangular towers, heard a response to his recent transmission. It seemed more like a distress call than kithkind, but he wants to gather a crew to head out and check it out.

THE WEIRD OF JORIA

Don't Go Near the Water: One of the aquatic gardens in the main has started sprouting a rainbow-colored fungus. It seems to be slowly growing in the shape of a miniature granthu.

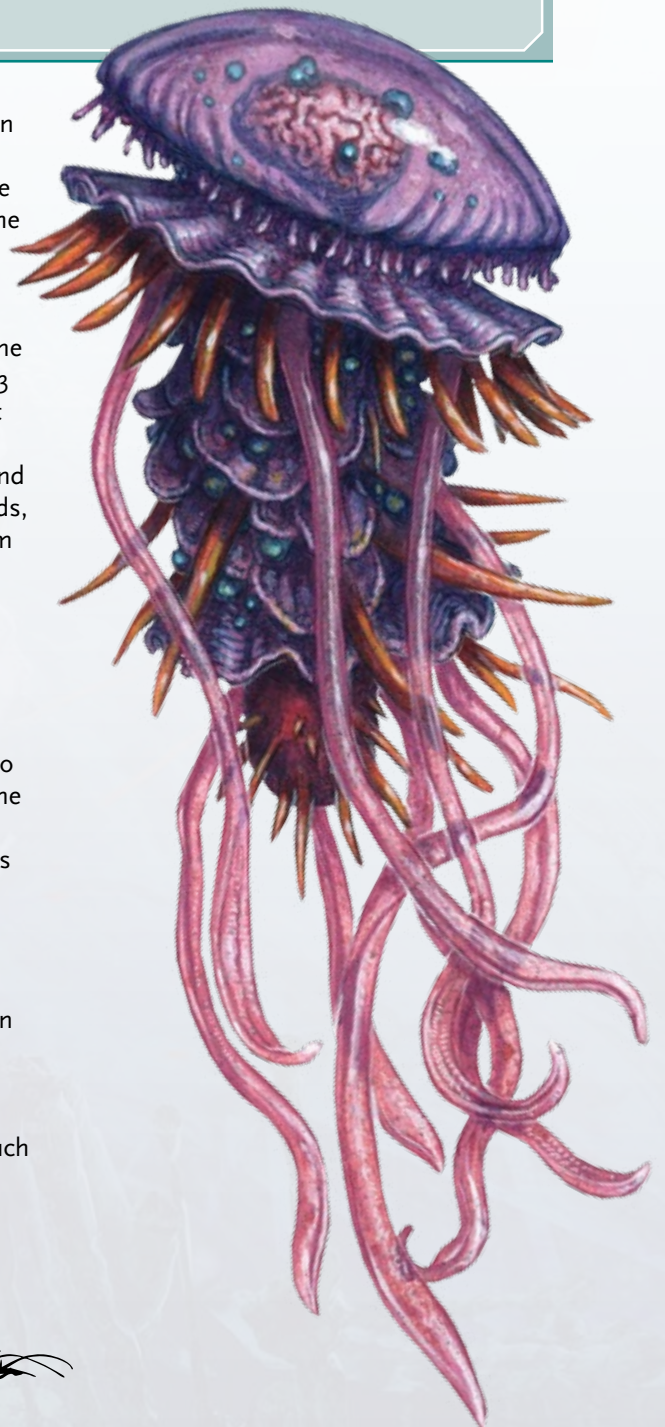
Fight Song: There is a strange, low crooning coming from one of the closed-off areas near the back of the city. Something about it is affecting any Jorian who hears it, making them want to attack their loved ones.

his family went back to the land. He's been keeping intricate notes about the vunds' hued patterns since he was a child, and he believes he has cracked at least a few of the most basic.

When vunds 1 and 2 (Kinderi has given each of them a number) are blue and the rest are orange, it portends the rising of the granthu toward the surface. When vunds 3 and 5 are greenish and vund 1 is purple, it signifies the beginning of a molt. Kinderi has catalogued more than two hundred and sixty-seven color patterns among the vunds, and he still has no idea what most of them mean.

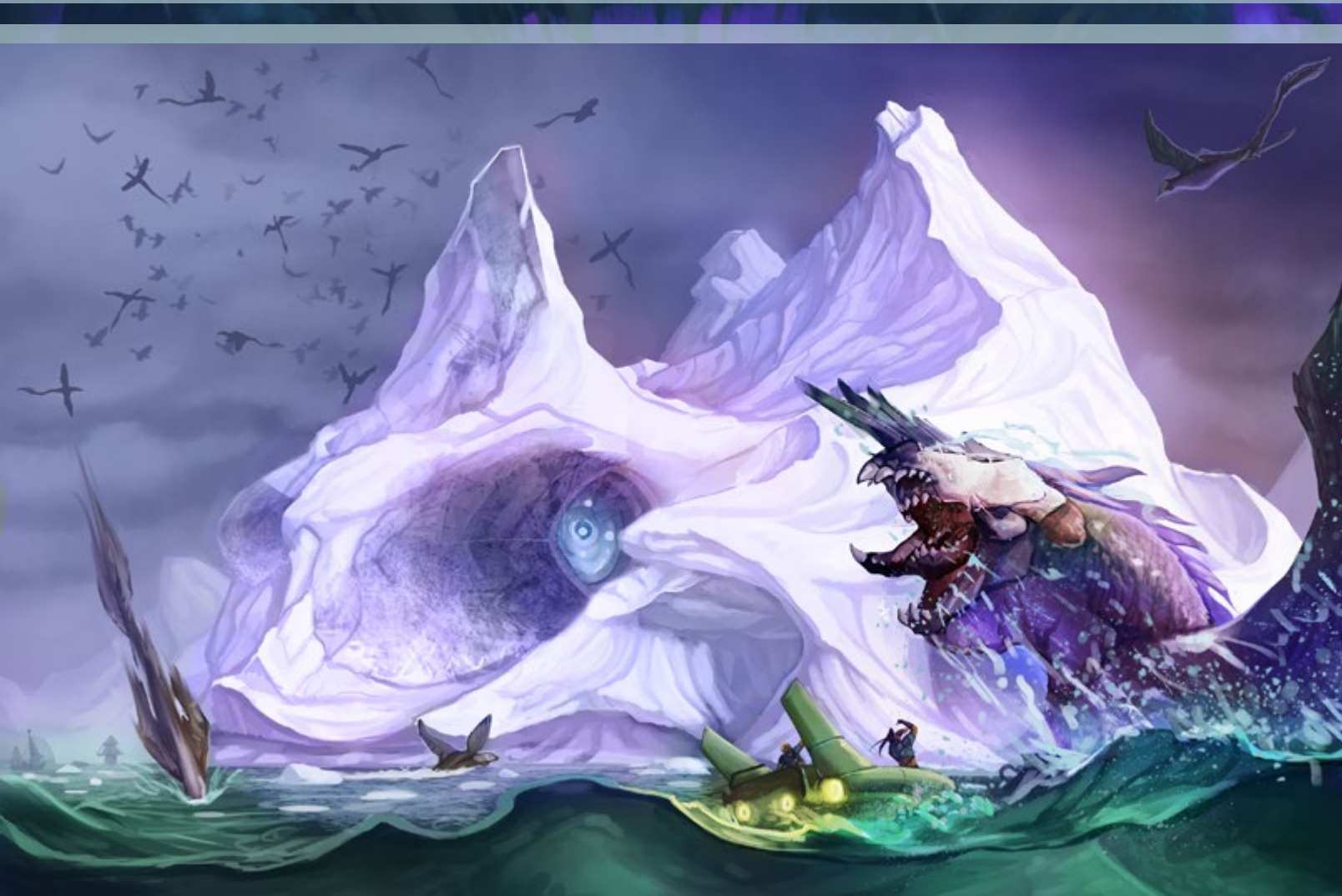
It is rumored that the vunds exist only within the evolo sphere. That to open the sphere and remove them would cause their existence—and perhaps that of the entire city—to cease. Most regard this as foolishness, but superstitions run deep, so few residents are willing to risk opening the door.

Still, every great while, someone decides to try. For this reason, the sphere's only doorway is guarded day and night by a bloom of amphibious **jellyfish**. The jellyfish are the only creatures able to enter and leave the evolo sphere at will. An electrical current runs through their long tentacles, which they can turn on and off at a moment's notice. The swarm attacks anyone who attempts to enter or even touch the evolo sphere.



PART 2:

OUT TO SEA



Chapter 5: The Coral Cathedral

46

Chapter 6: The City of Rust

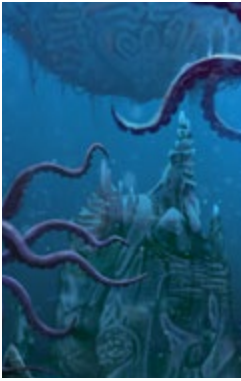
55

Chapter 7: Niress

64

Chapter 8: The Skelirroth Fleet

77



CHAPTER 5

THE CORAL CATHEDRAL



Draolis, page 148

Eldan Firth, page 171

*City of Bridges,
page 145*

Gloaming, page 9

Her Majesty, Queen of All Octopuses: *as standard octopus (page 146), except: level 10 in all regards; health 45; telepathic powers and level 10 nilstones grant telekinesis at long range, a mental blast (10 points of Intellect damage that ignores Armor) at long range, Armor 5, and three or four other abilities as needed*

Nilstone, page 49



Ghan, page 145

The Octopoidal Queen has a palace off the coast of **Draolis**, in the deep inlet called **Eldan Firth**. She travels extensively, however, and has other residences. One is a place farther out to sea called the Coral Cathedral. Here, her people have encouraged the building of a massive deep-sea coral structure almost 1,500 feet (460 m) below the surface. They have used various means to shape the coral, creating a multicolored temple of ominous and formidable appearance. The cathedral extends almost 100 feet (30 m) tall and ten times that in length, with an orb of living coral 150 feet (45 m) in diameter suspended in the deep water just above it.

GM SUMMARY

One of the homes of the queen of all octopi, and a major spiritual center and gathering place for all of her people, the Coral Cathedral is a significant undersea location. Although it is primarily a seafloor complex carved out of deep coral, the cathedral itself is located in a coral sphere that hovers, suspended in the water, above the rest of the complex. Within this sphere are gateways to two other universes—one called **Ujehaar**, and the other called the **Roil**. Thanks to the ultraterrestrial connection, in addition to their normal formidable technology, the octopuses here possess a material called **illavium**, which is a stone that heals its own damage, among other things, and a drug called **startal** that can grant immortality.

The queen is rarely in residence, but when she is, the cathedral is far more active, more heavily staffed, and much more fiercely guarded.

GETTING TO THE CORAL CATHEDRAL

The Coral Cathedral lies about 300 miles (480 km) off the coast of **Ghan**, west-northwest of the **City of Bridges**. It is in the region of the sea known as the **Gloaming**, along the ocean floor in a wide expanse about 1,500 feet (460 m) below the surface.

USING THE CORAL CATHEDRAL

The Coral Cathedral is difficult to reach, both in distance and in depth. It is difficult for surface dwellers to operate there. It is well guarded by a race notoriously unwelcoming to outsiders.

However, PCs will want to go there all the same, if for no other reason than the **illavium** ore that can be found there, as well as the **startal** treatments. Both of these are treasures without equal, found virtually nowhere else in the world. If the characters learn of either or both, they might travel to the cathedral without further prompting, or a wealthy aristocrat could employ them to retrieve one or the other.

In an entirely different sort of adventure, the PCs could be part of an envoy interested in establishing more friendly relations with the octopi. The **Sea King of Ghan**, for one, might sponsor such an expedition, as he desires their knowledge of the ocean and its mysteries. Such an envoy would not be welcome, but persuasive diplomats might be able to accomplish something.

A pathway through the **invisible corridors** leads to a location within 2 miles (3 km) of the Coral Cathedral, although the nearest surface access is more than 50 miles (80 km) away, and the path is a total of 75 miles (120 km) long.

Underwater travel in a vehicle, like a **submergine**, would provide the most direct access to the cathedral.

SURVIVAL IN THE CORAL CATHEDRAL

The entirety of the Coral Cathedral is underwater, so surface-dwelling characters need some way of breathing and coping with the pressure and the cold temperatures. The octopuses don't welcome outsiders—particularly surface dwellers—so they make no concessions for, nor offer assistance in, any of these matters.

OCTOPUS HISTORY

No one knows the history of the octopi, and they aren't telling. What they do say is that they have always been as sophisticated and advanced as they are now. They have, in their own minds, no origin tale.

Even though it seems unlikely, the octopi have watched the evolution of other species. They have seen them come and go. They've watched as new civilizations have risen and fallen—reshaping the globe more than once with their knowledge—and for the most part stayed well clear of all of them.

From their perspective, a new intelligent race evolves or arrives from elsewhere, flourishes for a few million years, and then either leaves or dies out. In that time, they likely make quite a fuss—consuming natural resources, changing the environment, populating the land and the sea, inflicting incredible destruction in wars or raising up fantastic creations, and so on—but to the octopi, even ten million years is a short, temporary stint.

Thus, octopuses have little to share about the prior worlds, even if they wanted to. To them, the worlds are fleeting. They are simply not worth noting.

Some people believe that long ago, octopuses were solitary, nonsocial creatures that communicated through their skin's ability to shift colors. If true, that all ended when octopi evolved telepathic powers.

They still have the means of communicating subtly through changes in skin color and texture, but they do so rarely. They've never had a verbal language and their need to write is quite limited. Even today, among the most sophisticated octopuses, perhaps one in ten can read and write.

OCTOPUS OUTLOOK

There are many varieties of octopuses, but they share basic physical and personality traits. Most believe that their form has not changed drastically in the last billion and a half years. Generally speaking, octopuses are aloof to the point of xenophobia. They rarely willingly mix with other intelligent species (aquatic or otherwise). Interaction with non-octopodes seems to be a futile waste of time to most. It's like talking to a stone, or—perhaps more accurately—a spark from a fire before it winks out.

Invisible corridors,
page 12

Submergine, page 11

Despite being happily Earthbound, octopuses are well aware of other worlds, both those circling the sun and those in orbit around other suns.





Even among their own kind, octopi are not the most social creatures. Each lives alone in its own small space and enjoys solitude. Only over hundreds of millions of years did they learn that true success and security needed at least a certain amount of cooperation. And that required leadership—and thus a queen.

OCTOPUS TECHNOLOGY

People who encounter octopuses usually believe that they have inexplicable, mystical powers. Even those learned in the ways of the numenera note that octopuses do not usually wield recognizable devices of any kind. This is because octopus technology takes two forms, and neither presents itself as obvious devices using electricity with buttons or screens.

BIOTECHNOLOGY

Through unknown means, octopuses shape and control living organisms like tools. The Coral Cathedral, for example, was formed by creating specific types of coral and controlling them to craft particular shapes and spaces.

Another form of biotechnology arises from the octopuses' ability to alter themselves.

They closely guard these secrets, but when they need to, an octopus might be able to use a subtle application of a specialized substance to gain the ability to fight better, swim faster, or do something even more dramatic. These alterations are usually temporary, basically making them cyphers from a human perspective. However, they are difficult for nonhumans to use, as they are small capsules that must be broken, with a tiny bit of liquid inside designed to be absorbed through the skin. For a human to use a capsule, it must be placed in the eye and then broken so the liquid enters the body directly. This is painful.

Some of the biotechnological alterations are permanent, more or less. Over the millennia, they have enhanced octopus brains, physiques, sizes, and ability. The creatures have, in a sense, taken control of their own evolution. One secret that the octopodes guard particularly well is their virtual immortality. For all intents and purposes, they have arrested the very concept of aging, and they did so long ago. Although modern octopodes are still vulnerable to harm, barring violence, they do not die. The current queen, for example, is well over a million years old.

ULTRATERRESTRIAL TECHNOLOGY

Long ago, octopuses broke down the barriers between universes. They explored these strange regions and eventually discovered a world called Ujehaar. The thing they found most significant about Ujehaar is a mineral called illavium. Through means mysterious, this material hosts nanoparticles that obey the will of an octopus. They have used it to create objects called nilstones, but non-octopi who have gotten their hands on illavium have been able to use it to create objects that heal damage, or add the mineral to existing objects so they heal existing damage.

Nilstones: Physical octopus technology uses what are called nilstones. Small objects of what look like mundane stone, the nilstones contain millions of ultraterrestrial nanoparticles receptive to octopus telepathy. Depending on the design, a nilstone can be used as a weapon, a tool, or even more fantastic things.

Spatial Expansion: Octopus technology sometimes incorporates an unknown means of expanding space. This is not so much an extradimensional space, nor does it create a “bigger on the inside than the outside” effect. Instead, the device literally creates more space. It expands the size of the universe on a minute scale. Instantly created atmosphere (or, much more likely, water) comes into being to fill the new space. If this technology is used near the ocean floor (or, in theory, on the ground on the surface), land also is created by the effect, as similar as possible to the original land at the point of activation. The device does not create living creatures or plants, nor any kind of organic material.

Octopuses use this technology to instantly create cavelike homes within what were once tiny crevices in a small rock, or to turn a small cave into a much larger one. They use it as a weapon to create empty spaces inside the bodies of their foes. They use it for defense to put space between themselves and a foe.

Use of this technology over the last billion years or so has actually increased the size of Earth, although no one knows for sure how much.

Swim Portals: Octopuses have perfected the technology of instantaneous travel by harnessing transdimensional spatial

warping. They call these “swim portals,” and they are designed so that only octopi can use them. Most are hoops of illavium no larger than 2 feet (60 cm) across. By swimming through one narrow hoop and exiting from another, an octopus can cross vast distances. Swim portals help the queen rule what is very likely the largest empire on Earth.

OCTOPUS WEAPONRY AND DEFENSE

In melee, octopus warriors use harpoonlike weapons or grapple with their tentacles. That said, they rarely engage in melee. Most of their offensive and defensive capabilities are telepathically triggered nanotechnological devices of their creation. This means that only beings with some kind of telepathic or mental abilities, or those trained at harnessing the power of nanoparticles (such as many nanos), can activate these weapons.

ARTIFACTS

BOILING ROD

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Short baton with a glowing red nodule at one tip

Effect: Inflicts points of damage equal to the artifact’s level on anyone touched by the tip.

Use of a boiling rod underwater (which is most of the time) creates a cloud of steamy bubbles that obscure vision like fog. They persist for one round after each use.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

BURSTER

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Pair of synth spheres with a curved handle

Effect: Affects a target within short range, causing a terrible rent to burst in its flesh. Against a nonliving target, the burster likewise tears matter apart, expanding the space between the existing portions. The potential victim makes a Might defense roll. On a success, nothing occurs. On a failure, the victim sustains damage equal to the artifact’s level.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

Could illavium be composed of natural nanites, rather than the products of fantastic technology, like that of the prior worlds? Most people who are learned in the ways of such things would never believe it, but in all the (possibly infinite) universes, is anything impossible?

Ujehaar (pronunciation):
Oo-jay-ha-ar

An illavium item repairs damage at a rate of about 1 point per hour (if damage to an item is not being tracked, assume a damaged item is fully repaired in 28 hours). A destroyed illavium item restores itself completely in one day per level. The only way to completely destroy an illavium item is total disintegration, melting, or something similar.



Octopi do not worship a god, and the cathedral is not a place of worship in that sense. The nearest any human has come to understand, or is likely capable of understanding, is that octopuses worship octopuses. That is, they see their species as a whole as the pinnacle of life on Earth and worthy of veneration. This means, in a sense, that all individual octopuses are holy in each other's eyes, which helps prevent them from hurting or betraying each other. In fact, octopus-on-octopus violence is extraordinarily rare.

POLAR TOUCH

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Long pike with a softly glowing nodule at the tip rather than a sharp point

Effect: The tip of this long melee weapon drastically and immediately lowers the temperature of whatever it touches. A target struck by this weapon suffers points of damage equal to the artifact's level.

Use of a polar touch underwater (which is most of the time) also freezes the water around the target. Characters who fail a Might defense roll are hindered for one round, which increases the difficulty of all physical actions by one step.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

CYPHERS



SAFE DISTANCE

Level: 1d6 + 2

Usable: A cube about 1.5 inches (4 cm) to a side, made of utterly ordinary stone

Effect: The space between the user and an adjacent target increases to a long distance. The device literally “stretches”

space to accomplish this—or to put it another way, the device expands space. This is a permanent change.

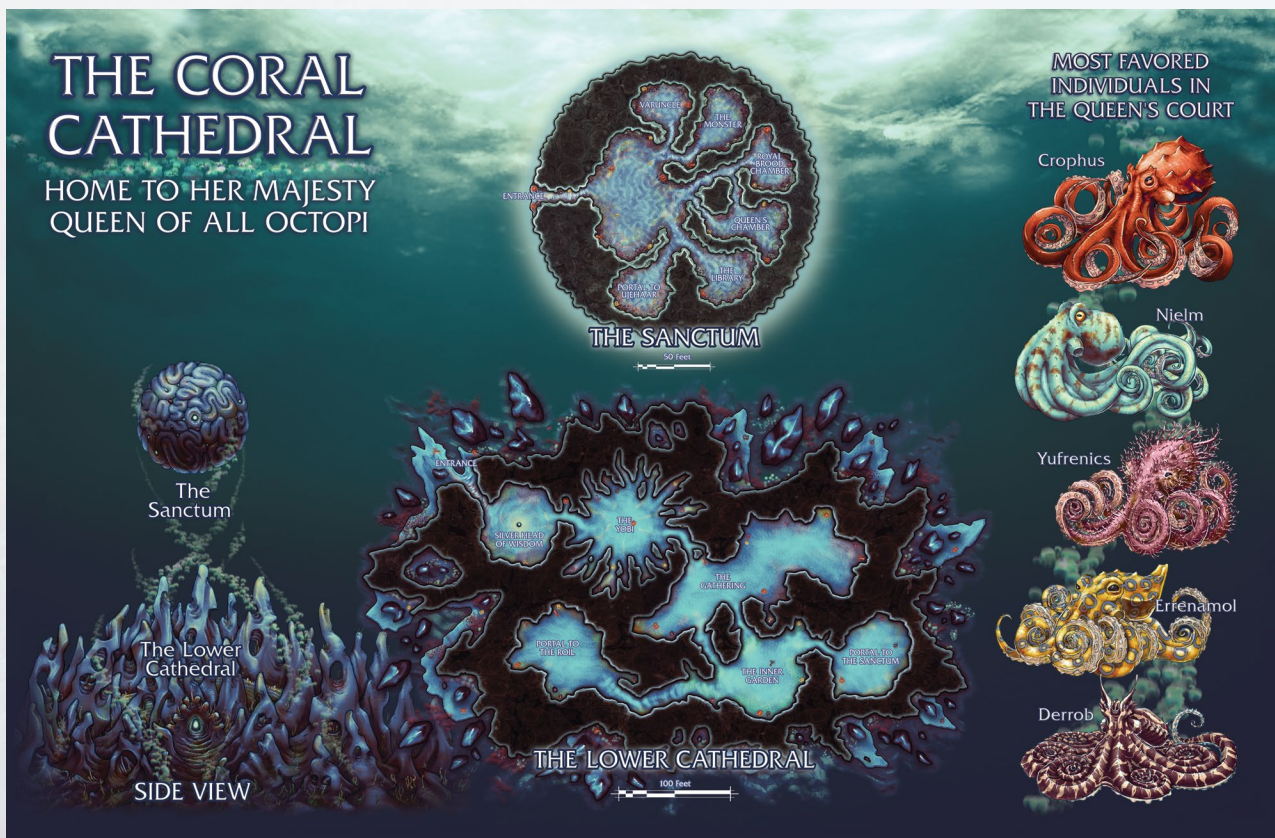
THE QUEEN'S CITY

You would never know that there was a city of almost 10,000 individuals around the coral reef in which the queen keeps her cathedral. This is because octopus homes are small, hidden, and fairly well spread out. To the untrained eye, the area seems like a typical deep seabed. Most individuals keep gardens and schools of fish that they farm for their own food.

THE CATHEDRAL

The Coral Cathedral consists of the portion on the ocean floor, called the Lower Cathedral, and the suspended orb, which is sometimes called the Sanctum.

The Coral Cathedral is one of the homes of the queen, but she is almost never here. Instead, she tours about the ocean with a grand retinue, visiting her subjects across the world.





Octopuses are very likely the most widespread of all intelligent underwater species. They are disliked by virtually all aquatic peoples and creatures, and the feeling is mutual.

Entrances and exits throughout the cathedral are almost never at ground level, as they were designed for and by swimmers. Throughout the Lower Cathedral, all manner of normal sea animals swim, crawl, and scuttle about the coral. In fact, there are more such creatures than one would normally expect at this depth, as they are tended by the octopuses.

ENTRANCE TO THE LOWER CATHEDRAL

This area is open (octopi rarely use doors) but protected by four **guards** with level 7 boiling rods. There are usually a half dozen other octopuses here at any given time.

THE SILVER HEAD OF WISDOM

Just inside the entrance is a massive sculpture that appears to be an octopus without tentacles. It is telepathic and sentient, and exists only to offer wisdom, insight, and advice to all who ask. It does not have much knowledge of its own and cannot predict the future.

THE YOBI

This area consists of a central chamber surrounded by a number of private chambers. These side chambers are only 5 to 6 feet (1.5 to 1.8 m) across, and entrances are located up and down the walls of the central chamber as well as at ground level.

The yobi serve many roles in octopus society. They are the closest things the cathedral has to priests, and they shepherd the general populace, offering counseling and, in some cases, serving as judges in disputes. They are also the queen's advisors and administrators.

The yobi employ a number of servants and underlings: messengers, guards, law enforcement, and administrative aides. These underlings do not live here full time, but instead live in the Queen's City.

If the queen is in residence, there are typically thirty yobi in this area. If she is not present, there are about a half dozen yobi

here, the rest either with the queen or out among the populace. There are always an equal number of underlings here.

THE GATHERING

This is the main area of the cathedral, at least as far as most visitors are concerned. There are typically a few dozen octopuses here, most in calm contemplation of themselves, their species, and their place in time and space.

If more than twenty individual octopuses gather here, space begins to warp. Specifically, it expands and contracts. To the octopi, this is normal. They can navigate this effect without issue. To any other creature, this expansion and contraction is disorienting, nauseating, and even maddening. All such creatures must make both a **Might defense roll** and an **Intellect defense roll** each round.

Failed Might Defense Roll: The creature suffers 2 points of ambient damage as space pushes and pulls against his body. Worse, nausea sets in, and the difficulty of all actions increases by one step until the lost points are restored. This penalty cumulatively gets worse with each failed **Might defense roll**.

Failed Intellect Defense Roll: The creature suffers 2 points of **Intellect damage** (ignores **Armor**). The creature has a difficult time coping with the spatial warping. She can close her eyes and take no action in the round. Otherwise, she suffers 2 more points of **Intellect damage** (ignores **Armor**). Further, the difficulty of any action she takes that round is increased by one step until the lost points are restored.

Both Defense Rolls Successful: The creature suffers no damage, but she is disoriented and the difficulty of all actions is increased by one step for one round.

THE INNER GARDEN

The octopi have cultivated a huge garden of underwater plants here, and within the vast coral cavern they have erected a sort of

If the PCs come to the Coral Cathedral, the GM should decide if the queen is present. If she is not, the cathedral is still a dangerous place, but if she is present, any sort of violence there will bring literal armies of octopi upon the characters.

Guard: as standard octopus, page 146

The Silver Head of Wisdom is a level 6 artificial intelligence.

Yobi: as standard octopus, page 146, except level 5 for all **Intellect-based tasks**

Yobi underling: as standard octopus, page 146





Tentacle plant: level 4; rooted in place but can stretch to attack foes up to a short distance away; creatures even touching the plant must make an Intellect defense roll to avoid suffering 3 points of Intellect damage and seeing distracting hallucinations that increase the difficulty of all actions by two steps (hallucinations stop when the Intellect damage is restored)

false sun in the ceiling that provides enough light and heat to sustain the plants that otherwise would not survive at this depth.

There are typically at least a half dozen octopi here, contemplating as in the Gathering.

Among the various plants are six **tentacle plants**. These are trained not to attack octopuses, but other creatures are fair game.

PORTAL TO THE ROIL

Although a single guard stands watch over this swirling blue and white portal, access is granted to any who wish to pass through. The portal is a circle 30 feet (10 m) across.

All octopi spend at least some of their lives in an alternate universe that they call the Roil. The Roil is a universe that is seemingly comprised entirely of liquid. This liquid, while not water, sustains life for any

creature adapted to water (any breathing apparatus that allows air breathers to function underwater works in the Roil as well). There are no pressure dangers in the Roil, though the liquid is always moving and churning violently. Octopuses find this invigorating and thrilling. For non-native swimmers in the Roil, the difficulty of moving through the liquid is increased by two steps.

The octopuses have special communities in the Roil and those that visit the alternate universe frequently undergo physical training with others of their kind to become even more proficient swimmers. Octopuses that take on martial roles train here in mock combats.

ENTRANCE TO THE SANCTUM

A narrow hoop here serves as a swim portal to the entrance of the Sanctum.



Octopuses have little to share about the prior worlds, even if they wanted to. To them, the worlds are fleeting. They are simply not worth noting.



This area is open, but an artificially induced current makes swimming into the entrance more difficult, decreasing movement by half. Four **guards** maintain a watch here, each armed with a level 7 freezing touch.

A small hoop here serves as a swim portal back down to the Lower Cathedral.

VARUNCLE

The minister of the cathedral, who oversees all its functions and personnel on behalf of the queen, is a red and black octopus named **Varuncle**. He is an ancient, powerful individual, fiercely loyal to his monarch but otherwise utterly convinced of his own superiority to all other beings.

However, if Varuncle encounters air-breathers in the Sanctum, he might be impressed enough with their resourcefulness to give them a moment of his time. Those who waste his time or threaten him even obliquely soon face what he simply calls the Monster.

THE MONSTER

Serving as a guardian here is a monstrosity created by Varuncle. **The Monster** looks like an enormous three-headed eel, although only the central head has eyes and a brain. The side heads are more like limbs that end in toothy mouths. The creature is 50 feet (15 m) long and a brilliant yellow and

orange. If presented with a powerful foe, or in particular multiple foes, it spawns a swarm of tiny versions of itself, each about the size of a regular eel. These creatures swarm around foes, befuddling and biting them. The Monster has no concern for its young. It spawns them frequently, usually devouring most of them itself.

PORTAL TO UJEHAAR

This portal is guarded by two warriors at all times, one with a boiling rod and the other with a freezing touch; control of the gateway is extremely important to the octopuses. On the wall next to the shimmering portal is a small nilstone that controls its opening and closing. However, behind it, hidden in the wall, is another nilstone that allows an octopus to permanently destroy the gateway. This is meant to be used if the portal has been compromised and non-octopus creatures are using it to get to Ujehaar.

THE LIBRARY

Octopoidal record keeping was once done on globular stones, grooved and shaped intricately, meant to be “read” by the complex touch of one of their own kind. An entire book’s worth of information could be stored on one small stone. This process is now out of date, and such “books” are quite rare, but the queen has a collection of tens of thousands of these tomes.

CORAL CATHEDRAL HEARSAY

Ready for Trade: The yobi have made it known that they have an excess of illavium and are willing to trade it. In exchange, they would like a specific artifact they know is on the **Skelirroth**.

Outside Threat: A group of **ebon** have been attacking octopi en route to the Coral Cathedral from the south. Varuncle wants to find outsiders who can deal with the threat quietly so as not to alarm the general populace.

Messengers: The yobi wish to have a message delivered to **Minifera** and are interested in employing non-octopi to carry it, as their kind are not always welcome by the inhabitants there.

THE WEIRD OF THE CORAL CATHEDRAL

The Red Fish: A few specimens of a rare red fish swim in the cathedral. Very observant visitors may note that the octopuses avoid touching the fish. If any non-octopus catches the fish, no common octopus will speak to the creature, but the queen will offer one boon. No one will ever explain why.

The Ghost: Although octopi don’t believe in an afterlife, what appears to be a shadowy, incorporeal “spirit” of a dead octopus nevertheless haunts the cathedral. The inhabitants try to ignore it when it appears, but it is startling to visitors. There is no explanation.

Guard: as standard octopus (page 146), except each is an exceptionally strong swimmer

Varuncle: as standard octopus (page 146), except: level 6; perception, Speed defense, and all Intellect-based tasks as level 7; health 30; Armor 5 from a water-permeable force field created by a level 8 nilstone

The Monster: level 8; health 50; Armor 1; attacks with three bites as a single action, each inflicting 10 points of damage; releases a swarm of fifty or so tiny spawn as a defense mechanism (no more than once per day)

Monster spawn: level 2; can attack as a large swarm as a single level 5 creature inflicting 6 points of damage; can obscure vision (increasing the difficulty of all actions made by foes in an immediate area by one step) and make an attack as an action; if half the spawn are killed, the rest scatter into the depths

Skelirroth, page 77

Ebon, page 139

Minifera, page 96



“Ninth World? What a ridiculous term. From our perspective, there has been one world. Even from yours, nine seems like an arbitrary number. But then, your perspective really doesn’t count. How could you possibly comprehend the time that has passed before you? Why would anyone think your outlook on such things might matter?”

Bay of Peyclin: Ninth World Guidebook, page 194

Lands of the Dawn: Ninth World Guidebook, page 181

Procreation among octopi is discouraged because they are immortal, so breeding risks overpopulation. It is also a dangerous time for octopi, for ancient instincts encourage risky breeding behaviors that can kill an individual (male or female) that is not careful.

Apricari: level 4; moves a short distance each round

Currently, octopus records and knowledge are stored telepathically in nilstones. The library contains ten of these, and they have as much information, if not more, than the stone-tomes.

THE ROYAL BROOD CHAMBER

Although breeding and procreation is discouraged among octopi, the queen is free to do so. She breeds rarely, but when she does, it takes place here rather than in one of her other homes. This chamber is usually empty, but sometimes it has a clutch of eggs attended faithfully by a half dozen servants and an equal number of guards, some of whom might be the father(s).

THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER

When Her Majesty, Queen of All Octopuses, is in residence, this chamber is where she dwells and—when necessary—holds audiences. The walls here are not coral, but a glittering array of crystals.

THE OCTOPUSES OF PEYCLIN

The nation of octopi in the Bay of Peyclin in the Lands of the Dawn is a mostly autonomous collective that owes only superficial allegiance to the queen. This particularly warlike group attacks surface ships and even human settlements on land using a variety of technological aids, most of them bioengineered.

The Peyclin octopi use a device that makes their natural venom much more potent (level 4 poison that inflicts 4 points of Speed damage) and water-filled sacs called niols to explore dry land. They also have living vehicles called *apricari* that allow them to move and even fight efficiently on land for long periods. A council of eight individuals rules these octopi from a throne city called Guhaquah.



CHAPTER 6

THE CITY OF RUST

Long, long ago, before the land of man, before the time of the eight-legs and the two-heads, before the water bubbled up to form the bowl of the sea, there was only one city. An enormous, wondrous city. A city of giants and gods. A city like no other.

~inscription in the Hall of Scin

GM SUMMARY

The City of Rust is a bustling underwater city of more than 10,000 inhabitants, the vast majority of whom are skeane, an amphibious race that is at home on dry land as well as in the water. The city is also home to a variety of other humans and even a few *varjellen*. Not surprisingly, amphibious races such as the *echryni* find Rust a companionable place to live. A few marine races like the *octopi* or the *vroaordun* can be found there as well. The only thing that is obviously missing is mutants.

Led by priests called Veds, the city's inhabitants worship, fear, and sacrifice to four volatile and benevolent machine gods, the Four Scylines. Another leader, the Russet, is supposed to be in charge of the secular elements of the city, but the current Russet is young and her foolhardy behavior is creating tension.

WELCOME TO THE CITY OF RUST

Rust consists of a number of buildings and tunnels that spread out across the ocean floor. A mile or so outside of the main city, in four directions, stand the city's machine gods, the Four Scylines. Each has its own personality and its own needs, and much of the city's daily activity goes toward pacifying and placating these giant deities.

The City of Rust is named for the orange metal that forms its main structures, and for the dried-blood hue of the water around it (due to leaching from the metal). Once the city had another name, but no one alive remembers what it was. Not even the Book of the Scin tells of its name, nor have the gods deigned to whisper it aloud these many years.

The city's inhabitants know only the names of their four machine gods, passed down from generation to generation. They have been changed and warped with each new mouth around the words until to most, the names of the powerful have become mere single syllables of what they once were:

Ka

Em

Sa

Ny

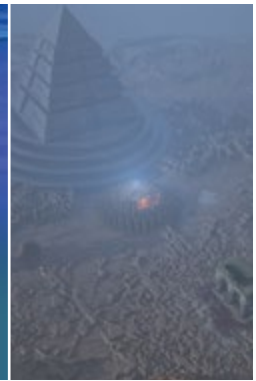
The Four Scylines. The protectors. The destroyers.

THE CULTURE OF THE CITY OF RUST

Rust feels very much like a city torn between gods and monsters. The majority of inhabitants are devout believers in the Four Scylines, but some follow a more secular path, seeking a leader to guide them.

THE VEDS

The *Veds* are five high priests who watch and listen to the gods constantly for signs of displeasure. They currently guide the city in taking the proper actions to keep each god happy, aided by lesser priests known as *scyros*.



Varjellen, page 121

The echryni are amphibious humanoids who hail from an archipelago called the Rayskel Cays. They're strong swimmers who can control and change the structure of water. For more information, see the Ninth World Guidebook, page 216.

Echryni: level 3

Octopus, page 146

Vroaordun, page 157

Ved: level 5; Armor 2

Scyro: level 3



Mask of the Will: *level 7; constantly shrouds wearer in a sheen of ice that gives +1 to Armor and, when activated, emits a blast of cold in all directions, doing 5 points of damage to all targets within short range*

Enthum: *level 4; tasks related to diplomacy as level 5*

Thruird: *level 3; wears the Mask of the Will*

Veds can “hear” the gods and can talk to the scyros via their telepathic abilities. They coat their flesh in a waxy hazel substance and wear cloaks made of long metal strips that they believe increase their telepathic connection to the gods.

THE RUSSET

There is another ruler who has long vied for power: the Russet. The City of Rust has not always had a Russet, but it has had one for long enough that all but a few forget the origins of the post.

The original Russet was Tanress, one of the first humans who made their way to the city long ago. Tanress came as a prisoner, brought in by scyros who found her attempting to injure Ny with machines and hammering devices. Tanress, however, could convince nearly anyone of anything and quickly talked her way not only out of jail, but also into the hearts of those who didn’t believe in the power of the Four. She set herself up as the rogue leader of the city, despite the protests of the Veds.

Now, the current Russet is a human teenager named **Thruird**, a name that means “third incarnation.” She is believed to be the third incarnation of Tanress. When Thruird was born, the entirety of her eyes were a rust-colored hue, a trait shared by the previous

two Russets. She was crowned the leader when she was six days old and has been ruling in one form or another ever since. She wears the **Mask of the Will**, an artifact passed from one Russet to the next. It shrouds her face in a mask of shifting ice, provides Armor, and allows her to emit a dangerous blast of cold to all targets within short range.

Mostly, Thruird is guided by her trusted advisor **Enthum**. Enthum is truly a stand-up counselor, urging Thruird toward good, smart choices for the city. Guiding a teenager with a great deal of power is never an easy task, however, and Enthum, for all her good intentions, usually fails to get the Russet to do much of anything other than scowl, half-burn down the city with her ice armor, and alternate between being the powerful center of attention and crying that she wants to go home to her mother. In light of this, Enthum has begun taking over the leadership role of the city, all in the name of Thruird.

Enthum works closely with the Veds, attempting to calm the anger and divisiveness that has been rising between the two factions for so many years. Of course, every time Enthum makes headway of any kind, Thruird does something stupid and knocks the relationship back a step. Thruird is sometimes derisively called Baby Em by the people, because her cold abilities remind them of Em’s.

USING THE CITY OF RUST

The GM can use the City of Rust several ways in a campaign. The following scenarios can be provided as hooks to player characters.

- The characters encounter a second group of New Theologists who are preparing to head to Rust to join the first. The theologians tell intriguing stories of the four gods and invite the PCs to join the research.
- The characters begin in Rust, either as skeane or as humans. They are in Enthum's employ, and she has asked them to look into a guard who may be taking visitors into the city through the illegal gates of the Rustway.
- The characters are in need of a special complicated device to complete their current task. Someone tells them about the crafters of Rust, stating that he believes such a device would be easy to obtain there—and quite cheap.

NEW THEOLOGISTS

Recently, a new group has arrived in the city, and it is beginning to amass followers. This group, which came from a city called **Rarrow**, call themselves New Theologists. Their stated purpose is to study and catalog gods of the world, attempting to divine whether any of them are true deities. Having heard about the Four, they found passage on a deep sea ship and came here to study them. So far, they have been denied official access by both the Veds and Enthum. However, the leader of the group, a man named **Etti Yarem**, has developed a relationship with Thuirid, and she has granted him permission on the sly. Etti claims to be an Aeon Priest but has no proof that this is true. The group is currently gathering the supplies and resources they need to go out and make their first study.

THE FOUR SCYLINES

Rust is a city overshadowed by the whims of four benevolent and angry machine gods. Each god is different and has a specialty. The gods are animate but don't change location. They're 400 to 600 feet (120 to 180 m) tall.

KA

Ka is the westernmost machine god. An enormous device of blue tubes and tentaclelike structures, Ka is a genderless water god. Its wrath stirs deep storms into being and draws swarms of **thunderfish** and fierce **inkeels**. When it is hungry, it quickly becomes angry. It begins to glow with a bright blue light and spins in the water, creating a whirlpool that sucks everything moveable into the machine itself.

A pleased, full Ka is a calm Ka, quiet and still, providing clear, placid waters full of edible fish that are languid and easily caught.

When the Veds sense that Ka is hungry, they ask people to offer the Prayer of Softness and to fill their houses with standing jars of liquid. They also send out a team of the lesser priests known as scyros to present offerings. These offerings are typically heavy objects—stone, brick, or sometimes large dead creatures—that are laid upon the god's "lap," a large flat panel of round black knobs. Once the offerings are provided, the god turns off its blue glow and sleeps until it is hungry again.

EM

Em is the easternmost machine god. She is fierce and fiery, a tall triangle topped by an oval. She glows red constantly, giving her the moniker of the "flame god in a red dress."

When she is displeased, she expels long trails of an oily substance that does not mingle with water. The substance catches fire easily, spreading fast and burning even stone and metal. It often burns out before it reaches the city, but some of the easternmost structures still bear the scars of Em's past destruction.

When Em is placated, she holds up her "hands," three complex prisms full of reflective surfaces that shine rare bits of sunlight down into the depths.

When the Veds sense that Em is angry—she typically gives fair warning by lighting the hem of her dress with a bright purple fire—they ask people to offer the Prayer of Breath and to carry bits of dried seaweed and bones in their pockets and adorned on their clothes and jewelry. They also send out a team to kill one or two large sea creatures, usually whales, and spread the fat all over Em's face and dress. Em burns hot and bright while she decides whether to accept the offering. If she accepts, she returns

Thunderfish: level 3; discharges electrified eggs into the water that explode on contact for 4 points of damage; attacks in groups of five or six

Inkeel: level 5; spews dark ink that leaks through skin or suits; those who fail a level 4 Might defense roll suffer 1 point of damage per minute (ignores Armor)

Rarrow, page 169

Etti Yarem: level 3

Four Scylines: level 10; health 1,000; Armor 20

to her typical red state. If not, the purple flames rise higher.

The last time Em was displeased, she exploded just as a team of scyros was presenting the offering. Six of them were killed outright, and four more were injured.

SA

Sa is the god of the north. The god of the white. The god of death. Three-gendered and three-faced, Sa is also the god of disease—particularly the Drown, an infection that kills more skeane than anything else. Sa takes the form of a tall, three-sided tower topped by a group of off-white orbs, interconnected and ever-changing. The appearance of the orbs is akin to a sac of eggs that constantly moves due to the growing creatures inside it. Sa gives very little warning of impending ire, other than one or more orbs cracking open. Typically the action is so small and happens so fast that it's hard for the Veds to catch. Once, long ago, the Veds stationed a constant watch of scyros at the site of Sa, but the god seemed to resent the intrusion and was angry much more often. Now the Veds watch from afar in the towers and hope that they catch the warning signs in time.

When the orbs crack open, nothing appears to come out of them. And yet, shortly after, there is almost always a rise in instances of not only the Drown, but other infections and diseases as well.

Prayers to Sa are Living Prayers, in which supplicants offer small pieces of their flesh, blood, hair, or other body parts as appeasement to the god. The parts are collected in large containers around the city

and melted into a type of sticky liquid. Then they are transported to Sa and stuffed into the cracks of the orbs.

When Sa is pleased, there is a general sense of wellness and health among the population of Rust.

NY

Ny is the most volatile of the gods. Although most wouldn't say it aloud for fear of calling down his ire, many think of Ny as the baby god due to his tantrums. Ny rules the weather, and the weather around Rust can change abruptly with little warning. Ny's color is the grey of shadows.

Ny is a giant tripod of metal and stone. Of all the gods, he looks the most like skeane, which is still only a little bit: he has a large beaklike shape on each leg that is deeply carved with ancient runes and markings. When Ny throws a tantrum, the beaks open—sometimes all at once, and sometimes slowly, one at a time—and the weather changes. Ice folds, a type of underwater snow that turns into smoke and then freezes into folds, are common. Ice folds are often followed by push glaciers, large ice structures that form below Ny's body and get shoved toward the city by an unseen force. Rarer, but far more dangerous, is boiling rain, drops of lavalike liquid that ooze out of Ny's beaks and increase the temperature of the water to near boiling.

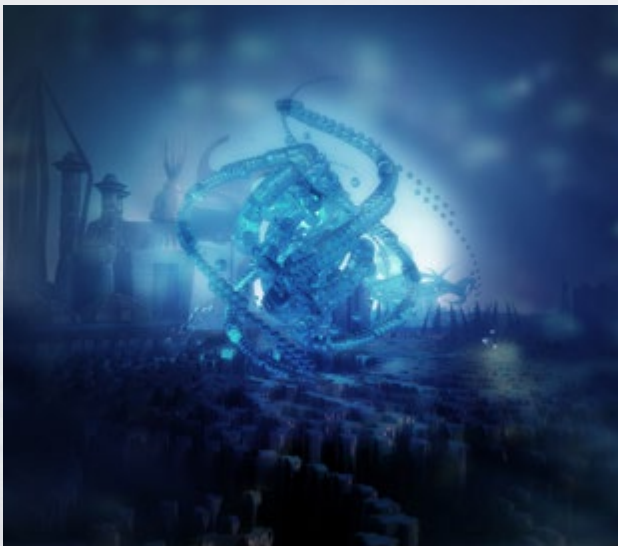
There is little that the inhabitants of Rust can do to keep Ny from throwing a tantrum. The god can be placated only by Prayers of Sacrifice. Typically, it is three scyros who make this sacrifice, a trio swimming out to the god in unison. The three perform an elaborate dance of undoing around the god—a dance designed to keep them from dying in the unleashed storm while distracting Ny—and then each slides into one of the open beaks. The beaks close around them, and Ny falls into silence. For now.

GETTING TO AND SURVIVING IN THE CITY OF RUST

The City of Rust lies deep on the ocean floor. Visitors must take the usual precautions against pressure, cold, and other obstacles to safely arrive at the three circular gatehouses. The city welcomes all who desire to enter it provided that they do not carry disease or infection.

In Rust, many mutations are considered to be physical signs of an infection. Those with discernable mutations who wish to enter the city may be quarantined for days or even weeks.

Upon entering the city, characters who have no artificial means of breathing and have not had an ooroma shot must make a level 4 Might defense roll or suffer the short-term effects of becoming water-locked. Those who become water-locked must make a second level 4 Might defense roll or suffer the long-term effects of becoming water-locked.



In order to enter the city, a visitor must pass through one of the three gatehouses. The gatehouses are complicated structures with a number of porous and semiporous membranes that visitors must walk or swim through to reach the inner city.

Skeane are amphibious creatures, but rather than breathing pure air or water, they enjoy breathing a special oxygen-rich liquid that they call ooro. Thus, the inner city is filled not with air or water, but ooro. When humans and other non-skeane enter the inner city, they may become temporarily water-locked. Their lungs quickly fill with ooro, which their body is unable to process. Within two minutes, oxygen deprivation occurs and shock begins to settle in. Most people's bodies are able to adapt to the liquid air before severe convulsions set in. A few, however, never adapt. Without treatment or assistance, they suffer more serious consequences, such as brain injury or death.

Those who do adapt find that breathing fluid becomes natural, but it also strips their lungs of their protective coating. To avoid getting—and possibly spreading—an infection, visitors are required to drink a fishy-smelling medicinal potion called florrine once per day. They can purchase florrine from the shops in the large building known as the Point. Anyone who is tested by one of the city guards and doesn't come up with traces of florrine in his retinas is quarantined and fined.

A second alternative for visitors is to get an oorama shot. This injection allows someone to begin breathing the ooro without any risk of becoming water-locked. A large syringe filled with dark green liquid is injected through the chest directly into both lungs, one a time. The procedure is known by those who've had it, and those who give it, as the "lung slug" for its intense feeling that someone just punched the air out of your chest. It's not uncommon for someone to begin the oorama shot process, get one lung injected, and then change her mind without getting the second one done. A single injection, however, offers no benefit.

Last, those who enter the city for the first time must sit through a short orientation about the Four Scylines. This five-minute presentation ensures that visitors know the rules and do not accidentally provoke the gods into action.

Once someone has entered the city safely for the first time, she is issued a passtag. The passtag shows that she has taken the orientation and is safe to pass undeterred.

SKEANE

Skeane are furred, feathered, and webbed in grey and white, with strips of orange-yellow around their faces and along the edges of their bellies. Their heads are similar to those of both dolphins and birds, with soft, pointed bills, small teeth, and long tongues.

Skeane have three sets of multipurpose limbs. On the ground, they stand on the back two sets and use the front set much in the way that humans do. When swimming, they can use all three sets, along with their kite-shaped tails, to speed through the water, or they can move more slowly and deliberately, using their front limbs to hold

Ooro is very similar to the oxygen-rich "water" found in the invisible corridors and may be related.

Invisible corridors, page 12

When skeane say the word "ooro," it's soundless, more of a bubbling gesture of the mouth than a sound. It is onomatopoeic, designed to represent the sound that bubbles make when leaving the lungs and reentering the liquid upon exhale. It has no written equivalent, nor does it have a Truth translation.

Typical skeane: level 4; swimming, resisting disease and poison, and all Intellect-based tasks as level 5; attacks and defense rolls as level 3; often has a random cypher



RACIAL OPTION: SKEANE

A PC can be a skeane rather than a human. Such a character would be native to the City of Rust. Rather than having a normal descriptor, the character's descriptor would be Skeane. These player characters might be somewhat awkward on land compared to other PCs, but they would obviously excel in the water, and would be wonderful additions to an extended campaign in the deep.

SKEANE CHARACTERISTICS

All skeane characters have the following characteristics:

Fast Finned: Your Speed Edge increases by 1.

Amphibious: You can breathe air or water.

Skill: You are trained in the numenera.

Skill: You are trained in swimming.

Skill: You are trained in study, contemplation, or mental concentration.

Skill: You are trained in crafting.

Inability: You are susceptible to contagious diseases. The difficulty of resisting disease or poison is increased by one step.

Inability: You're fast but not fierce. The difficulty of tasks involving combat—including attack and defense rolls—is increased by one step.

Extra Equipment: One of your starting cyphers is one that you created yourself, and thus you can work with the GM to determine what it is.

and operate complicated equipment, catch fish, explore ruins, and build or repair the city structures. Skeane are typically very smart, dexterous, and complicated. They are builders and creators, always looking for a new challenge. Their speech is mostly a combination of sounds, air bubbles, and hand and tongue gestures. Many, however, also speak a truncated version of *the Truth* thanks to small implants that pierce the sides of their tongues.

Skeane have three genders, each defined by their roles in raising young: egg giver, egg taker, and egg feeder. The givers produce a single small orange egg each year, which they pass to a taker. Takers insert the egg inside their bodies and carry it until it reaches term. When the egg is ready to hatch, the taker delivers it. In moments, it breaks open to produce a young skeane. Once the young has hatched, it's the responsibility of the feeder to raise it, using digestive enzymes to regurgitate special nutrient-rich food and liquid for the young.

Very rarely, twin skeane are born. When this happens, they are almost always conjoined. Special care is given to these babies, as they are believed to be an offering from the gods. Many skeane believe that if a pair of conjoined twins makes it to adulthood, the gods will be eternally placated. Most twins die before reaching adulthood, as they are particularly susceptible to the Drown.

The only differentiating characteristic among the genders is small white nodules on the undersides of the tails—givers typically have two, takers four, and feeders none. When not involved with producing, carrying, or providing for the young, the idea of genders isn't typically a part of daily life. Skeane are communal by nature, often sharing their lives and living spaces with two or more additional creatures.

LAYOUT OF THE CITY OF RUST

The City of Rust spreads its metal rooms and tunnels far and wide across the ocean floor. There doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason for the locations or shapes of the structures, and their sprawling pattern portrays the sense that they were all part of something much larger at one time. The outlying structures are largely uninhabited and many are still unexplored.

The city also seems to sit atop a much larger surface, one that is not of the natural world. This bottom layer, which is made of a perfectly smooth stonelike material, extends around the city for nearly a mile in each direction. No sand covers it, few creatures live upon its surface, and no seaweed or sea urchins build their homes here. The layer is utterly barren. The only place it breaks is around each of the four machine gods.



The Truth, page 133

Most skeane names are vowel heavy, more breath and soft air, than hard consonants. Many names are reused often and passed down through and across generations. Names like Ooya, Aawo, and Uoai are common.

Disease, particularly a disease called the Drown, is the number one killer of skeane. Considered a curse from Sa, the Drown takes down as many as a hundred skeane each year, despite multiple precautions and offerings to the god.



The main center of the city consists of three large buildings: the Point and two Pikes. Outside this center are the metal gods known as the Four Scylines: Ka, Em, Sa, and Ny.

THE GATEHOUSES

The city is accessed via the three gatehouses that are attached to each of the three main structures. These round buildings are filled with an orange glow that rises up through the clear floors. Beneath the floors are *duons*, bioluminescent snails held captive in giant tanks for their warm orange light.

Each gatehouse has at least six guards on duty at all times, as well as a number of porous and semiporous membranes. Visitors must pass through all of them, from water to air to ooro, to arrive at the inner city. The guards keep the peace and ensure that everyone who enters is free from infection.

THE POINT

The Point is the largest of the three structures and considered to be the true heart of the city. Here, you can find the main market—a large, permanent structure full of handcrafted equipment, scavenged goods, common items, and more. There is no black

market. If something is worth being bought, sold, or traded, then it is available to be bought, sold, or traded.

Of particular interest is the various equipment created by skeane crafters. They are renowned for the ability to turn scavenged and dismantled items into new, useful objects. Devices with multiple uses—such as a light that is also a projectile weapon that is also a storage item—are their specialty.

The market is carefully designed to be a winding maze that forces you to walk by the most glamorous, enticing shops first, and then past the scareshops—which attempt to sell disease protection, longer life, and safer passage—before you finally arrive at the section that offers basic necessities such as food.

A second, smaller market has four shops organized in a square. Each of the shops is named for the god it serves and offers various forms of sacrificial and prayer objects designed specifically for that god.

The markets seem to take any currency, including barters, stories from faraway lands, handwritten money, and shins (though shop owners have very little use for them). In fact, because the city provides for most of the needs of the inhabitants, those who

Duon: level 1; Armor 2

SKEANE-MADE ARTIFACTS

Being master crafters, skeane make many types of equipment, from simpler ways to cook and serve food to fierce weapons and unique devices. Many of these artifacts are focused on the typical life of a skeane and are for use in liquid, but skeane are ever-curious, always willing to tackle a new creation challenge.

DEVOTEE

Level: 6

Form: Large cylinder with a strong light at one end and a medium projectile weapon at the other. An exterior plug allows it to power another device at the same time. Despite its size, a devotee is nearly weightless in the water. Devotees are typically made to order and must be created in the name of one of the Four, with the appropriate prayers and sacrifices made each day that the device is being worked on. They can take up to a month to be finished and typically cost the equivalent of 30 shins.

Effect: Serves as a medium projectile weapon, a light, and a power source for another device at the same time. Particularly useful on long-term scavenging trips when one wants to travel light.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100

LIFEPACK

Level: 5

Form: These backpack-like objects are custom made to fit the wearer.

Effect: Small living creatures on the inside of the pack insert their spines painlessly into the back of the wearer. They monitor and relate bodily functions, surrounding weather conditions, and incoming dangers. A pack costs the equivalent of 10 shins.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

PERCEIVE ALL

Level: 4

Form: A perceive all, sometimes just called a Percy, is a small device that fits over the eyes.

Effect: Makes the wearer blind to whatever's right in front of her, but enables her to see, smell, and hear things that she otherwise wouldn't be able to. The Percy is connected remotely to a series of small nanoswimmers that spread out through the water in an invisible cloud. The user tells the nanoswimmers how far to go, in what direction, and what sensory details to pay attention to. The nanoswimmers relay everything they experience back to the wearer's brain, which triggers the appropriate senses. A low-quality Percy has half a dozen uses before it burns out, but it costs the equivalent of only 5 or 6 shins. A Percy eternal lasts much longer but can cost as much as the equivalent of 25 shins.

Depletion: Low-quality Percy: 1-2 in 1d6; Percy eternal: 1 in 1d100

run shops seem to be more interested in the sport of haggling and bargaining than in any currency changing hands. Getting a good deal is considered good sport; buyers who don't haggle—often loudly and with great force—are considered rude and boring. Shopkeepers who don't spend at least a few minutes trying to talk their customers into a higher price are thought to be doing a poor job. A shopkeeper is more likely to ask for something off a customer's person than for anything she may have in her pocket.

The Point also houses the City of Rust's governing structure, where the ruling Russet leads the city into the future (or is supposed to; some would say the current leader is doing a rather poor job of that). The city oversight committee also meets here.

The large second and third floors are entirely devoted to community spaces, including public and private gathering areas. Wells—private, air-filled rooms with

“secret” double entrances—are common here. Visitors pay a small fee to enter and spend their evening in a room filled with what seems like air (but is actually a chemical compound that “dries” the water into cool, invisible steam). Designed to provide a small touch of home for air-breathing visitors, the wells are mostly used by skeane, who find that breathing air gives them a temporary high. Skeane who breathe air for up to half an hour experience vivid hallucinations, lowered inhibitions, and a sense of extreme euphoria. More exposure than that, and there's a strong chance they will begin to suffer respiratory failure.

At the very top of the Point is the sanctuary and outlook of the Veds, the high priests who keep watch on the Four Scylines and guide the city toward the proper placation sacrifices and prayers. Each of the gods has a number of Veds assigned to it. Veds dress in the respective colors of their god.

THE CITY OF RUST HEARSAY

Fire and Ice: Someone has stolen a necklace from the Russet. She hasn't even noticed that it's missing, but Enthum has and, on the sly, is asking people to keep an eye out for anyone starting endothermic fires. It seems the necklace contains a small bit of the Russet's ice abilities and is quite dangerous in the wrong hands.

A Grievous Error: A visitor named Taisnel recently commissioned a crafter named Ouhu to create an automaton that would serve as a friend and companion. Something went wrong, and the automaton killed Taisnel. City

guards will pay well for anyone who can uncover evidence or find Ouhu and the automaton, both of which have been missing since the murder.

THE WEIRD OF THE CITY OF RUST

Small Gods: A crafter on a scavenging expedition recently came back with tales of another god far out from the city. He claims it is almost identical to Ny, only larger, and it talked to him.

The Reach: One of Ka's blue tendrils has begun to reach toward the surface. The tendril seems to lengthen every few days, as if it's growing toward an unseen goal.

THE PIKES

The Pikes are distinguished by their locations: the one on the left is closest to Ka and is called Kapike. The one on the right is Sapike.

Most people live and work in the Pikes. The Pikes also host hotels, rooms for board, and other attractions for those who visit the city.

Both Pikes are also terraced for gardens. Since nothing grows on the metallic ground beneath the city, the Pikes are the communal gardens. Tenders suit up and spend their days caring for plants and shrubs that produce a variety of edibles, including many types of seaweed salads, fruit, vegetables, and fungi. Small edible creatures make their homes among these gardens, and tenders ensure sustainable harvesting of these protein sources.

RUSTWAY

All around the main buildings are long, square tunnels that run, turn back on themselves, loop, and dead-end. The law forbids Rust inhabitants from entering the tunnels. The given reason is that they're dark, treacherous, and full of unknown diseases, creatures, and other potentially fatal dangers. While that is entirely true, there is perhaps an additional reason for the prohibition: unknown to most, the Rustway also offers a number of secret, hidden ways into the main buildings of the city. Those wishing to bypass the guards and the

membranes for any reason might risk the dangers in the dark, but most aren't willing. The main Rustway entrances are either boarded up or have guards posted, but new holes and smaller entryways are always forming, and the guards can't keep up with them all.

THE HOUSE OF THE SCYR

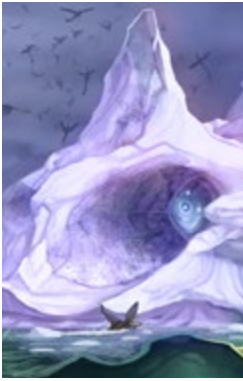
Located at the center point between the four gods (and very nearly in the center of the city itself) is the House of Scyr. This small, square structure is a place of worship, prayer, and sacrifice.

Rust inhabitants are expected to visit the House whenever the Veds deem it necessary. This is all based on the current state of the Scylines. Prayer goes on constantly, led by the scyros, who alter their prayers according to what the Veds are seeing among the machine gods.

THE FOUR SCYLINES

The machine gods reside outside the city, but close enough that they can be seen from the Point, close enough that they can project their curses and blessings upon the city, and close enough that those who live inside Rust can feel the reactions of their gods whenever they are angered or pleased. Most residents would swear that the city rests in the shadows of all four machine gods, although there is so little light in the depths that the very idea is an impossibility.





CHAPTER 7 NIRESS

Niress pronunciation:
NEAR-es

Mation, page 70

Shatonin, page 72

Frieth, page 71

Invisible corridors,
page 12

Estathin, page 66

Omath, page 147

Nalranin, page 74

Arxil is home to about 15,000 people. It is a city built amid the ruins of one from the prior worlds. Many items of the numenera in Arxil rely on cold and ice to function.

A brilliantly white mountainous island that moves, Niress is outwardly a particularly large sheet of floating ice that the learned call an icedrift. It measures about 80 miles (130 km) long and 20 miles (32 km) wide, giving it a surface area larger than some islands—and that’s just the ten percent of Niress visible above water. But unlike other icedrifts, Niress isn’t a lifeless chunk of frozen seawater. Its gargantuan interior is tunneled and hollowed. Life thrives in those frigid caves, caves that mostly lie far beneath sea level, though many are not drowned. Legends say there were once three inhabited icedrifts that plied the oceans. If true, those sibling icy flows are no more; only Niress remains.

GM SUMMARY

The much-tunneled interior of the icedrift of Niress is inhabited by *estathin* and *omaths*. Niress is artificially maintained by a machine at the icedrift’s root called *Nalranin*, which the primitive *estathin* worship like a god, and which the more technical *omaths* seek to study and exploit. For its part, *Nalranin* remains enigmatic. The heat-draining field it exerts across all of Niress makes the freezing temperatures even more severe. However, that same field sustains the *estathin* and a much larger ecosystem within Niress’s frozen caves and tunnels. Great blots of darkness called Frozen Cores dot the icedrift, each trapping in cold stasis something that’s valuable, dangerous, or hard to explain.

GETTING TO NIRESS

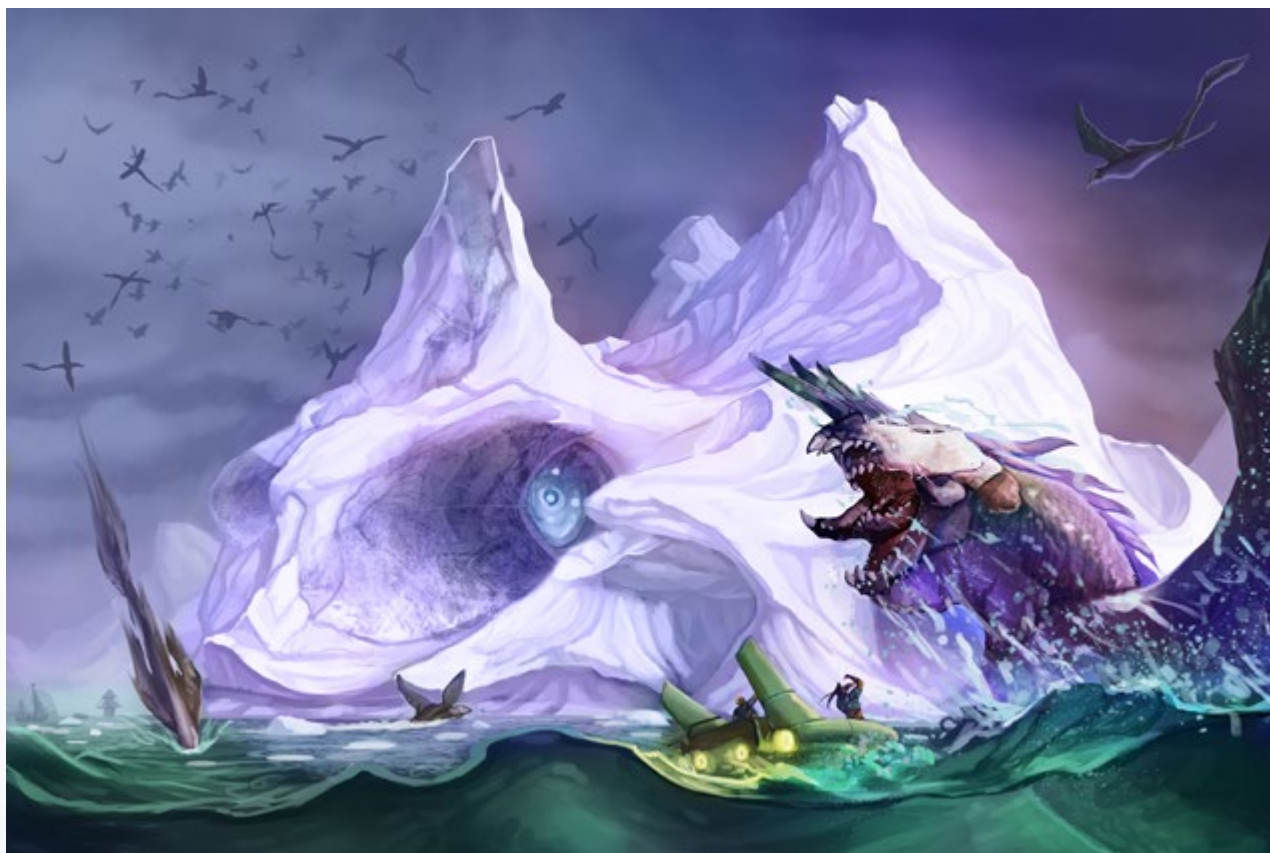
If a traveler wanted to find Niress, she would need a large ship, one with a strong prow capable of breaking through

the surface ice that often forms in the far southern latitudes where icedrifts form naturally. Finding such a ship isn’t insurmountable. More difficult is identifying which icedrift is Niress, then finding a way past the frozen exterior into the hollowed core. A few high doors exist on exposed mountains that reach skyward above water, including one that opens onto the *estathin* retreat of *Mation*. Several water tunnels allow access from below, including those surrounding the *omath* city of *Shatonin*. In addition, a hidden portal connects the city of *Arxil* in the Frozen South with the city of *Frieth* of Niress. Most creatures on either end don’t realize it exists. *Arxilites* know that sometimes, their citizens just go missing. *Estathin* in *Frieth* never approach the plinth on which humans sometimes appear, understanding its ability to snatch away the unwary to an unknown fate.

Other methods described in the introduction may also take explorers from dry land into Niress. Sometimes the *invisible corridors* intersect with the drifting passage of the lower water tunnels, for instance.

SURVIVAL IN NIRESS

It is brutally cold in Niress—supernaturally so, in fact, thanks to a field generated by *Nalranin* at the icedrift’s root. This field penetrates even warm clothing to suck heat away, except for creatures that are somehow tuned to the field. Native creatures, flora, and fauna actually enjoy the opposite effect and are sustained and warmed by *Nalranin*’s influence. As such, natives suffer no penalties from the cold, but other characters require proper protection, usually in the form of warm clothing, including gloves, face mask, and



insulated boots. Even then, the cold gets in. Explorers soon find that frost begins to form around their nose and mouth, metal dangerously and instantly adheres to bare flesh, and frostbitten fingers and toes are a real possibility.

Even with warm clothing that protects against natural cold, creatures not entirely immune to or protected from the influence of Nalranin's heat-draining field (an artifact or cypher that protects against cold will do) must attempt a Might defense roll with a difficulty of 4 once each day. On a failure, the traveler suffers 5 points of damage from the cold.

Natives and visitors alike must weather the icequakes that periodically shake the caves and caverns of Niress. Usually, shaking lasts for less than a minute, but some icequakes can last much longer, and during these events, the normally secure tunnels and caverns can collapse. This is why natives build low, domelike structures in their cities, in case one day the ice vault their community is built within collapses.

FLORA AND FAUNA OF NIRESS

Plants and animals live in Niress, though their adaptations to the extreme cold of Nalranin's influence can make them almost unrecognizable to explorers from the surface. In fact, grasses, trees, and animals draw energy from the field produced by Nalranin, the machine frozen into the root of the icedrift. Nalranin beams power to plants and other entities adapted to receiving and using that energy. The most obvious and important side effect of this beamed power is the supernatural cold that pervades Niress. In fact, Nalranin is why Niress first formed and is responsible for maintaining it.

The grasses that grow on ice cave walls are like brush bristles made of silver, and the shrubs and trees are tall with flattened canopies of leaves that glow blue light. The light shed from the vegetation is the chief form of illumination in Niress.

The beasts, vermin, and other creatures that inhabit the frozen tunnels are usually clothed entirely in shaggy hair that looks white to human eyes. The beasts eat each other and the ice-adapted foliage, while the foliage sustains itself almost entirely on the energy beamed from Nalranin.

South of the Steadfast and the Beyond lies a realm of cold and year-round snow called the Frozen South, most of which lies beyond what is known as the Southern Wall, a seemingly impassible barrier of ice.

Gorm: level 5, resists most physical attacks as level 6; health 30; makes up to three tentacle attacks at once; heat-draining tentacles inflict 3 additional points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) if a target fails a Might defense roll

USING NIRESS

Niress is not so different in external aspect from other icedrifts that float in the seas, which could make it hard to find. Because it drifts, the massive icedrift could show up along nearly any coast. (Niress also sometimes moves according to enigmatic whims of the machine Nalranin.) Though humans generally do not live upon the icedrift or within its tunneled interior, the estathin are humanoid enough to pass as humans when encountered. The theme of Niress is twofold: religious observance on the part of the estathin, and studious exploration and research on the part of the omaths. PCs face unbelievable cold while exploring Niress, but they might be drawn to do so to penetrate the crust of one of the Frozen Cores that dot the icedrift's interior. Meeting and interacting with the estathin could be dangerous, but PCs could maneuver the encounter in their favor by showing off their mastery over any artifacts or cyphers they might own. On the other hand, humans meeting omaths for the first time might mistake their grim aspect for aggression and prematurely attack creatures that might have otherwise proved friendly. Successful adventurers are likely to leave Niress with both knowledge and technological treasures not found anywhere else.

Some light-emitting plants protect themselves proactively from omnivorous beasts and creatures seeking to gather their shining leaves. One example is the red-leafed doat tree. The tree grows to a height of 30 feet (10 m) and fires concentrated beams of burning light at anything that comes within short range, requiring a difficulty 3 Speed defense roll to avoid suffering 3 points of damage. Lusk are fernlike plants that flash their leaves in rapid, brain-dazing patterns; those who see the display must make a difficulty 4 Intellect defense roll or suffer 2 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor).

Creatures include the **blacktusk**, a catlike mammal over 7 feet (2 m) long with massive tusks; the **frellan**, a birdlike creature with a vicious beak that runs instead of flies;

and the amorphous, heat-draining **gorm** that consumes everything.

Besides these examples, many more creatures and plants, most of them not so dangerous, are rampant in the icy-cold corridors of Niress. All of them ultimately rely on the great machine Nalranin at the root.

NATIVE RACES OF NIRESS

Two distinct races of intelligent beings are prominent in Niress: estathin and omaths. Between them, three hundred thousand intelligent creatures inhabit the caves and corridors of the immense, never-melting icedrift.

ESTATHIN

Estathin resemble humans, but they are shorter, rounder, and far paler, and they have a silky pelt of hair over most of their bodies. Estathin wear clothing but do not require it to survive within Niress; they are naturally immune to the chill because they possess a connection with Nalranin similar to that of the flora. Although that connection isn't enough to completely sustain them, it is enough to keep their core temperature comfortable without heavy clothing or while swimming in icy water.

Because of their natural adaptations to the severe environment, most estathin live at what might seem like just above a subsistence level, using basic tools and weapons and living a hunter-gatherer lifestyle in extended family units. However, their connection with the machine provides them with a kind of spiritual understanding of various aspects of the numenera. That said, they do not regard cyphers, artifacts, and Nalranin as tech; they regard the items as magic, the occasional automatons they encounter as angels, and Nalranin—whose “presence” they can always feel, literally—as their god.

Most estathin are not big on history, other than the oral histories each family grouping keeps in regard to its own movements, triumphs, and defeats. They do not know if they are descended from humans or, as some might be wont to suggest, if humans descend from estathin, perhaps having been cast out by Nalranin.

Because estathin always feel Nalranin's proximity, the average member of the race is content, and most are even happy.

Blacktusk: level 4, Speed defense as level 6 due to quickness; tusked bite inflicts 5 points of damage

Frellan: level 2, Speed defense as level 3 due to size; poisoned beak inflicts 2 additional points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) if a target fails a Might defense roll

According to the faith most subscribe to, when an estathin perishes, the mind survives and is embodied anew, through Nalranin's grace, in a newborn estathin. Thus, most members of the community believe they have been embodied thousands of times and will enjoy thousands more embodiments in the future. Such a belief also gives many estathin something of a carefree attitude, at least when it comes to danger.

Estathin speak their own language, and a few speak a tongue they call the "God Tongue," which is based on [the Truth](#). They use [abadis](#) for their primary currency.

A typical estathin community consists of an extended family or group of families with usually no more than thirty or so members. Most communities are sited within a large ice cavern. Homes and other structures are low domes of carved ice, built with an eye toward withstanding the occasional collapse. Collapses are rare, but they happen sufficiently often enough to affect both architecture and estathin culture. The shaking is seen as a sign of divine displeasure. The parts of a community's cavern not covered in domes are devoted to

glowing trees that provide edible fruits as well as light. Though the fruits vary in texture and taste, they alone do not sustain an estathin. Many are hunters and venture into the mazelike tunnels in search of furred prey.

Estathin hunters are sometimes accompanied by trained blacktusks, which have been raised from kits to be companions and aids in the hunt. Such blacktusks can be distinguished from their wild kin by the glowing cords of hemplike material wrapped around their necks like collars.

If an estathin in a community has a functioning artifact of the numenera that is usable, that person is usually considered blessed of Nalranin. The words and instructions of anyone blessed of Nalranin are considered to be wise, even if listeners cannot immediately discern that wisdom.

The omaths, the other intelligent race inhabiting the icedrift, are regarded as devils by the estathin. The estathin would prefer nothing more than to wipe out every omath, but the omaths understand and use the numenera in a way estathin have never required to survive. For the most part, the omaths ignore the estathin.

[The Truth](#), page 133

[Abadis](#), page 13



Omath, typical: level 3;
Armor 3; telekinetically
moves an immediate
distance each round;
telepathic within long
range

OMATHS

Omaths are post-biological, but they are no less a race than estathin or humans. Instead of being born through chance, new omaths are selected from worthy candidates (usually estathin, but also humans who find their way to Niress). A chosen individual is conducted to a special chamber where she is frozen into a chunk of metallic ice lined with tiny machines. From the point of view of the average human, the process takes a living person, entombs her in a sarcophagus of ice, and revitalizes the brain within the frozen coffin with eldritch energy. The revived mind finds that it can make use of capacities built into her new extended “body,” including speaking telepathically, flying and swimming via levitation, and interacting with her surroundings via short-range telekinesis. Omaths are proof against a wide variety of environmental conditions and can operate in air, the ocean deeps, the vacuum of space, and several other hazardous environments without coming to immediate harm.

The personality and knowledge of the original person implanted in the new omath’s carapace remain. Personality traits, sympathies, gender identification, and memories are not wiped away. They are what make each omath unique, despite a somewhat similar exterior. That said, the ice carapace provides an overlay of culture, new knowledge, and motivation to become a member in good standing with other omaths, which means that the original person is essentially dead, and a new being takes her place. Once someone has become an omath, reversing the process is impossible, at least with techniques the omaths possess; if a way could be found to remove the outer carapace, all that’s left is a slushy, fractured, bloody, and dying mess.

Many omath carapaces have additional abilities beyond basic communication, manipulation, and movement, including offensive and defensive measures. Omath enforcers, for example, are shown how to access numenera abilities latent in their carapaces that energize long-range beams of destructive energy. Omath thinkers can link their conscious minds together to create unified minds able to cogitate on problems enormously more complex than a human mind could ever hope to comprehend. **Omath rangers** can trigger

chameleon-like invisibility fields for when stealth is vital to accomplish their mission. Individuals can choose among these or many other professions to pursue; the only choice they don’t have is whether to be made into an omath in the first place.

Omath cities are peculiar affairs, in that to an outsider’s perspective, most chambers—carved into the icedrift with buttresses and arches—seem like mausoleums, filled with row upon row of unmoving sarcophagi. Omaths do not hover when not moving; they rest on the ground. They do not emit noise, even when talking among themselves; they speak via telepathy. Omaths do not require light; they can sense the world through other senses.

Omaths are ruled by a small group of leaders selected by random lot to form a Mental Council. Each member of the council serves for a term of seven years. The Mental Council has the authority to set community and racial goals, command





enforcers, and generally move things as they will. However, given the somewhat preprogrammed nature of each carapace before it is inhabited by an estathin or human, those goals are not given to radical change from year to year.

Most omath interaction, day-to-day commerce, and relaxation and recreation occur within a psychic construct created by multiple linked omath minds. The community goals of omaths are varied and include leading a good life of pleasure and discovery. Though much of that discovery is mental, many goals also include physical exploration of the surrounding world. Unlike the estathin, the omaths make almost constant use of the underwater tunnels that provide egress from the icedrift of Niress. They send out groups of rangers and explorers to search for novel objects and machines across the vast deeps and sometimes onto dry land. They are aware of many of the other cultures and creatures of the world, at least in general conception. If possible, omath explorers attempt to hide their presence from other creatures,

especially humans, given how the latter seem to equate omath carapaces with never-melting sarcophagi.

Other omaths remain focused on local discovery, finding the great machine at the root of Niress—which the estathin call Nalranin—of near limitless interest. The omaths are uncertain of their own racial origin but believe it is wrapped up with the machine. That said, they’ve learned to keep their distance from direct interaction with it. The tenders of the machine, called **vuluns**, are composed of the same iron-hard ice as omath carapaces. Despite their apparent connection, vuluns attempt to slay omaths on sight, and they’re good at accomplishing that task. According to omath lore, a vulun can melt an omath just by touching it.

Omaths keep shins and other valuables, but only as a way to bribe or attempt diplomatic relations with other creatures. Among themselves, they maintain a mental balance of “favors” that operates something like a currency, but these favors have no meaning or even existence beyond the omaths that track them.

Vulun, page 75

d20 Roll Frozen Core Contents

| | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Shins, oddities, cyphers, and artifacts |
| 2 | Collection of cyphers, including Nalranin connection graft and ice prison |
| 3 | Colossal omath created with 100 humanoid bodies (omaths who find it would consider it an obscenity) |
| 4 | Packetized estathin, butchered and packed as if for food |
| 5 | Human city that went missing from dry land |
| 6 | Plant with pollen that induces happy, dream-filled slumber |
| 7 | Titanothaur (gargantuan creature of destruction) |
| 8 | Humanlike creatures the size of ants |
| 9 | Naiadan missing from Minifera |
| 10 | A vroaordun |
| 11 | A skeane explorer |
| 12 | Direct connection terminal to datasphere |
| 13 | Teleportation doorway leading to the moon |
| 14 | Spatial anomaly that turns living creatures a brilliant shade of red, blue, or green |
| 15 | Iron Wind sample |
| 16 | Psionic parasite that infects victim with hallucinations of a higher-dimensional realm |
| 17 | Music of transcendental beauty |
| 18 | Small dredge similar to those still operating in the Skelirroth Fleet |
| 19 | Nightcraft (vehicle capable of leaving Earth and traveling into space) |
| 20 | Future versions of the explorers |

Titanothaur: *level 10; health 140; Armor 5; melee attack within long range inflicts 18 points of damage or 7 points of damage on a successful Speed defense roll; regains 2 points of health per round; for more details, see the Ninth World Bestiary, page 126*

Naiadan, page 100

Minifera, page 96

Skelirroth Fleet, page 77

Vroaordun, page 157

Skeane, page 59

FROZEN CORES

Blots of solid black ice are frozen throughout the massive bulk of the Niress icedrift. Ranging in size from no larger than a room to the diameter of cities, the Frozen Cores are sealed against casual entry. No two blots contain the same thing, but all contain an object, creature, energy, or anomaly frozen in stasis. The freezing quality provided by Nalranin is especially concentrated in the blots, as if designed to keep and preserve what lies within each one. Whether the purpose is to trap what

lies within or to preserve it against some future need is a debate that omaths have, though estathin mostly regard Frozen Cores as holy shrines. For this reason, most estathin do not attempt to penetrate a core when they find one, though they do guard and worship the blots. Likewise, omaths who are convinced that the Frozen Cores keep trapped dangers that would otherwise run loose stay away, though a few think the oily blots offer opportunity, not danger.

Penetrating a Frozen Core crust requires a phasing ability or one of several objects collected by estathin that serve as keys to open a brief doorway. A sense of being watched, like a mental touch, descends on each explorer who passes through a Frozen Core crust, and then fades. The contents of small blots are easily discovered, though the larger blots, especially those approaching the size of cities, are not always so easily inventoried. While some contain enigmatic devices or monstrous creatures whose size fills the cavity, others are a warren of metallic tunnels, circular chambers, mazes, or spiraling corridors like the interiors of shells. Potential contents include the possibilities on the table on the previous page, but the nature of Frozen Cores is to surprise; knowing what lies in one crusted blot is no predictor of what another might contain.



NALRANIN CONNECTION GRAFT

Level: 1d6 + 1

Usable: Small metallic disk

Effect: When applied to a creature's body, the disk immediately unleashes microfilaments of ice that penetrate into every organ of the creature, including its brain. Within five minutes, the creature suffers 5 points of damage, and then it gains a connection to Nalranin in the icedrift of Niress. If the creature is not within the hollowed interior of Niress, the connection serves merely as a strong sense of the direction in which the icedrift lies. If the creature is within Niress, it gains absolute immunity to heat drain (cold) from any source, including that created by Nalranin.



ICE PRISON

Level: 1d6 + 2

Wearable: Ring, palm disk

Usable: Short rod

Effect: A creature within immediate range is encased in a 3-foot (1 m) thick solid layer of metallic ice. The cypher thereafter serves as the key to removing the icy containment, though dealing it 50 points of damage (through Armor 3) will also crack the ice. While encased, the creature is in stasis and can take no actions, doesn't age, and is immune to damage and effects. If not removed in some other fashion, the ice prison melts after seven days.

NIRESS LOCATIONS

The following are just a few of the thousands of locations found within Niress.

MATION

More a retreat than a community, Mation is a camp of sturdy tents and firepits on the surface of Niress that usually contains about twenty adult estathin who are not related. It is slightly warmer than in the interior of the icedrift because the heat-draining effects of Nalranin at the nadir do not reach all the way to the surface. Paradoxically, estathin who inhabit the camp must wear heavy winter clothing to protect themselves from exposure even though it is warmer because their connection to Nalranin—which normally protects them from the cold—also doesn't reach to the surface.

Estathin come to the retreat as part of a once-in-a-lifetime religious observance called the Test. The Test combines exposure to the wide-open sky that



She slipped down the narrow ice tunnel that led into the frozen core. Inside she found innumerable white corridors and pale doors opened to her. A chamber stacked with masks of a thousand different faces, only a few of them estathin. A room where many voices spoke, bodiless. A vast space covered in stairs leading everywhere, and nowhere. And wonders she couldn't put words to.

~a story told in Frieth

triggers agoraphobia in most estathin, exposure to cold, and the attendant lack of subconscious contact with Nalranin, which most estathin equate with spiritual closeness to their god. Those who come to the Test must stay a full 28 hours to complete the religious obligation, but many stay longer to prove their devotion even in the face of extreme hardship.

Estathin subjecting themselves to the Test are usually the first natives of Niress that surface-dwelling explorers meet. Test-takers know that “humans” sometimes find the icedrift that serves as their tiny world, and according to the [Virtues of Nalranin](#), they are required to be hospitable and friendly, though not to reveal the secrets of their home or put up with insults to their safety or religious certainty.

A gruff estathin named [Krahul](#) took the Test some time ago and decided he liked it so much that he remains on the surface all the time. Krahul wears clothing made of colorful feathers, distinctive in their size and color, and sports an impressive beard. He maintains the camp, provides basic guidance to each new Test-taker, and lives off the supplies that new Test-takers bring to him. Living so long away from Nalranin's touch, Krahul has gained a wider appreciation of the ways of the world, though he would never go so far as to question Nalranin's role in estathin society to others of his kind. He has made the acquaintance of several omath explorers, human adventurers, and other visitors that emerge from the Deep Dark to investigate the oddities of Niress. In exchange for cyphers and food, Krahul will give such explorers a map to the hidden location leading into Niress, along with a pendant of carved ice that will give them an asset to any interactions with other estathin.

When not dealing with others, Krahul loves nothing more than to hunt large local seabirds called karestrels. Karestrels are fearless and

dangerous, especially when they hunt in flocks of five to ten. Krahul has hunted them so much that he has become something of an expert in dealing with them (all tasks related to karestrels are one step easier for him). He even carries an artifact that he can use to call them to his aid for a brief time.

FRIETH

Frieth is one of the larger estathin communities of Niress. Sited within a series of connected ice vaults, it is the primary estathin “holy city.” Domes that serve as temples are built within each of the large vaults. A priesthood, made up mostly of estathin females who have passed their

*Virtues of Nalranin,
page 72*

KARESTREL HORN

Level: 1d6

Form: Musical horn

Effect: When the horn is sounded, five giant predatory seabirds called karestrels are summoned if any are within 10 miles (16 km). Summoned karestrels arrive within one minute and fight on behalf of whoever blew the horn for up to ten minutes.

Depletion: 1 in 1d10



ICE DERMIS GRAFT

Level: 1d6 + 1

Usable: Small metallic disk

Effect: When applied to a creature's body, the disk immediately unleashes microfilaments of ice that crystallize throughout the outer layer of skin. Within five minutes, the creature suffers 5 points of damage and then gains +1 to Armor for 28 hours. It also gains an additional +2 to Armor against damage inflicted by heat drain (cold).

Krahul: level 5, attacks and intimidation as level 6; health 20; Armor 2; carries a karestrel horn artifact and an ice dermis graft cypher



Virtues of Nalranin:

The virtues are a list of simple directives that, if followed, promise to promote a happy life. Virtues embody hospitality, trust, charity, and similar concepts.

Salanthe: level 5, tasks related to Nalranin lore and interaction as level 7; long-range energy attack from a cypher ray artifact; carries a path viewer cypher and two additional random cyphers

Mala Mayda: level 3, tasks related to spreading believable gossip or propaganda as level 5; carries a detonation (crystallization) cypher

primary child-rearing years, inhabits these structures. The priesthood teaches the **Virtues of Nalranin**, helps the sick and hurt, gives food to those who need it, ministers to the spiritually deficient, and more. Though the estathin have no general government that ties them all together, the priesthood in Frieth sometimes steps into that role.

The head priest is **Salanthe**, an estathin at least a hundred years old who nonetheless retains her vigor and energy despite her wrinkles and white hair. She's ministered to every other priest in Frieth, most of the support community of estathin that makes up the rest of the population, and a reasonable percentage of estathin who have visited Frieth on pilgrimage. For the most part, everyone respects and trusts Salanthe,

even though she isn't shy of visiting harsh words on those who stray from the Virtues.

A Frozen Core called the Talas is the primary reason the priesthood of Nalranin is located in Frieth. The Talas is relatively large and partly protrudes through the translucent ice roofs of the three primary vaults of Frieth. The priesthood teaches that the Talas is a physical manifestation of Nalranin's love and virtue. Those who ascend the highest temple (using a set of ice stairs that provides a path to the vault ceiling) and touch one edge of the Talas learn the answer to one question vexing them. Answers are telepathic, but they are usually vague or given in terms the average estathin has no way to understand; however, the priesthood offers interpretation of knowledge given to each pilgrim as part of their overall mission. The priesthood allows only one question per pilgrim, mainly for the pilgrim's safety. Those who ask more than one question while touching the Talas are sometimes bodily subsumed into the Frozen Core and never seen again.

One of the side temples holds a plinth made of metallic synth instead of ice. Sometimes humans from dry land appear here and claim to be residents of the Frozen City of Arxil, which are ruins from the prior world that humans now inhabit. Estathin in Frieth are wary of the plinth, but the priesthood teaches tolerance for those who appear there, despite their lack of spiritual connection with Nalranin. Those who suddenly appear usually wish to return whence they came, but the estathin are not eager to allow it, believing that Nalranin may have drawn the visitors for a purpose.

Mala Mayda, an estathin priest new to the fold whose long black hair is streaked with blue, is something of a tall-tale teller. The stories she passes on tend to be somewhat alarmist. They center around the dangers of allowing humans to learn about the glory of Niress, and how estathin should react if they do—by killing the humans before they can return to dry land and tell their warm-blooded kind of the bounty of riches that Niress keeps for the faithful.

SHATONIN

The omath city of Shatonin is carved into the sides of a mile-wide circular bore providing a watery egress to Niress's exterior. Many of Shatonin's chambers are

CYPHER RAY

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Gauntlet

Effect: The energy of a held cypher is drained, destroying the cypher. The drained energy can be immediately emitted as a ray of heat targeting a creature within long range that inflicts a number of points of damage equal to the drained cypher + 2.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20



PATH VIEWER

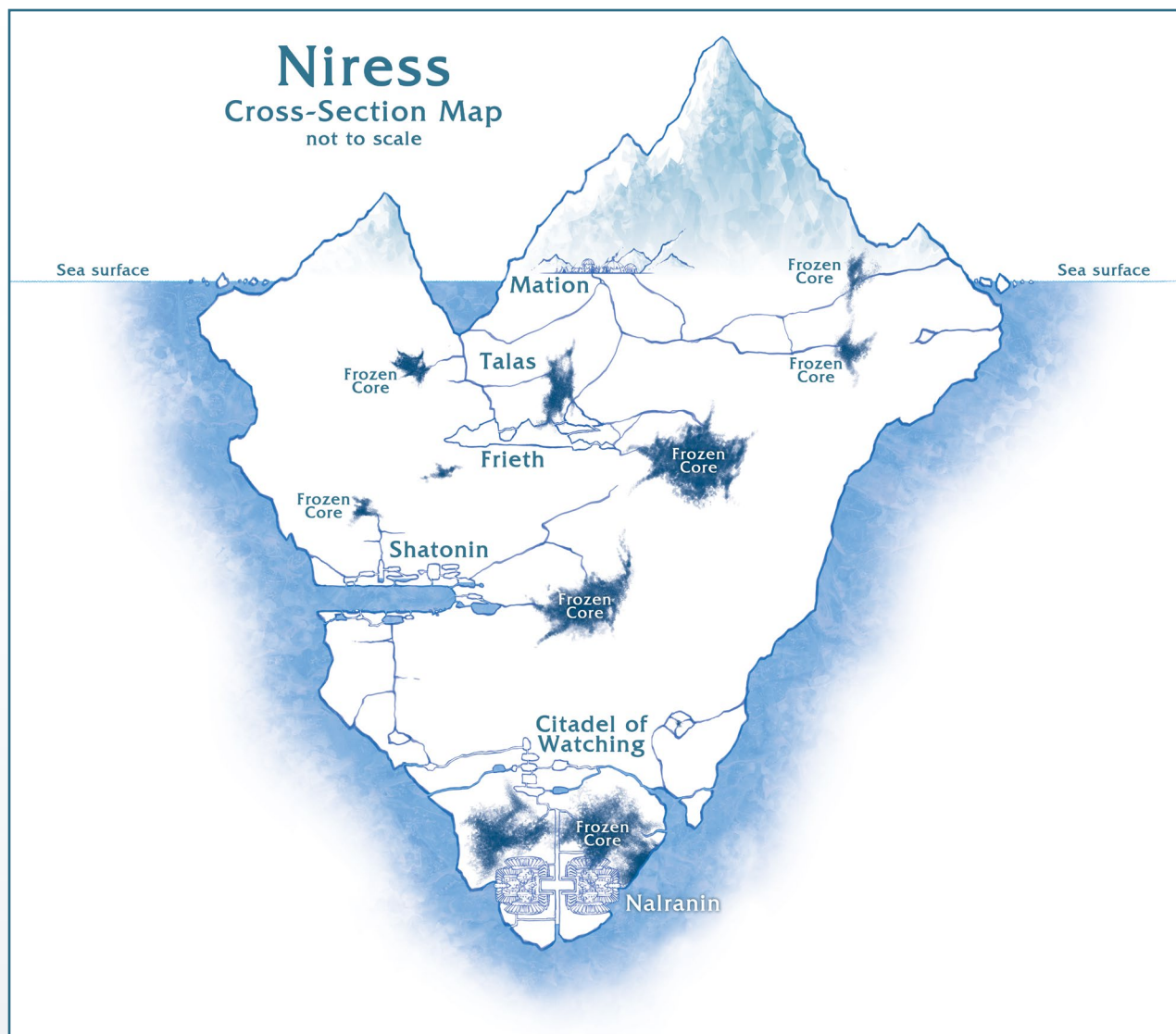
Level: 1d6 + 1

Internal: Subdermal implant

Wearable: Contact lens, glove, ring, wristband, headband, belt buckle

Usable: Handheld device

Effect: Connects briefly to Nalranin and then reveals a direct path to the stated objective, if the user succeeds on an Intellect-based task based on the level of a creature named or an object or location sought. In Niress, the revealed path takes the form of a glowing line in the ice that is visible only to the user and anyone he designates; the line lasts for seven days. If the user is not near the icedrift of Niress when the path viewer is used, the difficulty of the task is increased by one step, and the path is imparted only once as a telepathic series of instructions.



DETONATION (CRYSTALLIZATION)

Level: 1d6 + 2

Wearable: Wristband projector (long range)

Usable: Explosive device (thrown, short range) or handheld projector (long range)

Effect: Explodes in an immediate radius, crystallizing the victim within a crust of metallic ice. The victim is put in a state of suspended animation, during which time he is immune to damage and effects. He can be uncrystallized if removed from Niress, by the touch of an omath or a vulun, or by the machine called Nalranin.

similarly submerged, but others are dry; a series of airlocks protect the air-filled regions from submergence. Thanks to its placement, Shatonin is the center for extra-Niress trade and exploration. Groups of rangers, traders, and researchers routinely exit the icedrift here, or return from days or months away with the fruits of their mission (if successful) in hand.

Omaths trade with each other using barter or the exchange of their psychic currency (favors). They also trade with other entities of the deep, including a group of naiadapts from *Minifera*, who keep an embassy within one of the submerged sections of Shatonin. The omaths of Shatonin also trade with less cosmopolitan creatures, including various groups of humans. They've done the latter enough times that Shatonin omaths (unlike omaths of other communities in Niress) have

Minifera, page 96

learned to take into account human fear of the omath form. For that reason, special air-filled, warmed chambers to house humans in relative comfort have been set aside, and omaths initially interact via automaton intermediaries. Humans and other creatures trade with the omaths for nuggets of their storehouse of knowledge, as well as for unique cyphers and artifacts found within Niress.

Badusk, omath: level 3; Armor 3; telekinetically moves an immediate distance each round; telepathic within long range; has a phase changer cypher

Skelirroth Fleet, page 77

Omath ranger, page 147

Cuinum, page 84

An omath trader named **Badusk**, whose icy carapace is lined with golden filigree, specializes in trade sorties to the vicinity of the **Skelirroth Fleet**. Badusk has a device that either knows or can predict where those great machines will be at any given time. The omath trader has had many profitable interactions with the dredges, especially since much of the more exotic produce the dredges create has little apparent value to humans—except for **cuinum**, which the humans value as much as Badusk does. Unfortunately, whenever the humans of the fleet have caught even a hint of the true ice carapace forms of Badusk and his small trading team, the humans have reacted poorly. For this reason, Badusk often uses human intermediaries to get the material he wants.

Badusk also keeps a secret: an illicit omath birth unit artifact that other omaths are not aware he possesses. He sometimes trades with others using the promise of “evolving” them into a higher state of being—a being like himself.

Dellerdra, omath ranger: level 5; Armor 4; fly or swim a short distance each round; long-range heat ray attack inflicts 10 points of damage; carries three random cyphers

OMATH BIRTH UNIT

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Box of solid metallic ice

Effect: If placed next to the body of a recently slain intelligent humanoid, the box extends devices that encase the target in a metallic ice carapace over the course of ten hours. Once the process is complete, a typical level 3 omath is born.

If placed next to the body of a living intelligent humanoid, the box doesn't activate unless the creature is unconscious or incapacitated. If the creature is roused or rendered impaired or hale before the box completes its transformation, the artifact reverses its procedure.

Depletion: 1 in 1d6

CITADEL OF WATCHING

The Citadel of Watching is a complex tunneled into the ice of Niress as close to the portion of the icedrift housing Nalranin as its guardian vulun will allow. Through the somewhat translucent ice, the citadel's flickering glow is detectable for several miles. A series of dry tunnels leads down to Nalranin, as well as to the main passages that connect to the rest of the interior. A few water tunnels that provide an exit to the icedrift also branch off from the Citadel of Watching.

The citadel houses mostly **omath rangers**, over a hundred strong. In addition to the armaments each ranger normally carries, weapon turrets of metallic ice swivel and track anyone who approaches from most tunnels. Each turret can fire up to ten missiles before needing to be refitted. Missiles fired can follow a fleeing target around corners, or attack objectives many miles away, as long as a clear path to the target exists (though that path doesn't have to be straight). A detonating missile affects all in short range of where it hits with a blast of concentrated light. Those in the area suffer 10 points of damage if struck, and a minimum of 3 points even if not struck. Affected targets are also rendered blind for two rounds.

The omath ranger in charge of the citadel is **Dellerdra**, whose insignia is stamped in relief-shaped ice across the front of her carapace in glowing red. Dellerdra hates the vulun every bit as much as other omaths do. In fact, she hopes it's her honor to one day wipe out the vulun guardians so that the omaths can connect directly with Nalranin and learn its secrets. To that end, Dellerdra offers a bounty of cyphers to anyone who can provide a means to render a vulun inoperative, even temporarily. If Dellerdra found sufficient means to do so, nothing could hold her back from ordering all omaths beneath her to attack the chambers housing the Nalranin en masse.

NALRANIN

A massive machine called Nalranin is frozen into the root of Niress. The estathin know that the great machine is their deity, but given that they regard cyphers and artifacts as physical blessings provided by their god, they do not think it odd that their god partakes of the same blessed form.

In truth, the great machine isn't conscious, at least not in a way that the



Some travelers come to Niress in an attempt to make a study of the omath and their magical method of preserving bodies with cold. The omath sometimes allow one or two of their kind to be taken away for study, but who's actually studying who is an open question.

omath have ever been able to detect and communicate with. Despite that, Nalranin consistently beams power to plants and other entities adapted to receiving and using that energy, including the estathin, but not the omaths. A side effect of this beamed power is that Niress is continually being drained of heat. In effect, the presence of the machine maintains the icedrift into which Nalranin is frozen. The true nature of the machine isn't obvious. The learned know or might make the association with similar machines that lie in the Frozen South. Creating cold might well be the true purpose of these machines, but omaths believe there is a deeper purpose and power hidden in them, or at least in Nalranin. From their perspective, the existence of the Frozen Cores, with the many and varied objects trapped within them, provides clear evidence of this belief.

Corridors lead down from the dry, hollowed interior of Niress to an antechamber where a vast wall of the machine is exposed. Great spinning, glowing, and transforming mechanisms are visible, but attempting to reach them is a monumental task thanks to a force of guardian **vuluns**. Vuluns are living automatons of metallic ice. The creatures are fully composed, through and through, of the same kind of ice that omaths use as a carapace. Obviously some kind of connection exists between vuluns and omaths, but that secret has been lost to time. Now both creatures abhor the mere concept of the other. Generally, vuluns keep to the areas immediately surrounding Nalranin, though they are not adept in water like omaths are, and avoid submerging themselves. (Unlike omaths, vuluns have no telekinetic trick to keep water from freezing when they come into direct contact with it. A vulun who spends more than a few hours submerged in water becomes so encased in layers of freezing ice that it loses the ability to move.)

Besides the omaths in the Citadel of Watching, a second group keeps tabs on Nalranin from a nearby water tunnel under the command of an omath researcher called **Mertha**, whose carapace is relief-carved to resemble (at least from a distance) a natural slab of ice. Mertha avoids the vuluns by keeping her small omath team almost constantly underwater. She watches and waits for an opportunity to interact with the machine and learn its true purpose, or if it even has one. If that opportunity doesn't come soon, she plans on using the phasing cypher she keeps frozen into her carapace to close the distance without the vuluns being any the wiser.

ICE GHOST

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Wristband-mounted device with a few simple controls

Effect: Creates a likeness of the user composed of metallic ice that persists for up to ten hours as it attempts to complete a research mission imparted upon its creation. Before it melts, the "ice ghost" attempts to find the user and report on what it has learned. Missions that are aggressive rather than information-gathering are conducted as if the ice ghost was a level 1 creature. Otherwise, its level is equal to the artifact's level or the user's level (or tier), whichever is lower. The ice ghost has no specialized equipment such as cyphers or artifacts, but being composed of metallic ice gives it Armor 3. The ice ghost possesses the general knowledge of the user but has no special abilities. It is immune to cold, pressure, vacuum, and poison.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

Mertha, omath: level 3; Armor 3; telekinetically moves an immediate distance each round; telepathic within long range; has a phase changer cypher and an ice ghost artifact



Phase changer,
page 291

Vulun: level 7, Speed defense as level 6; health 45; Armor 4; fists inflict 8 points of damage; short-range ice projectile attack inflicts 8 points of damage on up to three targets as a single action; attacks ignore Armor granted by ice or cold effects; for more details, see the Ninth World Guidebook, page 248



NIRESS HEARSAY

Leaking Core: A reddish fluid is leaking from a crack in one of the largest Frozen Cores. The fluid doesn't behave like normal liquid because it doesn't freeze or flow along expected routes. Sometimes it flows upward, and other times it somehow melts through the solid walls of Niress. The fluid is usually inert to the touch in small volumes. However, if enough of "the Red" accumulates to form a pool an immediate diameter or larger across, the fluid undergoes some sort of phase shift and becomes a gas that kills everything within a radius of half a mile (1 km). An estathin priest called Laoh claims to know how to stop the fluid, but doing so requires a trip into the leaking Frozen Core.

Unholy Alliance: A half-insane omath has thrown in with a band of Nalranin religious extremists called the Grey Army; the omath has taken on the title of Grey Prophet. The prophet and her followers teach (and demonstrate by their violence) that the estathin have become soft, weak, and ineffectual in their faith. The prophet reveals "the hidden secret of Nalranin," claiming that it is a slumbering war god who will only wake to take its followers to an exalted afterlife if they first prove themselves to be worthy.

Dig to the Core: An omath has discovered a titanothaur called Kthama, a many-tentacled creature surrounded by a cloud of frozen darkness, within a hard-to-reach Frozen Core. For a reason she doesn't divulge, she believes a human presence is the key to unlocking Kthama from its prison. Thus, she seeks adventurers willing to travel to Niress, through the icy corridors, and down a narrow bore-hole drilled specifically to allow a human to touch the outer crust.

THE WEIRD OF NIRESS

Tuneful Wanderers: A group of green-armored beings that have characteristics of both living creatures and automatons wanders the least-inhabited corridors of Niress. They produce songlike melodies as they go, though most of their intonations are more like dirges than celebrations. All the beings have some sort of obvious damage, limp, or disfigurement, as if they passed through a particularly antithetical region before arriving in Niress.

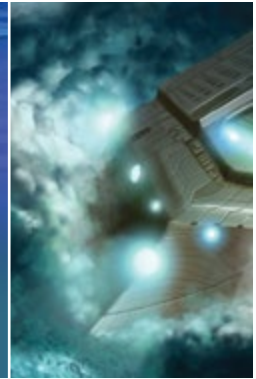
Bright Whispers: At irregular times, a mental wave erupts from Nalranin that touches the minds of almost every creature within Niress. The wave usually manifests as a cascade of whispers, as if many people were talking quietly all at once. Though the waves seem random and unfocused, some omaths believe that the great machine sends out the mental pulses as a sort of psychic sonar. If so, what Nalranin is searching for apparently continues to elude the great machine. Lately the whispers heard by the icedrift's inhabitants during a mental wave seem more desperate.

Ship Sightings: Estathin in Mation sometimes report seeing a ship of immense proportions. Given how large Niress is and how Mation sits on the mountainous slopes, the ship would have to be many miles long to catch their notice. But those who have seen it agree on several salient points: it glows pale blue, it has strange writing on the bow, and it sometimes flashes a red light in a nonrepeating pattern. It's a matter for debate whether that light is meant to convey a message to viewers in Niress or to some other entity the estathin can't see.



CHAPTER 8

THE SKELIRROTH FLEET



Five supermassive undersea dredging vehicles scrape clean the bottom-dwelling creatures along the ocean floor as they continue their centuries-long, automated mission of resource extraction. The massive blades, lined with intakes, create great furrows in the ocean floor. Anything that survives the blades is immediately smashed flat by tremendous treads.

The lead dredge vehicle (named the Skelirroth) is the largest. It is 6 miles (10 km) in length and about a half mile (1 km) wide and tall. Accompanying the main vehicle are four additional dredges, the Zyeburn, the Iskelorm, the Berambus, and the Yarvanax. The vehicles generally travel shoulder to shoulder in a widely spaced line. Each of the five is separated from the next by a distance of less than 300 feet (100 m). Far, far smaller undersea craft, mostly automatons, flit and jet between the dredges in a thick swarm. The automatons incessantly conduct thousands of repair and upkeep tasks each minute on the larger vehicles.

When the Skelirroth Fleet passes through an aquatic region, lanes in the ocean floor as wide as each dredge are scrubbed clean. Only lifeless ocean floor is left behind along a well-defined line. Life eventually recolonizes these denuded lanes, but it takes years before the original vivacity returns to what it once was. Some areas never recover fully, at least not within human lifetimes.

The Skelirroth Fleet, or simply Skelirroth as some call the mobile “nation,” has been continuously inhabited by humans for the last several hundred years. For the most part, the natives have no control over the fleet’s route across the ocean floor. Not surprisingly, trade of needful things keeps the natives of each dredge connected, but

cultures have diverged within each. The fleet is not unified under the rule of any particular group, though not from lack of trying.

GM SUMMARY

Humans live in massive undersea dredging vehicles—the Skelirroth Fleet—without any understanding of who originally built the vehicles or the damage they do to the areas

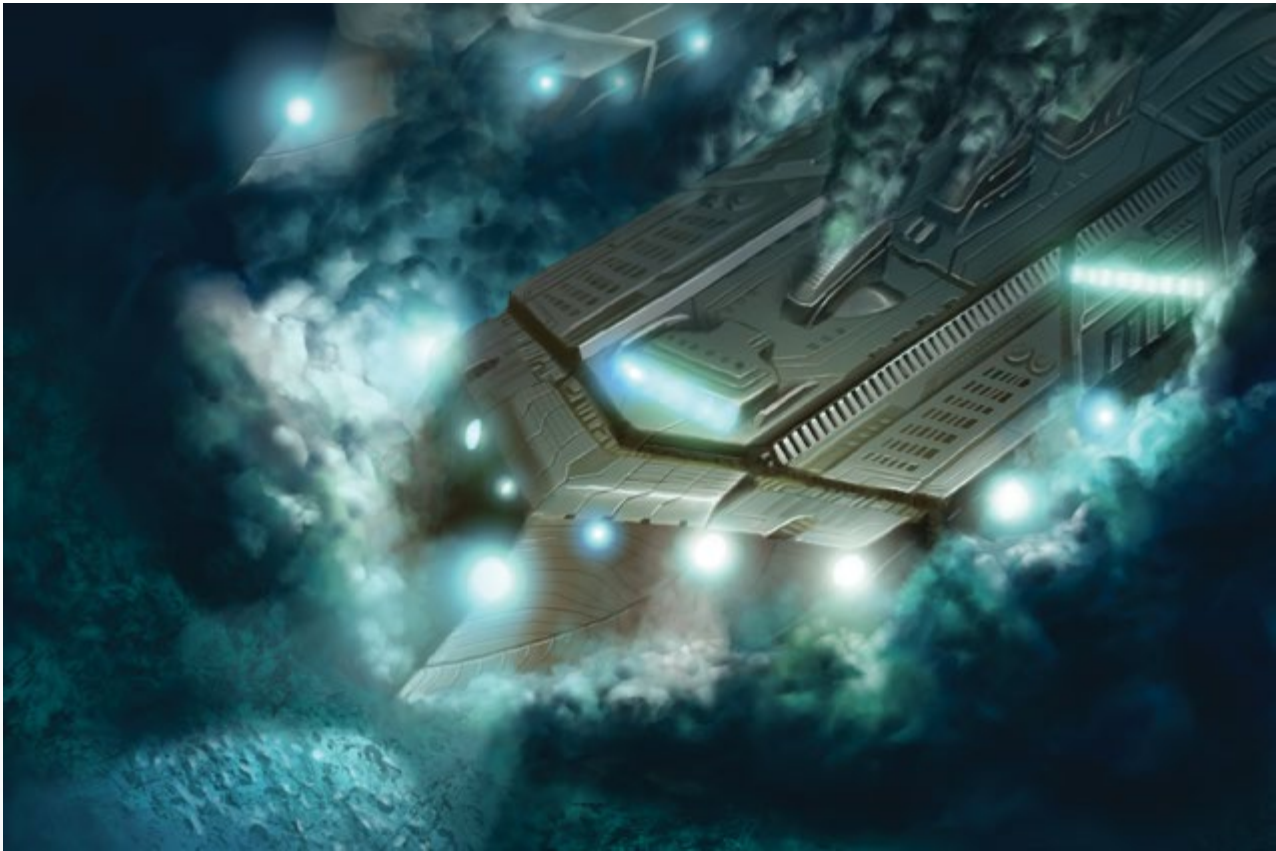
The surface of the sea is a liminal place, where the winds mix with the spray, which smears across the sky. The heaven opens wide above, while the deeps fall to their watery darkneses beneath.

USING SKELIRROTH

The GM can use Skelirroth several ways in a campaign. The following scenarios could be provided as hooks to player characters.

- The fishing waters of a coastal village in the Steadfast have gone from amazingly robust to almost dead. Investigation shows massive underwater tracks where the ocean floor has been scrubbed clean of life. The tracks lead off into deeper waters.
- A substance known as cuinum, a waxy material that serves as the base for many specialized applications by Aeon Priests, was once far more prolific. The last known source is a place called Skelirroth, apparently located somewhere far out to sea.
- The characters’ ocean-going vessel capsizes, and they are rescued by the Skelirroth Fleet.
- The bounty for Vooritwor, a shyster nano on the run from authorities in a few of the larger Steadfast cities, has reached astronomical heights. According to certain rumors, Vooritwor has found a home in a mobile undersea city called Skelirroth.

*To learn to swim, you must first get into the water.
—a truism oft repeated along the Ancuan coast*



of the ocean they pass through. In many cases, the humans also fail to understand that they live within a completely artificial, mobile environment maintained underwater.

DREDGE VEHICLES OF SKELIRROTH

Each dredge vehicle is a three-dimensional labyrinth of metallic corridors, chambers, and rooms, many of which are filled with breathable air. The interior surface area of each vehicle, given its three-dimensional nature, is larger than that of many large cities on dry land. The vehicles are ancient and constantly break down in ways big and small. It's not uncommon to find chambers of a vehicle, or even entire regions, taking on water or completely drowned, and other compartments filled with colonizing fungi. With thousands of malfunctions per day the expected norm, only the legion of **maintenance automatons** keeps the vehicles running; continuous function requires constant repair. Some humans who inhabit these spaces work hand in hand with these automatons, attempting to prioritize the repair schedules to keep a breathable

atmosphere in the primary living quarters, as well as to keep the resource extraction and processing areas running well enough to feed everyone (or almost everyone, during bad times) on each dredge.

Despite the massive resources each vehicle constantly extracts from the seafloor, the amount of usable energy and food produced hovers just under 1 percent of all that's taken from the sea. The rest is lost in gross inefficiencies. Only some of these inefficiencies are due to the constant malfunctions. The original design of the dredges might be the largest contributing factor to the lost energy and resources. The unpopular **Abersheen cult** believes that if just one dredge could be upgraded and optimized to even a fifth of its true potential, it could easily produce enough food and energy to sustain every inhabitant of the entire fleet, as well as provide a massive additional bounty.

A dredge vehicle moves on a series of massive metallic treads and covers a short distance each round, on average. Any creature in the water within short range of a dredge is at risk from the clouds of maintenance automatons, some of which are tasked with keeping the path clear of random

Abersheen cult, page 84

Maintenance automaton: level 2; swims a long distance each round; short-range grapple attack inflicts 4 points of damage on a second failed Speed defense roll, and catches target and pulls it toward bow of nearest dredge; has no sense of self-preservation or fear of being processed



debris and sea life, usually by directing that life toward the bow. A creature within long range of a dredge's primary mouth on the wedgelike bow is subject to being drawn in and consumed. The leading edge of each dredge is about 300 feet (100 m) across. Each round, creatures in range can make Might defense rolls to avoid being drawn in. Those who are drawn into the gnashing teeth of a harvesting intake mouth sustain 15 points of damage each round (a difficulty 6 Might-based task is required to swim free). Creatures that die from this damage are consumed and processed like other raw material within the bowels of the dredge.

GETTING TO THE SKELIRROTH FLEET

The humans inhabiting the dredge vehicles of the fleet have been there for as long as most of them can remember. Some contact with the rest of the ocean and even the surface still exists, usually instigated by outside explorers rather than Skelirroth natives, as most of the latter tend to be insular or at least so caught up in day-to-day survival that the concept of leaving is foreign.

Explorers, invaders, or (as happens somewhat regularly) saboteurs who want to disrupt the forward motion of the fleet are usually brought to the main community center of the vehicle in which they are found, where they await the attention of authorities. Given that most people in the dredges do not speak *the Truth*, explorers might have to show some patience.

Otherwise, any of the means suggested in the introduction might see travelers to the fleet.

SURVIVAL IN THE SKELIRROTH FLEET

The air-filled corridors and chambers within each dredge are fully compatible with the environment on the surface. In any given thirty-day period, there's a real chance that an inhabited compartment or a corridor through which residents must travel becomes flooded with water. Most residents either carry rebreathers or know the closest store that sells them. These artifacts are built and maintained by craftspeople of the fleet (the Fixers' Guild), and though the rebreathers work well enough, like everything in Skelirroth, they are given to malfunctioning.

Besides flooding and the dangers offered by other humans, vermin and rogue automatons are an ever-present danger to fleet residents. As with rebreathers, most Skelirroths either carry weapons, especially the ubiquitous spike jets, or know where to find the nearest armory containing them.

REBREATHER

Level: 1d6

Form: Face mask with small attached synth tank connected by tubes

Effect: Wearer from the surface can breathe underwater like a native creature. The rebreather offers some protection against the high-pressure dangers of moderately deep water, but it is not suited for dives into the Deep Dark.

Depletion: 1 in 1d6 (check per hour of use)

SPIKE JET

Level: 1d6

Form: Small handheld device with tube

Effect: Projects a spike at a target within long range that inflicts damage equal to the artifact level. The spike is poisoned, requiring those struck to succeed on a Might defense roll or take 3 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) for three rounds.

This device is a rapid-fire weapon, and thus can be used with the *Spray* or *Arc Spray* abilities that some characters have, ignoring "rounds of ammo" costs.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

RELAYER

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Small handheld device with harness and projection tube

Effect: Projects a grappling hook through air or water at a solid surface within 300 feet (100 m). The hook is attached to a long, thin piece of synth. The hook's claw connects solidly to the target surface, and in the subsequent round, the user can trigger the synth cord to retract, which pulls her to the target over the course of one round, barring any interruptions.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20



Spray, page 30

Arc Spray, page 31

The Truth, page 133

When rebreathers and other useful items are in need of repair, people of the Skelirroth Fleet rely on the Fixers' Guild. Most of Ombel is affiliated with the Fixers' Guild, one way or another.

MOVING FROM DREDGE TO DREDGE

Most of the movement human natives experience from day to day is between areas in their own dredge. Two cross-dredge societies commonly violate that rule: the **Traders' Guild** and the **Fixers' Guild**. Each group controls airlocked entrances on two or more dredges and keeps a store of rebreathers and relayers in various states of repair. If someone other than a trader or fixer wishes to travel between dredges (or leave the fleet entirely), she can probably find her own means of exit, but most natives usually prefer to contract with one of the guilds to arrange their passage.

Traders' Guild, page 83

Fixers' Guild, page 79

Crowler fungi: level 1+; stationary; bite inflicts 1 point of Speed damage (ignores Armor) for one round per growler level

Eckal: level 1; a swarm of four or more eckals attacks as a level 3 creature inflicting 3 points of damage

Slime: level 1+; moves an immediate distance each round; contact inflicts 3 points of damage and on a second failed Might defense roll, the victim's armor (if any) is destroyed

FLORA AND FAUNA OF SKELIRROTH

The artificial environments within each dredge support prolific infestations of fungi. Instead of attempting to eradicate it, the maintenance automatons route around the most severe instances. Thus, great swaths of contiguous compartments have been wholly abandoned to spore forests. There, all manner of dangerous plants, insects,

rodents, and even rogue automatons reside. Various elements of these spore forests inevitably creep into other areas of a dredge. Likewise, some human populations live wholly within spore forests. These human bands have forgotten that they live within a much larger artificially created vehicle.

The prolific fungi called **growlers** can grow to towering heights in the spore forests, but they can also grow to arm height in the dark recesses of nearly any other compartment. Growlers have mushroom heads reminiscent of a snarling beast and lash out with a bite that injects poisonous spores.

Tiny red fishlike creatures called **eckals** can swim through flooded compartments and move down dry corridors. Eckals often move in swarms and are not shy about taking a nip out of passing residents.

Emerald-tinged motile **slimes** that hunt other vermin by dropping over them are also prolific. Depending on its age and size, a slime can range from a stinging nuisance to a truly horrific threat.

Other creatures are more dangerous, including the many human bands and tribes that inhabit each craft. Although many tribes work to keep the dredge active



LANGUAGE OF THE FLEET

The inhabitants of each dredge speak their own language, and in a few cases, those languages are further splintered into dialects based on specific communities within a particular dredge. Two trade languages vie for dominance: Mearam and Naush. The best traders know both, as well as a selection of the most important dredge languages, which includes the eponymous Skelirroth tongue.

Fragments of **the Truth** can be discerned in Zyeburn, which strongly suggests that the fleet had contact in the past with humans who spread across the Steadfast and the Beyond. Someone who speaks the Truth can communicate basic concepts to a Zyeburn resident, but complex and nuanced speech isn't possible without greater study.

and in repair, other groups are out only for themselves and effectively operate like bandits.

The amphibian **heeldra** also infest the fleet, both within the hulls of the vehicles and on the surface. Natives of all sorts, whether normally allies or not, join together to resist heeldra incursions. Mothers frighten their children with stories of the heeldra, and with good reason.

Humans traveling between each dredge sometimes deal with heeldra and rogue automatons. But far more often, they must watch for **zybriils**, the great sharklike beasts that follow in the wake of each dredge, catching the prey flushed from their homes before a dredge trundles over them.

PRODUCE OF SKELIRROTH

Though highly inefficient, the vats that collect the automatically processed resources scraped from the seafloor create important goods. Without this produce, the humans inhabiting the dredge interiors would die. Most produce is expelled from vats or taps. The most important forms of produce include the following.

Farrac: Food vats emit processed foodstuffs in the form of nutritious bricks of semi-solid gel called "farrac." Outsiders who taste the processed food of the fleet

have a hard time describing farrac, or even developing a taste for the substance, but the dredge natives love a good farrac pudding and have thousands more recipes for preparing it.

Pure: Most natives refer to clean, non-salt water as "pure." Pure is a commodity among the dredges. The taps that produce it are guarded even more closely than the food vats.

Arak: The taps that produce arak look similar to those that expel pure. However, arak is alcoholic, prized both by the Fixers' Guild and by those who want to drink it for the state of inebriation that results.

Saya: Saya vats produce reams of variously colored synth fabrics, from which objects and clothing can be fashioned.

Wire: Coils of metallic wire of a variety of gauges extrude from these taplike protuberances.

Tuc: This grey film, sticky on one side, is used for fixing and crafting in equal measure. The Fixers' Guild treasures tuc even more than wire.

Kandu: Hard, bright red, and sweet to suck on, kandu is given to those who suffer from sickness. Often, it helps to clear up the issue. (Kandu provides an asset to any task related to healing or treating disease.)

SKELIRROTH DREDGE

The largest dredge and the one for which the entire fleet is named, the Skelirroth boasts a total human population of some 30,000 residents, distributed across various precincts. The Skelirroth dredge is in better repair than the others, likely because it is home to the Fixers' Guild. Being in better repair, the farrac vats produce slightly more sustenance than the population requires. This excess gives the Skelirroth dredge a valuable good for trade in return for the **cuinum** produced in small quantities by other dredges. Though fixers value cuinum as an aid in their repairs and crafting, most people desire it for its euphoric qualities.

OMBEL

The precinct of Ombel is located in the crown of the Skelirroth dredge in a wide compartment with several associated side chambers. The ceiling of the main compartment is a dome of transparent synth, giving the Ombel natives a few of



The Truth, page 133

Heeldran, page 140

Jybril, page 141

Cuinum, page 84

Farrac, page 81

Ahrin: level 5; tasks related to deception, politics, and dredge geography as level 7; Armor 1

the exterior that few other dredge natives enjoy. When the Skelirroth Fleet trundles into the Shallows, sometimes the seafloor rises so dramatically that the dredge's upper portions emerge from the water into the air, which from the exterior resembles a massive whale breaching the sea's surface. Those under Ombel's dome can see the sky and, on at least one celebrated occasion, the mystical "dry land" described in children's stories.

Ombel supports just over two thousand humans, most of whom live in a family-claimed side chamber. The central compartment serves as a common area, though a large portion of it is under the dominion of the Fixers' Guild, giving it the look of a busy junkyard to the unpracticed eye. Most days, travelers from other parts of the dredge (and even other dredges) are visiting Ombel looking for help with a particular problem, great or small.

Leasel is a Fixers' Guild grandmaster who wears a long gown covered in pockets filled with tools. She specializes in taking the bodies of defunct maintenance automatons and creating pets, servants, and pieces of animate art from them. A few times she has actually repaired a maintenance automaton, but given that the Iskelorm dredge is essentially devoted to repairing and producing the automatons, neither she nor the other fixers feel much pressure to take that on themselves. Leasel lost her family to a plague of slimes, so she keeps several **repurposed automatons** as pets and companions, each named for a missing member of her original family.

Raychard, a human with piercing blue eyes and short black hair, is responsible for monitoring and maintaining the Januar Door, the nearby airlocked entrance to Ombel. Raychard has also been spreading the story that he saw a giant flying creature through the viewing dome the last time the Skelirroth dredge partly surfaced. What's more, he says, people were riding the beast. Now Raychard wants to mount an expedition to the exterior surface and go looking for such a beast for himself, because he wants to fly.

NYLAD

The precinct of Nylad is a series of compartments located in conjunction with one of the sets of food vats that

produces **farrac**. Recently, Nylad has been disturbed by dissident residents called the Farrac Brigade. This group, led by a man named **Ahrin**, is trying to disrupt food distribution from the vats, claiming that the Traders' Guild salvage share isn't in the best interests of the Skelirroth dredge and especially not in Nylad's best interests. The Farrac Brigade says that the oddities, shins, and cuinum flakes traders provide in return for their vat salvage rights are a farce. Though only a few of Ahrin's closest lieutenants know it, the food salvage claim is a smokescreen under which he intends to build up a power base. His ultimate goal is to take control of the Skelirroth dredge and then the entire fleet.

Given that the Skelirroth Fleet runs almost entirely autonomously in the face of constant tampering by humans trying to gain control, Ahrin's goals might seem foolish. However, he believes that he finally has a lead on where the fabled Command and Control Room lies. It's not on the Skelirroth at all, as most assume given that vehicle's large size. Instead, Ahrin believes it lies in a protected, secret chamber on the Iskelorm dredge.

ZYEBURN DREDGE

Only about four-fifths the size of the Skelirroth dredge, the Zyeburn is still a massive vehicle that would crush nearly any surface community it rolled across were it ever to come ashore. Thankfully, it remains in lockstep with the rest of the fleet, trundling across the seafloor, sucking in enormous quantities of deep sea life while managing to return very little. The Zyeburn dredge is home to about 20,000 people distributed across various precincts. The Zyeburn is in adequate repair, though one large interior section has been completely lost to a fungi forest. The food vats and other resource ports provide virtually nothing, but the fungi forests produce a resin called cuinum that has become a valuable trade good.

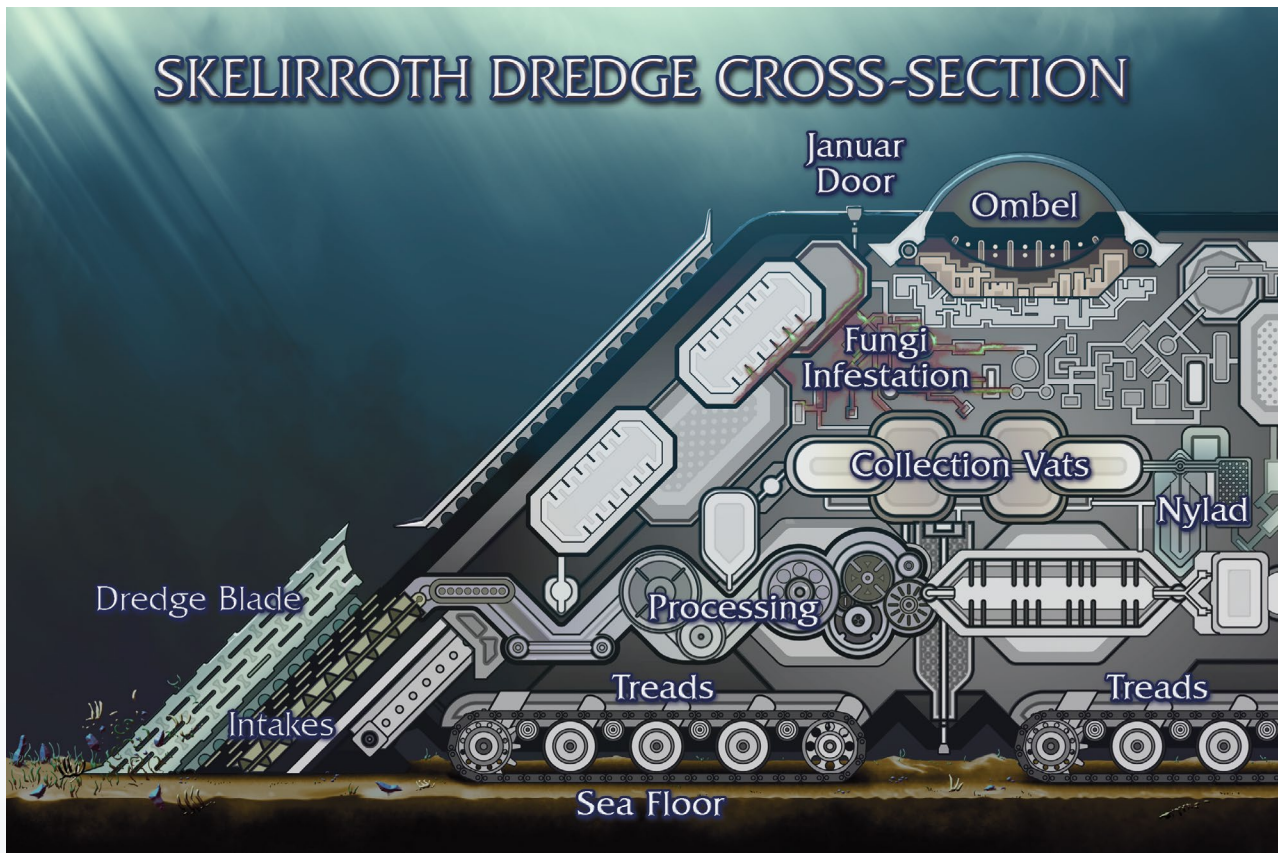
TRADE TOWN

Located in a precinct on the high starboard side of the dredge, Trade Town is the primary headquarters for the Traders' Guild that operates throughout the fleet and, very occasionally, to areas far beyond. Trade

Leasel: level 3; tasks related to the numenera as level 7; has a few random cyphers

Repurposed automaton: level 1; pleasant social interaction as level 4

Raychard: level 2; tasks related to the numenera as level 5; has one random cypher



Town contains about half of Zyeburn's population and is made up of traders, merchants, and the hunters who brave the interior to gather cuinum.

Trade Town has a five-tiered market in an immense but narrow open compartment. Within the many subcompartments—reachable by ladders, pulley systems, rickety stairs, and the occasional flier—a cornucopia of weird, hard-to-find, surprising, and not-immediately-identifiable goods can be purchased. Sale items include puddings, cuinum flakes, fungi dyes, crunchy vermin coated in farrac glaze, oddities of all sorts, and cyphers. Barter and shins are both acceptable, and haggling is the norm.

TRADERS' GUILD

Members of the Traders' Guild, who make up only about five percent of the population, get around the market levels via ambulatory vine mounts called **leaflings**. These motile plants, snakelike in their movements, stretch about 35 feet (10 m) and can transfer traders and their chests with ease. Leaflings were cultivated from more aggressive versions found in the fungi forest that rots in Zyeburn's core.

The Traders' Guild keeps several compartments solely for themselves at the top of the market. These compartments lead to a series of warehouse chambers where all manner of tradable goods are stored, some of which are especially valuable and require guards. Monitored passages lead from the guild house to no fewer than four airlocked exits to the dredge, all of which are under direct guild control.

The current Lead Trader is **Tamrin Geran**, a man never seen without a black scarf covering the lower half of his face. Tamrin has headed successful trading expeditions to other locations beyond the fleet, including down to **Minifera**. In fact, he is a **naiadapt**, and keeps **dyremmi**-bred cyphers in reserve should he ever need to manifest an ability to directly adapt to the ocean through which the dredge fleet passes. Otherwise, Tamrin is a short man with bands of strange "scaled" flesh swirling over his skin (marking him as a naiadapt to those who know) who rules the guild with an uncompromising and merciless business sense. He's not amoral, but he would never, ever give away something for free that people would trade for.

Tamrin Geran: level 6, tasks related to trade and persuasion as level 7; can use two random active dyremmi abilities

Minifera, page 96

Naiadapt, page 101

Dyremmi, page 97

Leafling: level 4; Speed defense as level 3 due to size; reacts like loyal pet to Traders' Guild owner

ABERSHEEN CULT

Besides the Traders' Guild, Trade Town is home to the Abersheen "cult," as the traders refer to it. The cult teaches that the dredges are dying and have been for longer than humans have inhabited them. The cult believes that the Skelirroth Fleet once served a higher purpose that has been lost, and more important, in their current state, the dredges are wasting the bounty of the sea. The Traders' Guild does not appreciate this teaching because they like the status quo just fine. If every dredge could provide everything it needed for itself, who would trade and support the guild?

The Abersheen are led by a former Fixers' Guild grandmaster from the Skelirroth dredge who everyone simply calls the **Priestess**. The Priestess always appears fully covered in clerical robes dyed bright red (she hides a skin condition called **hemwarts**). She leads spiritual studies and services in a small pod that features a wide porthole looking directly out into the ocean, where other members of the fleet are visible. This spectacle gives weight to her sermons. The Priestess believes that if the mythical Command and Control Room could be found, the original purpose of the fleet would be revealed, and it could be returned to its true purpose. The Priestess has unwillingly made an alliance with **Ahrin**, the head of the Farrac Brigade, on the Skelirroth dredge. She suspects that his true motives may not be what he claims, but for now, they both want to find and access the same mythical place.

FUNGI FOREST

A huge swath of compartments has been completely invaded, overgrown, and hollowed out by an uncontrolled fungi environment for which all the lesser versions are named; this is *the* Fungi Forest. Only the skeleton of the former separate compartments remains in this mostly contiguous area that is more jungle than forest. Every so often, a brave maintenance automaton penetrates the interior to apply herbicides. These automatons are usually quickly dismantled by the predator fungi and plants that thrive in the humid environment. In fact, it's possible that some of the processed resources the dredge was originally gathering have been organically rerouted and now feed the Fungi

Forest directly. Little else would explain the profundity and exuberance of the fungi and plant life found here.

Several tiny human tribes inhabit the Fungi Forest. For the most part, the tribes have lost their ancestors' knowledge that they live within a traveling undersea dredge vehicle. Some tribes are warlike while others are peaceful, and which is which seems to change each time another Traders' Guild expedition (chiefly comprised of **cuinum** hunters) visits the forest. Finding local guides through the ever-changing outer forest is vital, because all the plants and fungi possess some ability to move. Still, many treasures can be gathered by those willing to brave the spores and predatory plants. The most dangerous of the latter is the **spirril**, which seems to especially delight in killing humans.

The Priestess: level 4, Speed defense as level 2 due to **hemwarts**, intimidation tasks as level 6 due to **hemwarts**; Armor 2 due to **hemwarts**

Spirril, page 152

Ahrin, page 82

Farrac, page 81

TREASURES OF THE FUNGI FOREST

Cuinum: This waxy material is resin produced by rare treelike pods in the deepest portions of the Fungi Forest. The resin has an uncanny ability to unlock the minds of those who take it, providing an asset to any Intellect-based task. In larger doses, it provides a sense of euphoria that lasts for several hours, which washes out any Intellect gains.

Hemwart Bark: This fungal growth can be gathered from certain trees. If a person's skin is lathered with sufficient moisturizing gel, the hemwart fungi can be induced to invade it, which radically toughens the dermal layer. This gives the skin an unappealing and diseased facade, increasing the difficulty of a subject's Speed defense and all interaction rolls by two steps, but providing +2 to Armor. This condition is usually called "hemwarts," and most people can stand it for no more than a few months, after which antifungal treatments can be used to shed the growths.

Sporelin: A green-colored spore provides a hot, sweet spice that is a perfect tangy flavoring for **farrac**, and thus it is highly valued across the Skelirroth Fleet.



Fanciful stories are told along the creaking corridors of the dredges about the beginning. Stories of a people with arms like octopi who built the fleet in ages long past, so long ago that the only thing that remains of them is legend. Legend, and a single word: Calram. That, and a promise that one day, when the dredges are full, the builders will return.

ISKELOM DREDGE

Humans don't live on the Iskelorm dredge, though it is sometimes visited by embassies from the Fixers' Guild who want to learn its secrets. Other human groups in the fleet who believe that Iskelorm holds the secret to understanding and controlling the entire set of massive vehicles also show up. Iskelorm makes up for its lack of humans with hundreds of thousands of automatons. The automatons are constantly produced within the dredge in hundreds of compartments that resemble small factories, many of which are filled with water and no fit place for a human. Automatons fresh from the factories are usually expelled from Iskelorm to take up repair duties on other dredges, or on Iskelorm itself. Who decides where each automaton goes is unclear, but it might simply come about in the same way that social insects accomplish larger goals—through emergent behavior.

VOORITWOR'S REALM

A nano from the surface is the only human who has successfully made a home on the Iskelorm dredge, and that's due to his ability to talk with machines. A hunched man with silver hair, **Vooritwor** claims a compartment near the rear of the dredge. His space is decorated with all manner of oddities and a few artifacts scraped from the seafloor that otherwise would have been consumed and converted by the dredge into spare automaton parts. The nano sometimes allows Fixers' Guild ambassadors into his space for brief consultations, but he never admits members of the Traders' Guild, who he fears will learn that he's on the run from Aeon Priests from the surface and rat him out. For the same reason, Vooritwor is paranoid of all visitors to the Skelirroth Fleet, seeing them as possible Aeon Priest spies. Unless the nano can be convinced to trust visitors to his realm, they often end up

being ejected into the surrounding ocean minus any adaptive gear.

Vooritwor doesn't believe there is a Command and Control Room because he can talk to the automatons, and they tell him that none exists. That said, he is willing to pretend to believe, if only to lead on those who do. This technique has proved useful for herding those who get on his bad side (or those who he believes are spies) to their deaths.

COMMAND AND CONTROL ROOM

The fabled room does exist, but all knowledge of it has been programmatically removed from the minds of every automaton that maintains and preserves the Skelirroth Fleet. The only way to find the chamber is by intensive exploration (which has so far been stymied by the automatons, who usually expel humans they find aboard Iskelorm), posing a particularly lucky question to the **datasphere**, or using one of a handful of keys that point the way to the room. Each key resembles a flat metallic disk that, if dropped or thrown anywhere in the world, always lands closer to the Command and Control Room. If dropped in water, a key moves an immediate distance each round toward the room. Those who have previously stumbled upon a key on the surface haven't discovered any greater significance than an oddity that tends to always fall one way.

Behind a level 7 bulkhead, the Command and Control Room is a chamber of cracked display screens, exposed synth cables, and shin-studded control surfaces. Built-in chairs that could comfortably fit a large human frame are situated before many of the control surfaces. The room's central area is taken up by a sealed aquarium from which most of the synth cables originate, each snaking to one or more control surfaces. The aquarium is circular and apparently filled with green, stagnant water



Search Term:
emergent behavior



Datasphere, page 12

Vooritwor: *level 6, all tasks that involve the numenera (including attacks with energy weapons and effects) as level 7; Armor 4; can command six level 5 automatons at once*



Defense automaton: level 4; Armor 2; short-range electrical attack inflicts 4 points of damage and stuns target for one round, causing it to lose its next turn

that is opaque. The aquarium could be unsealed with a difficulty 5 Intellect task by someone trained in the numenera, or with a difficulty 5 Might task by someone using a heavy smashing implement. Inside is a mass of water and jellied brain material.

Though long dead, the mass has pickled, which explains its preservation. Opening the aquarium (or trying and failing some other major task within the chamber) summons five spidery defense automatons.

SKELIRROTH FLEET HEARSAY

Hunting Expedition: A group of dry land hunters, known for their exploits in taking down game of unusual size and ferocity, has learned of massive sea beasts called “skelirroth” that sometimes partly emerge from the waters along the coast. They have mounted an expedition in hopes of taking one of these mighty beasts as a trophy the next time it breaches the surface.

Lost Trader: A member of the Traders’ Guild named Dramben Kol left the fleet to find the mythical “dry land people” in an effort to open trade. Dramben did not receive the blessing of the Traders’ Guild for his outing, and the organization is jealous of its monopoly. The guild has sent a retrieval team of specialists to bring Dramben back to the fleet, dead or alive.

Breakdown: The third largest human-inhabited dredge in the Skelirroth Fleet (the Berambus) is falling farther and farther behind the rest, and is leaking toxic sludge into the surrounding water and into interior compartments where people dwell. Unless something can be done to prioritize the maintenance automatons’ activity, it seems likely that the dredge and everyone aboard it will be lost.

Ghost Dredge: Sometimes fleet humans swear they see a glimpse of a sixth dredge vehicle following the track of the

first five. No sixth dredge has ever been part of the fleet—at least, not as long as humans have inhabited the vehicles—so these sightings are attributed to a “ghost dredge” and put down as hallucinations and children’s tales.

THE WEIRD OF THE SKELIRROTH FLEET

Phantom Winds: Winds blow in the dredge compartments, usually smelling of oil or fungi. But sometimes, the sound of something scratching and tearing is heard just under the wind’s whine. When those sounds are heard, the smell of blood and rotting meat wafts with the wind, and residents hide in their compartments.

Knocking: According to no particular schedule, dredge natives sometimes hear the sound of hard knocking, as if someone standing on just the other side of a compartment wall is pounding on it with a metallic tool. No human or automaton is ever found upon investigation, but if someone knocks back, the pounding immediately ceases.

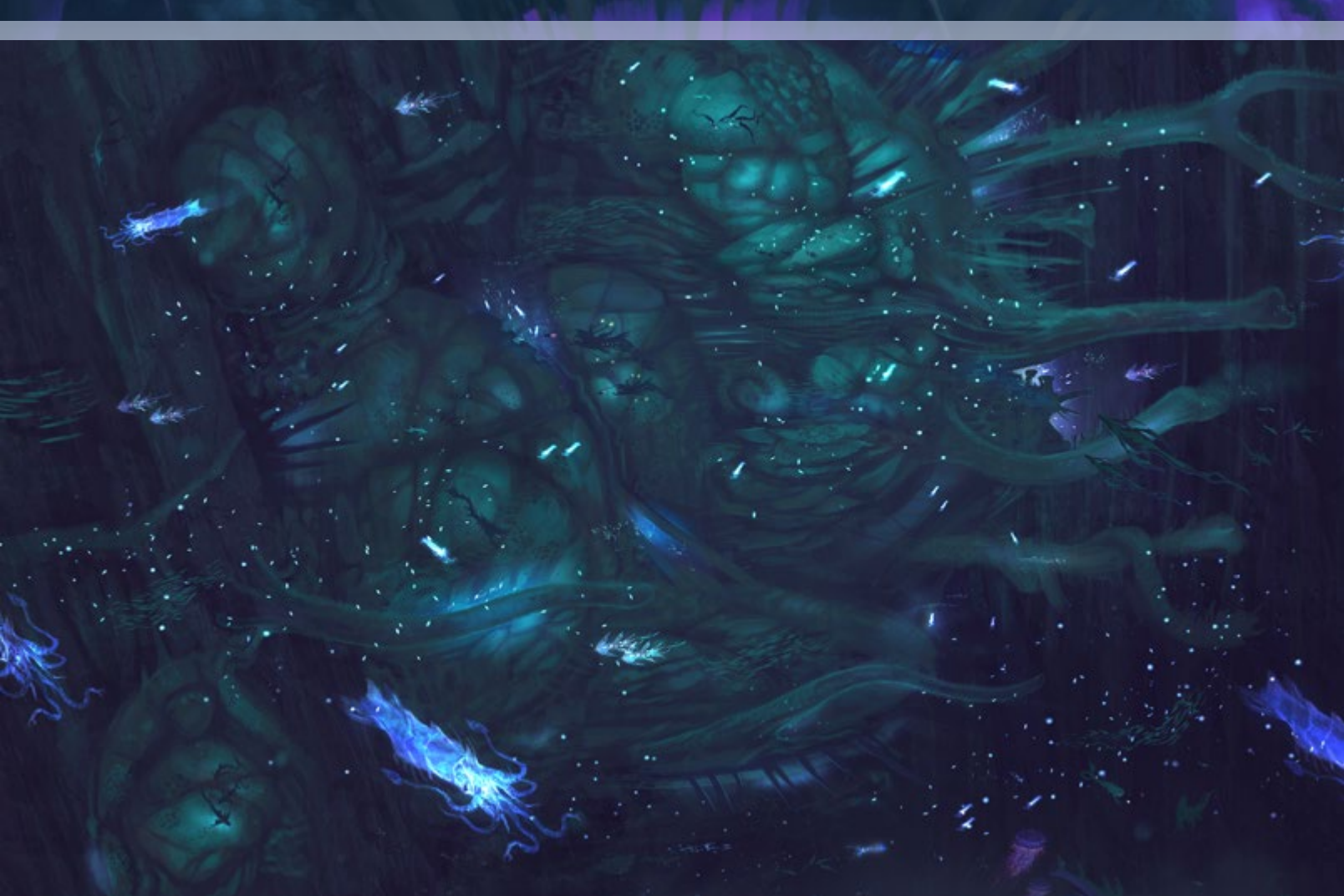
New Produce: In addition to the farrac, kandu, tuc, and many other items of produce the vats and taps expel, new produce is sometimes discovered. Recently, a vat on the third largest human-inhabited dredge (the Berambus) began expelling weird objects that can be used like cyphers with seemingly random abilities.



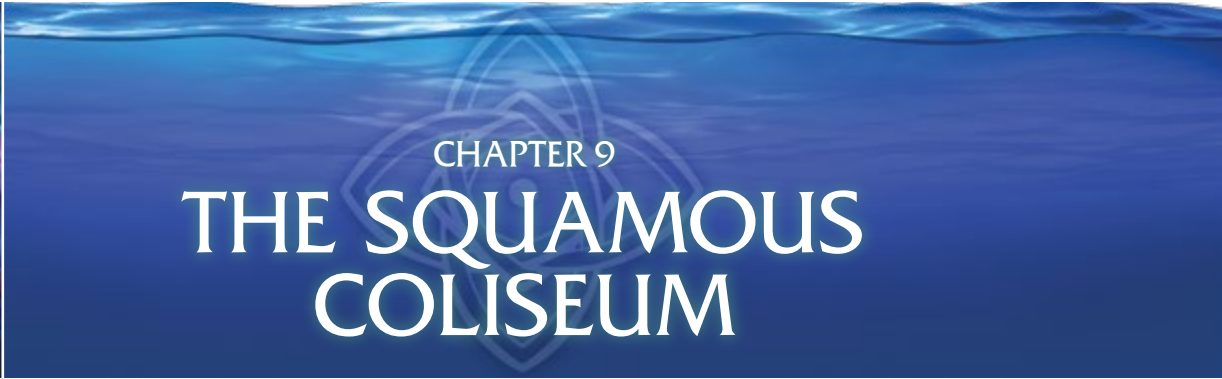
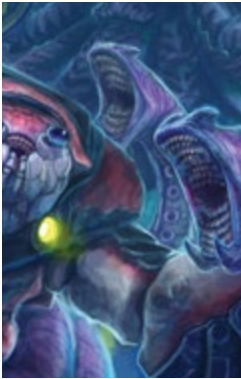
A few of the dredges contain smaller craft nestled like young ones in protective chambers. They are noisy, tiny, and smelly. But when they are found, they are treasured by the humans infesting the fleet, because they might offer the chance to escape the Skelirroth Fleet forever.

PART 3:

THE UNFATHOMABLE DEPTHS



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CHAPTER 9

THE SQUAMOUS COLISEUM

The dread domain of King Faralousus is an underwater city called Ahmas, home to what would seem, at first, to be a wide variety of creatures of different species—*hundreds* of different species. However, this is not

the case. Most of the subjects, as well as the king himself, are of human origin, the descendants of horrifically altered kidnapping victims.

Squamous: covered with or characterized by scales

USING THE SQUAMOUS COLISEUM

The GM can incorporate the Squamous Coliseum into a campaign by sending surface-dwelling player characters deep underwater to retrieve an important device from the king's agents or the Hushed Moh. (The item is probably some kind of biologically modifying concoction, for which both groups are well known.) The domain is a dangerous place, but it's relatively easy to reach and operate within, as it is filled with breathable air and adjusted for surface dwellers.

Another reason to go might involve history. If the PCs need to track down what happened to certain people in [Ancuan](#) and they trace the history back, they'll find old records mentioning many mysterious disappearances. An extraneous source, like the [datasphere](#) or another sophisticated source of information, might reveal that the people were taken to Ahmas.

Last, Ahmas might be a place of general exploration with little specific reason to go there. For example, the PCs might find an ancient map or records suggesting that a prior-world complex lies in a specific underwater location, worthy of investigation. Or perhaps they're just wandering the invisible corridors and come upon a strange structure...

GM SUMMARY

Ahmas is an air-filled, pressurized city deep underwater, centered around a huge arena called the Squamous Coliseum. In this "might makes right" society, the people give all power and wealth to the strongest among them. The king's agents, in fact, attempt to isolate the genetic material of the champions of the Coliseum to build ever-greater warriors. Meanwhile, a secretive group called the Hushed Moh attempts to concoct elixirs to boost the physical characteristics of the weak so they can better survive the harsh community.

GETTING TO THE SQUAMOUS COLISEUM

The underwater city of Ahmas lies hundreds of miles from any significant landmasses and almost 2 miles (3 km) below the surface in a very deep portion of the [Deep Dark](#).

A pathway through the [invisible corridors](#) leads directly to Ahmas, although the route is somewhat circuitous. From the nearest surface access, the path is about 9 miles (14 km) long.

Otherwise, travel by vehicle, like a [submerge](#), is the only likely means of getting to the coliseum. Unless the characters take special precautions, the pressure outside the city would crush them, assuming they don't freeze to death first.



[Ancuan](#), page 166

[Datasphere](#), page 12

[Deep Dark](#), page 9

[Invisible corridors](#), page 12

[Submerge](#), page 11

The underwater structure of Ahmas, in which the coliseum lies, is filled with air and is fully pressurized to be comfortable to land dwellers. Numerous airlocks allow for a comfortable and quick transition to and from the watery environment around the city.



THE BLESSED AHMAN

The tale told in Ahmas goes like this: more than 350 years ago, creatures haunted the coastline of Ancuan, stealing sailors from ships, fisherfolk, and those dwelling near the sea, dragging them to strange laboratories deep beneath the waves. These victims, now collectively called the Blessed Ahman, were fused with the stuff of sea creatures and scaly things for which humans had—and still have—no names.

Inexplicably, the beings that took the Blessed Ahman simply disappeared one day. (A few people contend that the victims rose up in revolt and destroyed their captors, but this seems fanciful and revisionist.) Unwilling to return to their homes, most of the Blessed Ahman made new homes in the laboratories in which their torments occurred. Today, this place is called Ahmas.

A few generations later, the descendants of the Blessed Ahman saw that the alterations originally introduced had made their structure and nature fluid at best and unstable at worst. Many were born with untenable mutations and unsustainable forms. A few, however, bore ever-greater strength and adaptations. More often

than not, the might of these few bred true. Powerful traits were passed down to their children. As is so often the way, the weak were abandoned to the sea, and the strongest ruled over the rest.

The people of Ahmas wanted to discover the greatest of these traits in order to pass them along to their offspring and to ensure that their children and grandchildren would prosper. However, at some point they determined that the best way to do so was through a test of strength and mettle. They cleared out the central chamber of their new home to create a place where these contests could be held, and the Squamous Coliseum was born. What started as a variety of tests of strength, endurance, and ability devolved quickly into pure combat. For what better way to prove one's superiority than to do it in such a straightforward manner?

Thus, in the grand tradition of his predecessors, King Faralousus forces his people to pit their strength and abilities against one another to find and isolate the greatest traits they might bear. Champions of these fights earn wealth and positions of power and influence. The king's learned agents also capture samples of the blood and flesh so that the traits can be isolated and replicated.

"Ahman" is a word from a very old language spoken in a few small regions in Ancuan that means, roughly translated, "unwilling saint/savior."



Most surface dwellers would say the government of Ahmas is more like a dangerous criminal gang with an absolute (and ruthless) ruler rather than a viable system of law and order.

LIFE IN AHMAS

Ahmas is a functioning city of almost 40,000 individuals. Life there bears little resemblance to life in a surface city. About 70 percent of the population have little purpose or drive. About 29 percent are worked like slaves. The remaining 1 percent command nearly absolute power. The city in which they all live is a strange place of ancient provenance, but they have dwelled there now for many generations and think of it simply as home.

KING FARALOUSUS

The role of monarch of the city is not hereditary except in the sense that the offspring of extremely mighty individuals tend to be extremely mighty themselves. King Faralousus is not the son of the prior ruler, but instead the scion of a powerful champion of the coliseum fights. He slew the previous monarch, proving his right to the throne. The real truth is that although Faralousus is powerful, he is probably not the most powerful individual in Ahmas. However, those mightier than him genuinely like Faralousus and his rule. They benefit from it. He ensures that the life of the coliseum's champions includes every comfort and freedom he can afford, almost as if they were already rulers of the city without having to challenge him.

Faralousus has a fat, bloated body covered in silvery scales. Only fools would mistake this bulk for weakness, as he carries his weight with commensurate muscle and knows how to use his mass to his advantage. He wears a golden crown and wields a long coral-adorned sword of unknown metal that serves as a symbol of office and a massive weapon that is deadly in his hands. Unbeknownst to most (but suspected by many), Faralousus has strange fluted organs near his gills that can puff out an invisible gas at a single target in immediate range. Creatures failing an Intellect defense roll become extremely susceptible to suggestion for one round,

which the king immediately takes advantage of, issuing a command to the victim that will be obeyed for up to one minute. He's smart enough to use this ability sparingly and subtly in most cases, so that his friends and foes alike are not prepared for it.

The king is nothing if not ambitious. Secretly, he hopes that, through combat in the coliseum and his sages' work on the biological material from the champions, he will gain the means to breed a powerful (and easily controlled) army. He knows of other undersea ocea like **Onisteles** and **Tshannng** and would be interested in expanding his domain. Even the surface, he thinks, could and in fact should bow to his will.

THE KING'S AGENTS

The king has two distinct groups of agents. The first are his **enforcers**, who carry out his edicts. This makes them keepers of law and order, but in Ahmas, there are few laws beyond the word of the king. In this might-makes-right community, even theft and murder are not illegal. If you're able to take something, it's yours. Of course, you have to be able to survive the attempt and be willing to risk the later retribution.

The king's enforcers are mostly hulking brutes, although one out of ten is smaller and more wiry. These latter **skulkers** are spies who crawl about in the nooks and crannies of the city and keep tabs on the populace, keeping abreast of all activity. They are still considered enforcers, however, and live with their larger, stronger comrades.

All enforcers wear dark green sashes studded with pearls of varying number. They aren't supposed to say what the pearls represent, but most people have figured out that they represent the number of foes they've killed as part of their job. Most enforcers wield two-handed clubs and ranged weapons that function like **buzzers**.

The second group of the king's agents are his so-called **sages**. Intelligent and learned

Onisteles, page 116

Tshannng, page 112

King Faralousus: level 6, perception as level 7; health 28; Armor 3; wields a level 3 artifact greatsword (Depletion: —) that deals 8 points of damage and grants an asset to any attack made with it; produces a gas of suggestibility that he can use on one target in immediate range as an action

King's enforcer: level 4; health 22; Armor 2; equipped with ranged and melee weapons that inflict 5 points of damage

Skulker: level 4, stealth as level 6, Speed defense as level 5; equipped with ranged and melee weapons



Buzzer, page 79

King's sage: level 3, numenera-related tasks as level 5; Armor 1

Not surprisingly, the king's sages hate the Hushed Moh and seek to root them out. Any member or suspected member caught by the sages suffers greatly at their hands.

in the ways of the numenera—particularly as it applies to biology—these sages study the makeup of the winners of coliseum battles and attempt to isolate the material in their blood and flesh to potentially replicate them.

The king's sages have an extensive collection of biological samples taken from various individuals (mostly battle champions). They have devised injections and other processes to attempt to instill beneficial traits in others, but they have had nowhere near the degree of success achieved by the secretive cabal known as the Hushed Moh, who are entirely unaffiliated with the Faralousus regime.

In addition to these duties, the sages supervise the maintenance of the city's systems and structures, although the self-sustaining systems almost never need upkeep of any kind, and most of the significant structures have self-repairing capabilities.

The sages also use their knowledge of chemistry and other sciences to create a variety of torture devices to extract information from prisoners brought to them by the enforcers. They are working on a means of rewriting memory and thought to recondition subversives and criminals.

THE PEOPLE OF AHMAS

The main characteristic of the people of Ahmas is a varied appearance—each is unique in form. However, the commonality that unites them is a general humanoid countenance (more or less) with piscine, crustacean, or cephalopod traits, or a combination of two or even all three.

The **weak citizens**—if they are tolerated to live—are essentially slaves, forced to do all menial tasks required of them. Almost all of those with gills and the ability to survive the water pressure are food gatherers, herded to the lesser depths (the **Gloaming**) where more fish and plants can be found. They use enormous shock-nets designed by the king's sages to snare fantastically huge catches at once, and sometimes even trap and subdue very large sea creatures. A few of the king's enforcers accompany them to ensure that they work hard and fast, but also to protect them—or, more appropriately, the food they gather—from danger.

The weak who are unable to survive unprotected in the depths serve the strong

by cleaning, fetching, toting, or performing other tasks. They are not truly slaves because they have no owners. They simply serve all who are stronger than they are.

The **strong citizens**, unless they serve the king directly as his agents, do little that is productive. They brawl and squabble, constantly vying for positions of power, but almost none truly achieve much. It is a life only slightly better than that of the weak. A few particularly strong individuals carve out a small domain of influence, but there is still little wealth or comfort to be had. This system is designed as an incentive to aspire to greater heights, and there lies the path to the coliseum.

Ahmas has few laws other than “might makes right.” The monarch's word is supreme, and he can have anyone slain with but a word or gesture. (And if the person in question is tough enough to survive an encounter with the king's enforcers, that's fine, for again, might makes right.) When something isn't just being taken, it is traded. They use no currency in Ahmas and would scoff at an offering of worthless shins from the surface.

The people of Ahmas speak their own idiosyncratic tongue, although about one in five speaks a little of **the Truth**.

There are no diving suits or underwater survival gear in Ahmas unless they are brought from the outside. Likewise, the people here have almost no underwater craft of their own, but visitors from other ocea sometimes bring them. If a citizen has the ability to leave the city and breathe underwater, fine. If not, he is considered too weak to do so.

GENERAL LAYOUT OF THE CITY

Ahmas is a strange mixture of tiny, winding corridors and vertical shafts (in some cases, just crawlspaces) connecting cavernous chambers. The city structure itself is a sprawling, almost weblike complex of domes, cubes, and other shapes on the ocean floor. These are connected by tunnels that are either underground or on the floor. Everything is made of level 9 materials that are unknown to the inhabitants or visitors, and much of it (particularly the outer walls) self-repairs so that if somehow pierced, it closes like a healing wound in short order. This means that remodeling is out of the question.

Typical strong citizen:
level 3; Armor 1

Perhaps ironically, although the people of Ahmas don't believe in using devices to survive outside the city, they do not have similar feelings about the numenera in general. Weapons or defenses in particular are valued.

The Truth, page 133

Typical weak citizen:
level 2

Gloaming, page 9

The numenera in Ahmas: *The original builders of what is now the city of Ahmas left behind various devices and technology, but it has long since been looted. Thus, most available cyphers and artifacts are in the hands of the strongest members of society. Rumor has it that the king's sages have storehouses of technology, much of which they are still trying to understand. Likewise, the Hushed Moh have stockpiled what numenera they can get their hands on.*

Spined Captor: *level 7; Armor 3; struck victims who fail a second Speed defense roll are caught in its spiny rolls and suffer 7 points of damage each round until they get free; any creature damaged by a spine must make a Might defense roll or be paralyzed and unable to physically act for one round*

Tentacled Gueryon: *level 7, Speed defense as level 6 due to size; health 32; attacks all foes in short range as a single action*

Crastalan: *level 8, Speed defense as level 6 due to size and speed, level 9 for the strength of its poison; health 40; Armor 5; can attack a foe at short range with spiked tentacle that is also poisoned, inflicting 5 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) if a Might defense roll fails*

Typical member of the slashing masses: *level 4; Armor 1; ranged and melee weapons*

The interior of Ahmas was clearly not designed by or for humans. There are no stairs or elevators connecting levels vertically, so the inhabitants have had to construct seaweed rope ladders to ascend or descend. Some accessways are so small that one must crawl through them, while other doorways or corridors can accommodate twenty people walking abreast.

Most people live in the corridors, often in niches or in substructure levels that amount to being lower corridors separated by metal grillwork. In some places with high ceilings, people use seaweed rope to build hammocks or whole hanging structures.

The larger chambers are mostly used for markets, storage, and the domains of the strong. These are sometimes subdivided by curtains or woven rope walls, floors, and ceilings. The king has a chamber so large that it serves not only as his palace but also as the headquarters, barracks, and laboratories of all his agents, located in cordoned-off sections or niches and side chambers adjacent to the main room.

At the center of the city, the hub of all of Ahmas, lies the Squamous Coliseum.

THE COLISEUM

The Squamous Coliseum takes all comers. Anyone is welcome to test their mettle. Further, all are welcome to come watch the fights, which happen every day. Attendance is normally a thousand or more, and five times that if the champions are participating. Even the enormous coliseum can just barely accommodate such numbers on those days. The king comes to watch quite often, but not every day. Certainly on any day that the champions fight, however, he is in attendance with rapt attention.

THE SLASHING MASSES

When fighters first come to the coliseum, they are thrown in with what are called the **slashing masses**. There are no rules or regulations—a fighter can arrive with

whatever weapon or armor she wishes, although a well-equipped but weak combatant won't make it into the actual coliseum fights if she's killed for her gear by other aspiring warriors before she reaches it.

Initially, the slashing masses fight in enormous free-for-all battles, sometimes involving many dozens of participants at once. Those that survive these savage brawls form small fighting units that are pitted against each other, or against terrible aquatic beasts captured and brought here by the king's agents, and—eventually—against a champion.

THE BEASTS

Sometimes, horrific predatory beasts are caught in the nets used by the city to capture food. Most of these are slain and eaten, but occasionally the citizens discover something that can survive in an air-filled, low-pressure environment like the coliseum. When this happens, the beast is made the center of the next combat, pitted against groups of better-than-average slashing masses or a champion or two.

Spined Captor: This thing looks like a large, obese anemone covered in rolls of fat, which in turn are covered in spikes. It rolls over foes when it attacks.

Tentacled Gueryon: Each of the dozen or more tentacles of this semi-amorphous cephalopod ends in a toothy mouth. It is about 12 feet (4 m) in diameter.

Crastalan: This yellow-shelled crustacean has one long poisoned tentacle that can be retracted into its shell. It stands 8 feet (2.5 m) tall and is 10 feet (3 m) long.

THE CHAMPIONS

The champions are the toughest, strongest, and most skilled fighters in the coliseum. Most have seen hundreds of fights there. Although sometimes a newcomer will reach champion status (as determined by the king's agents), they usually don't last long. The current champions who have managed to last—and are likely to continue to last—include the following four warriors.



In the grand tradition of his predecessors, King Faralousus forces his people to pit their strength and abilities against one another to find and isolate the greatest traits they might bear.

Orishall: With a hard crustacean's shell and massive claws, Orishall is a terror. She stands almost 9 feet (3 m) tall, although she scuttles low to the ground more often than rising to her full height. She has bolted scavenged pieces of metal to her shell for even greater protection—most attacks simply bounce off her. Orishall never uses ranged attacks and is often able to cross the entire battlefield while archers or others with similar weapons waste their time trying to penetrate her armor. She has a remarkable bloodlust, even for a champion of the coliseum.

Ehnaa: Muscular and quick, Ehnaa is the perfect arena fighter. She typically uses a spear and a shield, but she has a level 6 artifact energy weapon that she can use at long range when she wishes it (she does so sparingly). Ehnaa is a favorite of the crowds because she fights with skill and intelligence as well as strength and fortitude. She has brilliant blue scales and gills.

Vooren: Vooren is stout, with a wide, muscular body covered in thick, tough brown scales. What's more, he carries a number of small creatures harvested from the ocean floor that appear to be fleshy disks about 6 inches (15 cm) in diameter.

These things, called *chrik*, latch onto flesh like leeches and inject a paralytic poison. Vooren throws up to three *chrik* at a foe as an action (the attack is based on his level, not the *chrik* level). Those that hit bite and inject their poison and continue to do so until removed (requiring an action) or killed.

Boisterous and confident, Vooren likes to toy with his enemies a bit if he gains the upper hand.

Huranilla: Tall and lithe, Huranilla is more snake or eel than human. She attacks with her bite but also uses an array of long knives if needed. Huranilla also carries a number of throwing weapons. She is quick, efficient, and quiet.

THE HUSHED MOH

A secretive, subversive group calling itself the Hushed Moh operates in the shadows of Ahmas. Using tools and techniques left over from the original captors, these people work toward creating injections and treatments that enhance themselves and others. In effect, they seek to cheat the paths of heredity so they can survive in the city and even the coliseum to stand among the strongest of their kind.

Orishall: level 6, attacks as level 7; health 30; Armor 5; makes two melee attacks as a single action

Ehnaa: level 7, perception and Speed defense with her shield as level 8; health 25; Armor 2; carries an artifact that fires a ray of superheated energy at a single target up to 200 feet (60 m) away (Depletion: 1 in 1d20)

Vooren: level 6, Might defense as level 7; health 32; Armor 3

Chrik: level 1, attacks and Speed defense as level 2; poison inflicts 1 point of Speed damage (ignores Armor) each round

Huranilla: level 6, Speed defense as level 8, attacks and stealth as level 7; Armor 1; poisonous bite deals 4 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) to those failing a Might defense roll



Ullavan: level 5, numenera knowledge as level 7; Armor 1

Ilisha: level 6, numenera knowledge as level 7; Armor 1

They have devised a number of treatments that involve injecting chemicals and biological materials directly into a subject's body. Although in the early days of the group these treatments resulted in deformity or death as often as not, today they have been perfected over literally thousands of trials. Some of the treatments are temporary, and thus act as cyphers. These are called concoctions. Others inflict longer-lasting or even permanent changes upon the subject. These are called

transfusions and, for lack of a better term, are considered artifacts.

The leaders of the Hushed Moh are twin sisters **Ullavan** and **Ilisha**. Each is slight and covered in brilliant blue scales. Ullavan has a large red fin on her head, and Ilisha has large, bulbous white eyes.

Most members of the Hushed Moh believe that they are not in fact subverting the essence of the coliseum, because by delving into the numenera, they are merely using the strength of their intellect rather than their bodies.



MOH CONCOCTION

Level: 5

Usable: Injection, pill, or spoonful of serum

Effect: The recipient gains one effect on the Moh Transformations table for 28 hours.

MOH TRANSFUSION

Level: 6

Form: Tank of liquid connected by a tube to a needlelike injector

Effect: The recipient permanently gains one effect on the Moh Transformations table. Receiving the transfusion takes six hours, during which time the recipient cannot act.

Depletion: Automatic

Moh Transformations

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Tough scales* | +1 to Armor |
| Carapace | +2 to Armor |
| Fins | Doubles movement speed in the water |
| Tail | Medium bashing melee weapon |
| Stinger** | Light piercing melee weapon with poison that inflicts 2 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) |
| Enlarged eyes | Perfect vision underwater |
| Claw** | Medium slashing melee weapon |
| Pincer** | Medium slashing melee weapon |
| Pressure resistance | No damage from the pressure of great depths |
| Gills | Water breathing |
| Pressure sense | Sense all movement within short range underwater |
| Cold resistance* | +5 to Armor against cold damage |
| Heat resistance* | +5 to Armor against heat damage |
| Tentacle* | Medium bashing melee weapon |
| Spines* | Foes attacking in melee take 1 point of damage |
| Bite** | Medium piercing melee weapon |
| Oily secretion | Asset on any Speed defense action |
| Resilience | Asset on any Might defense action |
| Enhanced strength | Asset on any Might-based action |
| Enhanced speed | Asset on any Speed-based action |

* You can gain this ability multiple times, the effects stacking

** A second result of this entry means it deals 3 additional points of damage

Unless otherwise indicated, if the recipient already has the effect granted by the transformation, nothing happens.



The Hushed Moh and the king's agents fight a war in the shadows of the city. For different reasons, neither side of the conflict wants the general populace to even know the Hushed Moh exist.

THE BRADDAFOR

No one in Ahmas knows what the Braddafor is. No one—visitor or native—can even truly, fully comprehend its existence. It is vaguely humanoid in shape but stands almost 8 feet (2.5 m) tall. It doesn't appear to be organic, but no one understands the brownish-gold material that makes up the entirety of its form. The full creature is never in the visual spectrum at any given second, so it seems to flicker in and out intermittently—leg, arm, torso, leg, head, and so on. Sometimes, pieces of it appear to hover in midair (or midwater) 10, 15 or even 20 feet (3 to 6 m) away from it.

The Braddafor wanders the city, occasionally stopping to observe something—sometimes for a moment, sometimes for days on end. Now and then, it speaks, although no one can understand its words, and it never seems to be addressing anyone around it anyway.

If attacked, or if anyone takes any aggressive action within short distance of

it, the Braddafor reacts with powerful and nigh-incomprehensible weaponry against the transgressor. Its foes have the very matter of their bodies and gear vaporized in large chunks, and armor or energy fields offer no protection.

Since people have learned these details of the Braddafor, its appearance can bring a combat in the coliseum to an immediate halt. No one wishes to draw its attacks by fighting. Elsewhere in the city, people give the Braddafor a wide berth. Most draw a frightened breath when they see it, even though they know that if they don't take any hostile actions, they have nothing to fear from it.

Some people speculate that the Braddafor is a leftover guardian or servitor of the original captors or the Blessed Ahman. Some say that it is one of those captors, or even that there was only ever one such being, and it never left Ahmas as the tales say.

The Braddafor: level 9, defense as level 10; health 60; Armor 5; inflicts 15 points of damage (ignores Armor) on up to three targets within short range as an action

GM Intrusion: The character damaged by the Braddafor has one or more possessions vaporized as well.

SQUAMOUS COLISEUM HEARSAY

A King's Wish: King Faralousus hates the Braddafor and would give a huge reward to anyone who rids the city of this being. Since that task is out of the reach of most people, he would also pay for information on the creature's nature or weaknesses (if any). The king normally pays in favors—sometimes extravagant ones, as anything that can happen in Ahmas will happen if he wishes it.

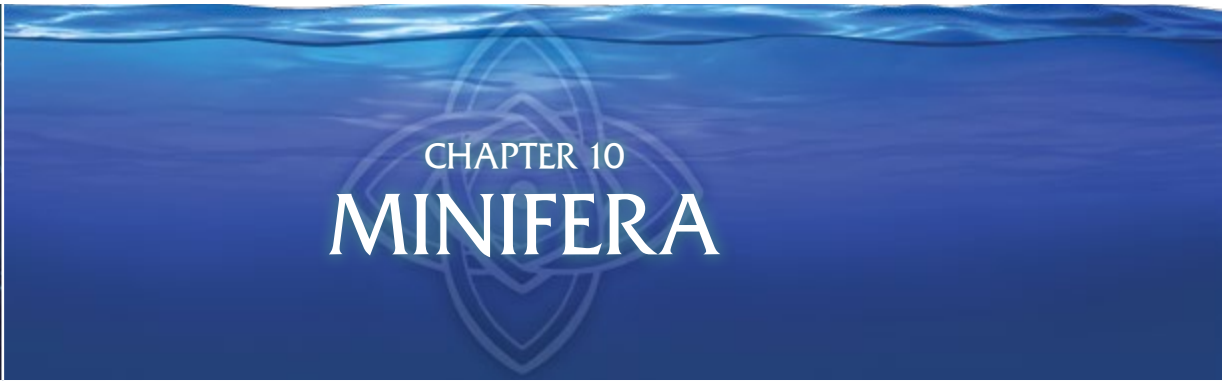
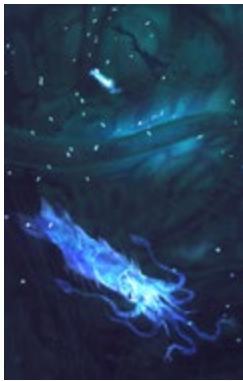
Looting for Profit: The Hushed Moh need technological parts and materials that can no longer be found in Ahmas (or at least, the group does not have access to them). They are looking for explorers capable of leaving the city to travel to some of the nearby "ruins" and scavenge what they need. They will pay well, probably in information or biological knowledge if that's desired.

THE WEIRD OF THE SQUAMOUS COLISEUM

Strange Attentions: The Braddafor has been known to stop in one particular part of the city and stare into a specific place in an empty corridor as if something is there. Occasionally, it speaks when it does this. The spot is always the same. No investigation into that area has shown anything out of the ordinary.

The Flashes: Sometimes the walls of the city flash in rainbow hues and the entire structure shudders. No one knows why, but those on the outside when it happens report that the walls seem to strain and flex, as if the whole thing was trying to get up and move.





CHAPTER 10 MINIFERA

Oceia: *The term used by Miniferans and some other groups to describe an underwater city.*

Naiadapt, page 101

Minifera pronunciation:
min-NIF-er-ah



Search Terms: *hadal, bioluminescence, firefly squid, piezolytes*

Naiadan, page 100

Creatures that live at extreme depths are adapted to the pressure so they can live there in comfort.

Minifera is the result of many expansions and contractions of prior civilizations, all now forgotten. The result is a bizarre, wondrous, and dangerous place in the hadal depths some 40,000 feet (12 km) below the surface. There, not the least hint of light filters down from the surface. Yet dazzling sparks illuminate the oceia all the same. Minifera is resplendent with countless darting points of bioluminescence, sparking from tiny swimming creatures called scintillans. In this light, the complex structures making up Minifera are revealed as elaborate, constantly shifting and changing architectures of domes, spikes, pods, and tubes protruding from the walls of a 2-mile (3 km) wide ravine in the ocean floor.

Weirder and more wondrous than the structures are the natives who make up the bulk of Minifera's population. Called naiadans, each individual is composed of thousands of much smaller living units. Humans and other races that visit or dwell in Minifera often accept some of these constituent creatures into their own biology to adapt to the especially crushing pressure. A small percentage of the humans who use this living tech decide to become hybrid human-naiadans and are called naiadapts.

GM SUMMARY

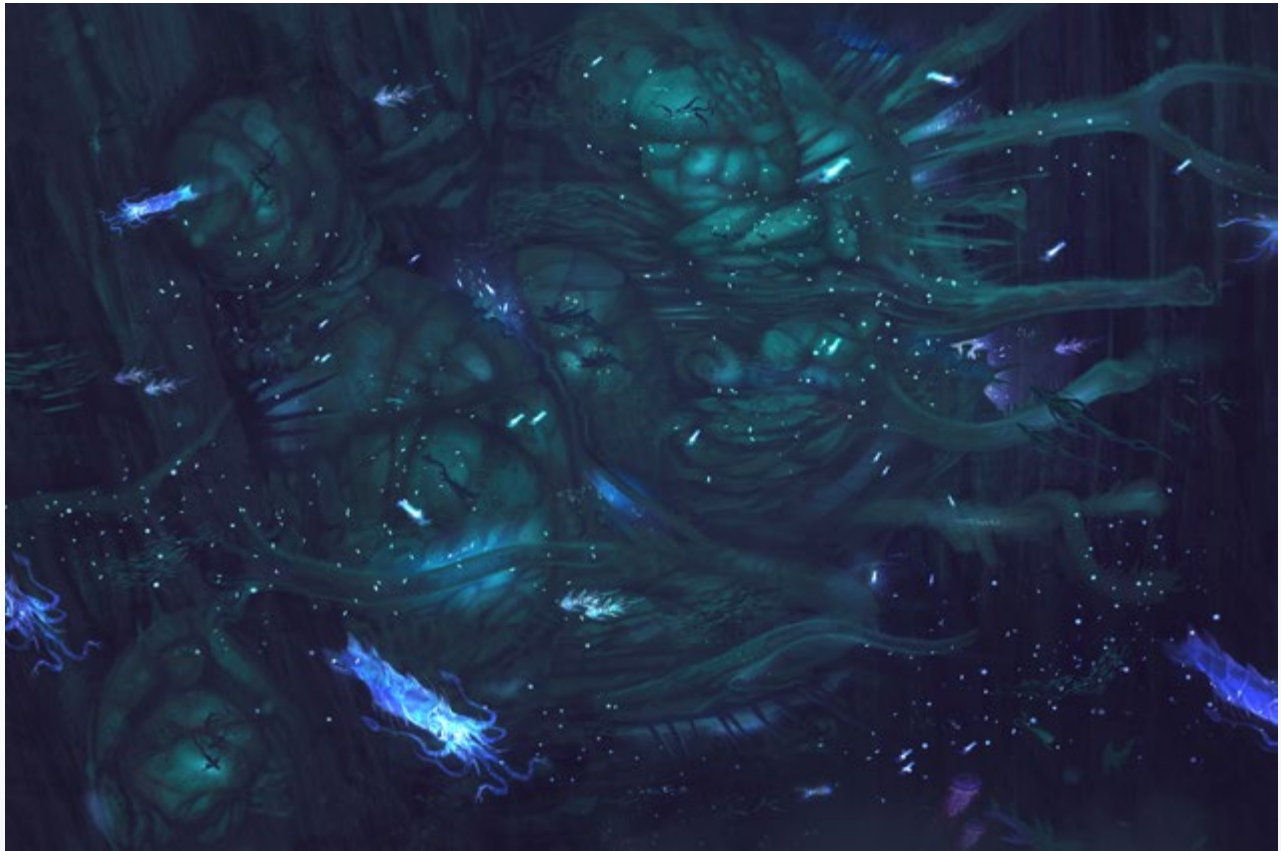
A race far older than humans called **naiadans** resides in one of the deepest parts of the oceans, in a city called Minifera. Naiadan grasp of the numenera is so extreme that they themselves are composed of tiny amoeboid constituents called dyremmi, each bred for a purpose. Naiadans can change out their dyremmi as they desire to give themselves new

abilities, exchange memories, commune, reproduce, and more. Humans who interact with dyremmi are sometimes colonized by the living tech and become hybrid-naiadan creatures called **naiadapts**. Naiadapts are a new racial option for PCs.

USING MINIFERA

The GM can use the oceia of Minifera several ways in a campaign. The following scenarios could be provided as hooks to player characters.

- The characters begin play as naiadapts (human-naiadan hybrids) in Minifera, not on the surface, and adventure through the sites of Minifera and the wider ocean described in this book.
- Characters on the surface learn that a colossal artifact called the Attractor lies buried beneath the deepest part of the ocean. It is an artifact of immense power whose secrets clearly need to be uncovered and exploited.
- Fugitives from justice on the surface seek to escape to the hardest-to-reach place on Earth, where even the invisible corridors fail to reach. The PCs are sent to retrieve them.
- A collector on the surface offers a treasure in artifacts and cyphers in return for a captured entity known as a naiadan, which can be found most reliably in the deepest part of the ocean.
- The PCs are invited to Minifera by a council of naiadans called the Myessach. The Myessach ask the characters to quell a disturbance within the bowels of the Attractor.



TRAVELING TO MINIFERA

Any of the means suggested in the introduction can deliver surface dwellers down to Minifera. However, the *invisible corridors* don't extend to the underwater city; the closest lane passes 5 miles (8 km) above. If the characters rely on instantaneous travel, they might appear in the observation pod constructed by the *Seechar* or in the sights of the defense crawler called *Lorrother*. If they arrive via a deep-diving vessel or under their own power in some other fashion, they would do well to stay clear of the *Implosion Zone* at the very nadir of the trench that holds most of Minifera, where all things find their end.

SURVIVAL IN MINIFERA

Because the benefits of the invisible corridors do not saturate Minifera, characters are more likely to survive their visit if they are prepared for the extreme environment. The crushing pressure—a thousand times that which exists on the surface—can kill an unprotected surface dweller even faster than the airless landscape of the moon. Couple the overwhelming pressure with a lack of

breathable air and water so cold it's just barely above freezing, and the prospects for an unprotected human seem grim.

Surface visitors need a breathing apparatus, a way to divert the pressure, and insulation from the cold. If they do not already have such artifacts or cyphers, it's not necessarily the end: unprepared visitors could still be saved by a colonizing swarm of tiny naiadan-bred creatures called *dyremmi*. A naive character might think she's being attacked by a swarm of flesh-devouring amoeboids. The truth is, the creatures—a type of *dyremmi* called *adapter spines*—are attempting to save her life, not eat her, by force-adapting her body to the conditions of Minifera.

FLORA AND FAUNA OF MINIFERA

Creatures and sea plants of kinds familiar to explorers from the surface are rare in Minifera. The crushing cold in one of the deepest places in the world means that the grasses that grow along the trench sides are swaying groves of tendrils, the full-size fish that move in slow, stately schools are flattened with mantalike wings, and the

Invisible corridors,
page 12

Seechar, page 103

Lorrother, page 103

Implosion Zone,
page 106

Adapter spines, page 98

Naiadapt, page 101

profusion of smaller creatures are some combination of animal, plant, insect, and automatons. For example, the yellow-bulbed zocqua stalk grows to lengths of 20 feet (6 m) and produces tiny fruit from which delicate crystal automatons are born. They resemble tiny swimming insects but can serve as parts for anyone trained in the numenera who attempts to repair or craft an item, or breed a specific trait into a wild dyremmi population. Otherwise, these zocqua “seeds” either become food for other creatures or eventually become the starts of new zocqua stalks.

Scintillans: Scintillans are everywhere, flashing like ambivalent stars in the upper parts of Minifera and suspended over the wide trench. Close up, scintillans are revealed as tiny creatures similar to firefly squids. Related to the scintillans are the much larger **noghalor**, which hunt both their smaller cousins and any lone naiadan, naiadapt, or other visitor to the oceaia they happen across.

Wild Dyremmi: At least as numerous as the scintillans—though without flashing lights to draw attention to themselves—are the wild dyremmi. When tame, dyremmi are the amoeboid constituents of individual naiadans and also specially bred and crafted cyphers made by the naiadans. Individual dyremmin are about 1 inch (3 cm) in diameter and are variously shaped like stars, spines, spheres, and knots. Hundreds of different wild populations of dyremmi saturate Minifera, some of which are dangerous pests. One of the most lethal is the **dread spines**, which attack in swarms.

Adapter Spines: The wild dyremmi called **adapter spines**, which are located throughout Minifera, are normally placid. However, when adapter spines sense a creature not adapted to the environment, they “attack” in swarms like dread spines. If their attack succeeds before the target creature succumbs to the cold, pressure, and lack of air, that creature may survive to discover that it has forcefully acquired an activated deep adaptation cypher. (If a character is already at her cypher limit when a deep adaptation cypher successfully force-adapts her to surviving in the depths, roll on the **Cypher Danger** table to determine if any secondary ill effect occurs.)

If the target creature is a human, there’s a small chance that the attack goes

further than granting a cypher—a certain percentage of humans take to the dyremmi constituents a little too readily and become naiadan hybrids (or **naiadapts**, as they are most often called). Since this essentially changes the PC’s race to naiadapt, it happens to a character only if the player and GM agree that it does.

CYPHERS OF MINIFERA

The naiadans of Minifera possess an understanding of the numenera far in advance of even the Order of Truth. This mastery is biological, owing to the fact that naiadans themselves are composed of dyremmi constituents. Though living, each individual component (a “dyremmin”) is like a finely engineered automaton. When naiadans research new tech, they essentially breed and evolve batches of dyremmi to accomplish their goals. The Trait Breeders have such expertise that they can craft cyphers from dyremmi to nearly any specification they desire.

Common cyphers in Minifera and other naiadan outposts include the following.

ACCESS

Level: 1d6 + 2

Wearable: Sheet of living scales composed of biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Usable: Injector containing biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Effect: For one hour, the user can pass into or out of most naiadan structures whose level is less than or equal to the cypher level as if the solid barrier was insubstantial. In fact, the barrier becomes selectively permeable to the user and her equipment. She can pass into or out of structures of non-naiadan architecture, but doing so requires her full concentration over the course of three rounds.

AMAZING EXPERIENCE

Level: 1d6

Wearable: Nodule composed of biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Usable: Injector containing biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Effect: User gains the memory of an experience so epic that each time he reviews it as an action, he has an asset on all tasks in the following round.

Noghalor: level 2, *Speed defense as level 3 due to flashing distraction of luminescent body*

Dread spine (swarm): level 2; *in groups of six or more, attacks as a single level 4 creature inflicting 4 points of damage*

Adapter spine (swarm): level 2; *in groups of six or more, attacks as a single level 4 creature inflicting 4 points of damage; if prey not adapted to the depths would be killed, instead the prey wakes with activated deep adaptation cypher in effect*



Cypher Danger,
page 279

The memory's vividness (and ability to confer an advantage) fades after 28 hours, but its general content remains. The memories conferred by an amazing experience cypher are usually from the point of view of a naiadan exploring a prior-world installation along the seafloor, of contact with a new group of creatures never before met, or of a particularly ecstatic group birthing or ultra-governing *communion*.

DEEP ADAPTATION

Level: 1d6 + 2

Wearable: Sheet of living scales composed of biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Usable: Injector containing biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Effect: Physically adapts user to survive like a native creature of the Deep Dark, including immunity to high pressure and cold, the ability to breathe underwater, and the ability to see in dark water for up to 111 hours. This adaptation is lethal at surface pressures and temperatures.

ELECTRIC JOLT

Level: 1d6 + 2

Wearable: Nodule composed of biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Usable: Injector containing biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Effect: For the next 28 hours, the user can generate an electrical burst at a target within short range that inflicts damage equal to the cypher level. Alternatively, her melee attacks deal 1 additional point of damage through electrical discharge.

OVERSIGHT

Level: 1d6 + 2

Wearable: Nodule composed of biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Usable: Injector containing biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Effect: For the next hour, the user can release a stream of fluid at a target within immediate range as an attack that inflicts 1 point of damage (ignores Armor). In addition, until the end of the next round, the target obeys the instructions of the user.

SPECIALIZATION

Level: 1d6

Wearable: Nodule composed of biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Usable: Injector containing biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Effect: User becomes specialized in one task, attack, or defense for 28 hours.

Possibilities include the following:

| | |
|-------|-----------------------------|
| 01–15 | Melee attack |
| 16–30 | Ranged attack |
| 31–40 | Speed defense |
| 41–50 | Might defense |
| 51–60 | Intellect defense |
| 61–68 | Squeezing into small spaces |
| 69–92 | Swimming |
| 93–94 | Sneaking |
| 95–98 | Perceiving |
| 99 | Escaping |
| 00 | The numenera |

Communion, page 100





SURFACE ADAPTATION

Level: 1d6 + 2

Wearable: Sheet of living scales composed of biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Usable: Injector containing biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Effect: Physically adapts a deep-dwelling creature to survive like a native surface dweller, including immunity to low (sea-level) pressure, immunity to warmth, and the ability to breathe air for up to 111 hours.



TELEPATHY, NAIADAN

Level: 1d6 + 1

Wearable: Nodule composed of biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Usable: Injector containing biomechanical amoeboids (dyremmi)

Effect: For one hour, user gains the ability to telepathically converse with any naiadan, naiadapt, or someone using or who has used a naiadan-bred cypher in the previous week.

Naiadan can incorporate Minifera-bred cyphers permanently into their bodies, which grants them new abilities based on the cypher incorporated. A naiadan can have up to three active dyremmi abilities at a time, plus up to six additional inactive abilities that can be swapped out with the active abilities. When an ability is active, it regenerates, so after being used, it can usually be used again within minutes or hours.

NATIVES OF MINIFERA: NAIADAN

From a distance, a naiadan appears to be covered with scales shaped like stars and spines, with finned arms and legs and an elongated head with no obvious mouth. Many have specialized limbs that include tentacles, projectile weapons, and sometimes light-emitting pods. However, the resemblance to scales is superficial. Each naiadan is made up of thousands of constituent living creatures called dyremmi; the “scales” are just the outermost layer of the dyremmi.

The learned know that everything alive is made of tinier living parts, which is what gives life its versatility and adaptability. For naiadan, their dyremmi constituent parts give versatility a whole new name—literally. Naiadans have a special name for the

process whereby an individual transfers a memory, an appreciation of a concept or important experience, a skill, a body customization, an immunity, or some other special ability: communion. To a naiadan, communion is an art, a meditation, and a way to appreciate and connect with naiadan culture and history. To an outsider, communion looks like two nearby naiadans unraveling into each other, after which both are slightly different.

Though they could easily choose not to, most naiadans prefer to maintain a male or female gender. Few live out their whole lives as the same gender.

With adequate stocks of dyremmi nearby or via the cooperation of another naiadan with a specialized ability, a Minifera native can gain a new ability (and swap out an old one) after just a minute of exchange and consolidation. Communion isn't usually conducted in ad-hoc situations out and about in the oceia. It normally occurs in one of the numerous structures called communion shrines. To enter a communion shrine alone is a sign to any passing naiadan that one is open to a new idea, a new contact, or a new experience, or is perhaps seeking a special skill or lost memory. Communion is a communal experience between two individuals, not one that can generally be forced on an unwilling partner (though there are stories of such).

Birthing communion shrines also exist, though they are rarer. A birthing communion exchange involves ten or more individuals, all of whom completely dissociate into individual dyremmi during the ten-hour-long event. When the commingling concludes, everyone reforms. In addition, a newborn naiadan individual composed of constituents that were contributed by all the others is formed. For the parents, the experience is beyond the kind of description a surface dweller can comprehend, but it includes components of sexual pleasure, a sense of overwhelming cosmic unity, and the lingering glow of satisfaction at the assured continuity of the species.

The naiadans maintain a civilization that exists in harmonious equilibrium with their environment. They keep a handful of small outposts in other places in the Deep Dark, as well as a few embassies of ten or so naiadans in other locations. Naiadans do not seek to grow their numbers or their



influence beyond what they've already achieved, but neither are they declining and losing their advanced knowledge of the art required to maintain their bodies, Minifera, and their place in the Deep Dark. If necessary, individual naiadans may become especially aggressive or grasping, but usually only in reaction to an exterior threat. Naiadans who do not accept this worldview usually leave Minifera to find a life of adventure and excitement in the wider Deep Dark, the Shallows, or even on the surface. (Opposing philosophies are also common in the naiadan-human hybrids called naiadapts, but that's to be expected.)

Not surprisingly, naiadans are a placid, accepting people. They welcome change, even embrace it, but only as far as that change contributes to their ability to maintain their current place in the world. They have an advanced understanding of the numenera, one that would make nearly any Aeon Priest jealous, but they don't seek to use that knowledge to create an empire or transcend to a higher level of existence. Naiadans are content merely to be.

The natives of Minifera are well aware of other races in the oceans, humans and other creatures inhabiting the surface, and a few

places beyond the grasp of Earth. Naiadans may have been spawned by a hyper-intelligence of a prior world that engineered them to inhabit and exploit the deep, as certain ancient dyremmi memories suggest. It's possible, and it would explain how naiadans can have real conversations and connections with other kinds of creatures, including humans, despite seeming quite alien. In particular, an artificial past might also explain why humans are so susceptible to being hybridized with life-saving dyremmi constituents.

The only enemies the naiadans have are the people of the *Skelirroth Fleet*. Skelirroths operate a fleet of massive vehicles that dredge the ocean floor and overfish to such staggering excess that they give even the normally equanimous naiadans pause, even though the vessels rarely come so deep. The mere knowledge of the fleet's existence is enough to drive a naiadan to distraction.

RACIAL OPTION: THE NAIADAPT

Players can run characters who are hybrid naiadans, called naiadapts. Naiadapts are humans who have become partially hybridized with naiadan biology. Playing

Skelirroth Fleet, page 77



Varjellen, page 121

Naiadapts need to eat and drink about 25 percent more than normal to stay healthy, mainly because they're supporting not only themselves but also their dyremmi symbiotes, which gain all the nutrients they need by absorbing them from the host.

A common slang term for a naiadapt is "dapt."



Works Miracles, page 75

Controls Gravity, page 56

A naiadapt can have up to two active dyremmi abilities at a time, plus two additional inactive abilities that can be swapped out with the active abilities.

a naiadapt is slightly more involved than playing an average human, so only players willing to shoulder additional complexity should consider playing a naiadapt, and then only with the blessing of the GM.

As previously described, naiadans are composed of thousands of individual constituent creatures called dyremmi. Like [varjellen](#), naiadans and naiadapts can adapt themselves to their circumstances. However, they do so by literally swapping portions of their body with a personal reservoir of spare dyremmi or with another naiadan or naiadapt who possesses the desired feature.

A naiadapt looks like a human who has been partly fused with patches of artificial organic material (the dyremmi). The fused dyremmi might be wholly hidden under the skin, or they might resemble patches of scales here and there replacing the naiadapt's skin. As a naiadapt swaps out different abilities, small changes in appearance are the norm. For instance, a naiadapt who exchanges her ability to be adapted to the depths with the ability to run a long distance each round on dry land might go from appearing essentially scale-covered to looking like a human but with legs more like that of a fast-moving plains animal, including a reverse knee joint. Naiadapts can be thought of as humans partly colonized with symbiotes that, if removed, would kill the human.

Whereas naiadans are placid and accepting, naiadapts can be unpredictable, excitable, and even ambitious. That's because their humanlike psychology can't help but see the amazing opportunity that their changeable physiology can provide. Some naiadapts revel in their differences, especially if they rejoin surface-dwelling societies. Others hide their differences to gain an advantage, though a few adapt the more easy-going attitudes of a naiadan.

A naiadapt could conceivably far outlive a regular human, though to do so would require that she find the right specialized dyremmi and keep them active for many hours every day. Naiadapts eat human foods, though their hybrid biology means that strong spices and hard alcohol hit them particularly hard.

NAIADAPT ABILITIES

All naiadapt characters have the abilities described in the Naiadapt Dyremmi Abilities sidebar. Players can create a new one if the GM allows it. A naiadapt's race is his descriptor, but he can choose any character type and focus desired. For example, a player might create a naiadapt nano who [Works Miracles](#) or a naiadapt glaive who [Controls Gravity](#). Because a naiadapt gains more benefits from his racial type than he would from a conventional descriptor, each carries more disadvantages as well.

NAIADAPT DYREMMI ABILITIES

The following are typical dyremmi abilities a naiadapt might have stored (or active). If a character encounters another naiadapt, a naiadan, or a living cypher of the kind typically found in Minifera, the GM and player can work together to determine if other abilities are possible.

Contemplative. +2 to Intellect.

Deep Adaptation. Thrive like a native creature in the deep, including immunity to high pressure and cold, the ability to breathe underwater, and the ability to see in dark water. (If the naiadapt ascends to the surface, this ability, if active, must be changed out or ameliorated. Otherwise, the naiadapt undergoes a process that is the reverse of what a non-native experiences when it visits the hadal depths, and the naiadapt most likely dies.)

Armored Carapace. +1 to Armor.

Spray of Confusion (2 Might points). The character can release a stream of fluid at a target within immediate range as an attack that inflicts 1 point of damage (ignores Armor). In addition, the difficulty of all tasks is increased by one step for one round.

Skill. The character is trained in tasks related to the numenera.

Spew Acidic Detonation (4 Might points). The character can project a goblet of biological material at a target within short range, whereupon it explodes in an immediate radius, inflicting 5 points of damage from acidic discharge.



Swappable Dyremmi Abilities: Each naiadapt can have two active dyremmi abilities plus two spare abilities that are inactive. The spare abilities are usually stored as internal biological packages visible as slight bulges or discolorations somewhere on the character's skin. This feature grants a naiadapt a flexibility that others rarely possess. The naiadapt can replace one active dyremmi ability (such as Deep Adaptation, Armored Carapace, Spray of Confusion, and so on) with a different stored ability. If a naiadapt meets another willing naiadapt or naiadan with different abilities, they can permanently swap abilities (active or inactive) between them.

To switch between an active and stored ability, a naiadapt must spend ten minutes concentrating, during which time his physiology shifts as he gives up (and stores) one dyremmi ability for another. A naiadapt can choose to vary an active dyremmi ability up to twice per day, immediately after a one-hour or ten-hour recovery roll.

Naiadapt Dyremmi Abilities: The abilities in the Naiadapt Dyremmi Abilities sidebar are granted only while the indicated dyremmi ability is active, as chosen by the PC.

Cypher Dangers: Active dyremmi abilities count against a character's cypher limit. To avoid a roll on the *Cypher Danger* table, a character must keep the number of normal cyphers he carries plus the number of active dyremmi abilities available to him under his cypher limit at all times.

Hybrid Instability: Whenever a naiadapt descends a step on the damage track, he must succeed on a difficulty 3 Might defense roll. On a failure, he loses cohesion over some of his dyremmi constituents, which suspends one active dyremmi ability for ten hours.

Inability: The difficulty of tasks involving remaining calm, resisting stress, and engaging in rational debate (including attempts at persuasion) is increased by one step.

MINIFERA LOCATIONS

The bulk of Minifera lies within the mouth of an underwater trench located at the bottom of an already extremely deep part of the ocean. Various structures composed of translucent synth and dyremmi sway and pulse like breathing organisms. The

constellations of scintillans that wheel slowly through the water, executing complicated dances of their own, provide a dim illumination in the upper portions of Minifera, though the deepest parts of the trench are lost in darkness.

SEECHAR OBSERVATION POD

The Seechar observation pod is attached to a flexible, extendable stalk that rises high over Minifera. The long stalk continually lengthens and contracts, depending on current water conditions or targets of observation. The stalk is so extendible that it can reach all the way to the ocean's surface, allowing the far lookers—naiadans who inhabit the structure—a view across the open sea for brief periods. The variable vantage offers far lookers visual warning of potential threats and a view of interesting developments in the seas around them and even in the waters far above.

The bevy of machines and dyremmi constructs that accomplish much of the routine observations are kept in repair by the chief far looker, a naiadan called *Irisis*. Apparently *Irisis* does more than observe the waters around Minifera, as she seems to know every naiadapt and naiadan in Minifera personally, though most do not know her except by reputation. If one wishes to learn secrets in Minifera, *Irisis* is the one to seek out, and if one has secrets in Minifera to be kept, she is the one to bribe to keep her lips sealed.

LORROTHER

A massive level 7 vehicle shaped somewhat like a lobster nearly 300 feet (100 m) across clambers around on the ocean floor along the length of Minifera's trench. The vehicle has a direct connection with the far lookers in the Seechar observation pod via naiadans fitted with telepathic devices. This connection gives *Lorrother* lead time when threats appear, as well as the ability to fire torpedoes (that explode in a long-range radius) with pinpoint accuracy to a distance of 200 miles (320 km) through the murky depths. Against threats in closer proximity, *Lorrother* uses giant pincers to detain potential threats or crush confirmed ones.

Lorrother is crewed by a dozen naiadans as well as a few dapts called crawler pilots. The chief crawler pilot is a naiadan called *Alondel*, who sports all sorts of extra

Irisis: level 4, perception tasks as level 9; can use two random active dyremmi abilities

Cypher Danger, page 279

Alondel: level 6, tasks related to piloting and using Lorrother weapons as level 8; can use three random active dyremmi abilities

Thakarsis: level 4, can use two random active dyremmi abilities

Persamlor, page 108

Cheldam: level 4, tasks related to deceiving, knowledge, and history of Kaparin as level 7



Kaparin, page 167

Naiadans of Minifera keep small embassies in various other oceia as well as in a few places on the surface, including Qi, Ledon, Mulen, and Rarrow. Usually, these embassies are staffed by naiadapts who maintain a nearly human guise.



Qi, page 148

Ledon, page 147

Mulen, page 159

Rarrow, page 169

Kulusa: level 5, tasks related to the numenera and dyremmi trait breeding as level 8; can use two random active dyremmi abilities

appendages. He has several specialized dyremmi adaptations allowing him to connect to all the legs of the crawler at once via a series of living tubes. Though he could direct the pincers and missile launcher from Lorrother's tail, he usually allows eager naiadapts that honor.

The vehicle contains a few air-filled, low-pressure chambers set aside for the occasional creature from the surface that finds its way down to Minifera without protection. A traveling human peddler named **Cheldam** currently occupies one of those rooms. Cheldam is old and tottery, but he still manages an air of civilized grace despite his dark surroundings. According to Cheldam, he is on the run from a crime syndicate based in the Ancuan city of **Kaparin**. If asked why he lives in confinement instead of using a deep adaptation cypher or any of a number of other solutions, Cheldam claims he has an allergic reaction to using the numenera, especially dyremmi-bred cyphers.

MYESSACH ASSEMBLY DOME

Given how naiadans use communion for communication, art, breeding, and more, it's no surprise they also use a form of the same process to govern Minifera. Technically, any adult naiadan or naiadapt can attend a daily governing assembly meeting under the large crystal dome set in the side of the trench. In practice, only a small subset of citizens regularly attend. Those who meet most often are said to be "on the council of Myessach." To some, the distinction is a great honor. Most naiadans, however, are happy to leave the decision making to others as long as Minifera continues to thrive.

Decisions reached during a communion-like census of the Myessach are spread through a variety of channels depending on the importance of the message. These include word of mouth, release of coded message chemicals into the water, and physical messenger, all the way up to rare "ultra-communion" events where almost every naiadan in Minifera fuses into a single thinking entity. This leaves little room for misunderstanding in the minds of singleton naiadans after the communion, and what's more, the ultra-being is able to send telepathic news to all naiadans everywhere, including those posted to distant settlements and embassies.

The caretaker of the assembly dome is a naiadapt named **Thakarsis**. When council naiadans are lost in communion, Thakarsis guards them. When other naiadans are off doing whatever they do when not deciding weighty matters of governance, Thakarsis sees to the maintenance and upkeep of the dome. Given to the caretaker is a secret few others know: a tunnel about 1 foot (30 cm) in diameter at the back of the dome is a portal that connects to the naiadan settlement of **Persamlor**. When decisions are reached in the assembly dome, Thakarsis sees to it that reports are sent via messages coded in chemical seep through the tunnel to Persamlor. Given that the settlement is inhabited by a dissident faction of naiadans, Thakarsis is keen to keep his connection private.

TEMPLE OF THE TRAIT BREEDERS

The Temple of the Trait Breeders is a keystone of naiadan culture and mastery over the numenera. Within the many segregated breeding chambers are stored all manner of primordial populations of dyremmi, as well as those already imprinted with an ability. The temple is composed of a large dome surrounded by a campus of smaller interconnected pods and domes, all of which constantly change locations based on updating priorities.

The head trait breeder is, oddly enough, not a naiadan, but rather a naiadapt named **Kulusa**. Kulusa is a human woman with red hair who sports a ring on each finger. She arrived in Minifera three hundred years ago. She was already an accomplished nano and took to trait breeding dyremmi with a convert's conviction. She has the respect of most naiadans, though a few remain suspicious of her rise to one of the most important positions in the city. A rare few resent that one of their own doesn't hold the position. Other naiadans regard that as a racist attitude and ignore the ongoing murmurings.

If a Minifera citizen wishes to undertake a program of new research on nearly any topic, the Temple is the place she'll likely visit first. At the very least, she can apply for a batch of raw dyremmi imprinted with the potential for a variety of nascent traits. If she's insistent and can convince Kulusa of the importance of her project, a researcher may get a tiny attached dome associated



with the Temple for a time. From such a coveted dome, all the resources of the Temple are within the researcher's grasp.

NAIADAPT ALLEY

If the alien nature of Minifera is too much for a visitor (especially from the perspective of a human surface dweller), that visitor is sent to stay for a while in a neighborhood known as Naiadapt Alley. Visitors to the Alley become the guests of a naiadapt referred to simply as “the Mayor.”

Though naiadapts are fully integrated into Minifera life, some dapts live together in the Alley as well. Though it's not exactly illegal, the dapts here stealthily experiment with

objects and devices gathered via trade and exploration from other parts of the world, usually tech from other underwater regions, but not exclusively so. It's not that the dapts reject dyremmi-bred tech. But the shared feeling—as promulgated by the Mayor—is that they might be missing out on wonders of the prior worlds by focusing exclusively on biological tech.

The Mayor is the putative neighborhood leader. She is a naiadapt with silvery, wirelike hair, an extra eye, and a voice that penetrates like sonar. Her home is expansive, filled with laboratories where she puts to work any dapt who wants to aid in her quest to explore the limits of the numenera. Some of the labs maintain bubbles of air at surface pressure and temperature. In one lab, she stores excess human body parts normally sacrificed when a naiadapt swaps a formerly human limb for a dyremmi-bred body part. The parts can be recombined in new ways, both with dyremmi and with non-dyremmi tech, leading to a plethora of partly living oddities. The Mayor isn't sure exactly what she will find, but she is certain that something wondrous will come of her efforts.

The Mayor oversees dozens of half-complete projects but is especially proud of one creation she calls **Alpha**. Alpha is a humanoid with finlike head, hands, and feet adaptations. Alpha doesn't speak directly, but it can bud off duplicate versions of itself that survive for a few hours before dissolving. Alpha is completely loyal to the Mayor. Some of the dapts of the Alley worry that the Mayor is up to something that's not in the best interest of greater Minifera. When apprised of the situation, however, the Myessach council seemed unconcerned—though it does keep tabs on the Alley.

HARD WATER FILM

Level: 1d6

Form: Synth belt studded with devices

Effect: A film of hard—yet flowing—water forms smoothly around the wearer's skin and equipment, giving her Armor equal to the artifact level for one hour.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

Alpha: level 6; health 25; can spawn a level 2 duplicate as part of another action once every other round; each duplicate spawned inflicts 1 point of damage to Alpha

The Mayor: level 5, resisting the effects of or using the numenera as level 7; +3 to Armor from hard water film artifact; can use two random active dyremmi abilities

TRENCH MIDZONE

The trench of Minifera extends down much farther than the main ocea structures and the cozy light of scintillans reach. At these dark depths, mines honeycomb the narrowing walls, where rare minerals and ores can be had, as well as the occasional crushed synth fragment from devices dating back to a prior world. The material is mined by naiadans using dyremmi-adapted bodies capable of burrowing through solid rock at a respectable clip. Materials gleaned from the mines are sent upward in rising bubblelike conveyances to the inhabited ocea levels. There they are collected and incorporated into useful base substances for construction, dyremmi maintenance, and repair of devices. Rarely, dangerous objects are found, and these are simply dropped so they fall farther down the trench, toward the Implosion Zone.

At the bottom end of the Trench Midzone, an observation pod hangs in the darkness on a thick, reinforced stalk. A team of observers is routinely stationed there. Each observer incorporates dyremmi-modified body parts specialized for perceiving light, scent, radiation, and especially gravity. Gravity storms sometimes surge up from the Implosion Zone. Usually these storms are weak affairs, but occasionally they are far worse. The observers are responsible for grading each storm, and when necessary, sounding a warning to the miners above. When the miners receive such a warning, they retreat into specially built storm shelters to ride out the gravity flux. Though it hasn't happened yet, observers worry that the increasing volume of low-level gravitic events augurs a future gravity storm of extreme magnitude that could reach all the way to the top of the trench, shaking and crushing Minifera itself, and perhaps areas beyond.

Over a dozen level 10 synth cables, each as wide as a naiadan, extend up from the darkness of the Implosion Zone. The cables are affixed to the sides of the Trench Midzone, zigzagging to avoid mine mouths, and run all the way up to the ocea. They transfer energy from the Implosion Zone and meet all the power needs of Minifera.

Gravity storm (magnitude 3): level 3; moves a short distance upward each round; attacks all creatures and objects within short range, inflicting 5 points of damage (ignores Armor); persists for 1d6 + 3 hours unless disrupted

IMPLOSION ZONE

The Implosion Zone is the area at the bottom of the trench. Here the trench finally narrows to just under 1,000 feet (300 m) across. Most Miniferans give it little thought, except as the out-of-sight, out-of-mind place where unrecyclable trash and dangerous items are disposed of. Anything that comes within immediate range of or touches down on the trench bottom is subject to a level 10 attack each round that inflicts 20 points of gravity damage (ignores most Armor). Objects destroyed or creatures killed by the effect are crushed into drifting dust. The area isn't clogged with subatomic dust because infrequent gravity storms send dust plumes back up the ravine's throat.

The level 10 cables that provide power to Minifera far above are sunk into the rock floor. Placed there when Minifera was founded, the cables have proved resistant to the effects of the Implosion Zone and the gravity waves that frequently storm upward. The cables follow fractures in the stone for hundreds of feet (200 m), and then they plunge into the surface of an object buried in the mantle. This object—about the size of a very small moon, roughly 100 miles (160 km) in diameter—is called the Attractor.

The Myessach and several naiadans working in the Temple of the Trait Breeders know about the Attractor, but not necessarily why it is so named. That it is an artifact of a prior world, none doubt. They suspect that the revered naiadan ancestors—the proto-naiadans who came before those who now inhabit Minifera—were responsible for sinking the power lines into the Attractor. Presumably those proto-naiadans knew far more about it, enough to give it a name. With all that knowledge, they chose merely to tap its excess energy rather than try to unearth it. Modern naiadans generally believe the wisest course is not to disturb what lies below for that reason.

A cache of artifacts recently found in a Trench Midzone mine includes many wonders of the extinct proto-naiadans: several sets of gravity modulators, phase modulators, powered grips, and a few gravity spears. Those who worry about the increasing frequency of gravity storms believe it might be worthwhile to use these tools to trace the power lines down into the mantle and discover the true nature of the Attractor.



GRAVITY MODULATOR

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Crystal plates, like a carapace or very large fish scales

Effect: When placed on the wearer's flesh, the armor grafts on for up to 28 hours per use. The wearer is immune to extreme gravity effects and to damage directly inflicted by gravity. In addition, the wearer can pass through frozen time or similar stasis effects, though doing so reduces her movement to an immediate distance each round, and increases the difficulty of any task requiring Speed by one step.

Depletion: 1 in 1d10 (check per day worn)

GRAVITY SPEAR

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Spearlike weapon with devices affixed to the blade and hilt

Effect: This weapon functions as a normal spear. However, if the wielder uses an action to activate it, the weapon radiates a field of extreme gravity distortion for one round. During that round, if it hits a target, it inflicts additional points of damage equal to the artifact level. Alternatively, the user can emit a gravity-disrupting pulse that extends to a long distance in all directions. Permanent effects of extreme gravity are suppressed for one minute in the area, and temporary gravity phenomena (such as gravity storms) are permanently disrupted.

The gravity spear can also create a tunnel through frozen time or similar stasis effects. The tunnel created is a short distance in length and an immediate distance in diameter, and it lasts for up to 28 hours.

Depletion: 1 in 1d10

PHASE MODULATOR

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Crystal plates, like a carapace or very large fish scales

Effect: When placed on the wearer's flesh, the armor grafts on for up to 28 hours per use. The wearer can shift her phase as an action. While phase shifted, she can swim through objects or solid rock as if they were water. A phase-shifted wearer is immune to most purely physical attacks, and she cannot affect other creatures with physical attacks of her own.

Depletion: 1 in 1d10 (check per day worn)

POWERED GRIP

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Oversized articulated prosthetic made of crystal, roughly in the shape of a hand

Effect: Serves as a fully functional prosthetic hand; humans who use this artifact must sacrifice a normal hand to do so, though naiadans and naiadaps are not so constrained. In addition to doing things a hand can normally do, the powered grip provides its owner with several other abilities. These include an electric touch attack that inflicts damage equal to the artifact level, a +2 boost to Might Edge that lasts for one hour, and a long-range "rocket punch" that inflicts damage equal to the artifact level.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20 (check per day worn)

If the crystal plates of a phase modulator artifact are worn with those of a gravity modulator, the wearer gains +1 to Armor. The combined plates do not hinder movement or tire the wearer in any way (no Might cost or Speed reduction).

ATTRACTOR

The Attractor is, in truth, an ancient starship held in temporal stasis. As the proto-naiadans knew, the Attractor is indeed an artificial object, though one not native to Earth. The stasis field is powerful, but over the millennia it has begun to malfunction. Instead of remaining completely self-contained, the stasis field has started to "wobble." This wobble is responsible for the Implosion Zone and the increasing

frequency of gravity storms. The stasis generators responsible for freezing the warship in time and the gravitic leakage effects can be found on the ship and switched off or possibly repaired by someone with great skill with the numenera.

If the Attractor were to ever regain a regular time stream, it would be revealed as a massive craft filled with aliens called [sorg](#) who somehow became trapped in the world's crust. Freed, the aliens would fulfill

Sorg: level 5; health 20; Armor 4; move a long distance each round when swimming or flying; long-range attack inflicts 5 points of damage to target and all creatures within immediate range; for more details, see page 152 of *Into the Night*

Inner Sea, page 124

their original purpose: attract the attention of more of their warlike kind using tech on their craft, telling them that Earth is a place rich in resources and potential.

Many naiadans assume that the name *Attractor*, which was passed down from their ancestors, was an obscure reference to the object's anomalous gravitational footprint. In fact, it's a reference to the craft's potential to draw attention to the Earth.

HAUNTED TRENCHES

Trenches similar to the one that hosts *Minifera* are located in other parts of the deep, and in fact they contain structures not dissimilar to those of *Minifera* itself. However, these oceaia, if that's what they were, are abandoned and dead. Naiadans have no memory of their kind having had settlements in other trenches that they later abandoned.

A proto-naiadan race preceded those now living. Legends suggest some kind of war between them and a splinter group wiped out the proto-naiadans. Only the splinter group remained, who went on to found *Minifera* and the modern naiadan race.

The haunted trenches may be evidence of the proto-naiadans. Most naiadans want nothing to do with these places, but naiadapts feel differently and are eager to explore them whenever news of a new haunted trench becomes known. Exploring a haunted trench provides opportunities for scavenging shins, oddities, cyphers, and artifacts. As with any exploration, danger is also constant, often from misunderstood devices but also from other creatures of the deep that have claimed parts of these cities as their lairs.

Explorers who have entered a haunted trench and returned report finding some of the following features.

- Dyremmi that have gained individual sentience, and who view naiadans and naiadapts as monstrous, enslaving conglomerations that must be broken up so that individual dyremmi can be emancipated
- Cyphers of pre-dyremmi construction made of concentrated or condensate psychic energy
- Domes that seem filled with normal water but are revealed to be stomachlike baths of acidic enzymes

- Ruins of ancient structures and artifacts sunk from the surface and stored in deposits of amber-colored translucent synth
- Previous explorers inexplicably turned to glass
- Tunnels leading into sealed places in the crust, or all the way through it to the [Inner Sea](#)
- Insane naiadapts building a new empire amid prior-world ruins
- Automatons that possess living parts harvested not from naiadans but from creatures on the surface
- Machines that transport would-be travelers to other locations in the sea, other locations on the surface, or distant locations in the universe—or that just disintegrate them
- Creatures trapped out of phase; to become wholly physical at their current location would kill them in a few rounds because they have nothing akin to deep adaptation cyphers
- Crystal pulsing with the trapped mind of a prior-age psychic overlord
- Detailed plans for building a device capable of quickly and efficiently unzipping naiadans into their constituent dyremmi, effectively killing the naiadan but leaving the constituents alive and easily salvageable

Not every haunted trench is the same. Several were obviously never inhabited by anything like naiadans, and others seem completely empty (at first . . .).

PERSAMLOR

The naiadans of *Persamlor* are convinced that their race took a wrong turn long ago, perhaps as far back as when *Minifera* was originally founded. Though knowledge of that long-before time is essentially legend, *Persamlorans* maintain a rich mythology of “how things once were.” They subscribe to the ideology that dyremmi-based tech is wondrous, certainly, but ultimately limiting. Despite naiadan mastery of and dependence on it, pure bioengineering can take the race only so far. Witness how the naiadans of *Minifera* have remained essentially stagnant for thousands of years, say the *Persamlorans*. Thus, they seek to return their race to a state more like that of the proto-naiadans and give up complete



dependence on dyremmi-based use of the numenera. In this, they go against the dictates of the Myessach council.

The naiadans of Persamlor no longer use *communion* as the primary means to pass on their culture and science or to breed. They've modified themselves to the point where they resemble other species in the world. Rather than being completely composed of dyremmi constituents, they possess unified bodies of living tissue with only a few dyremmi customizations (as cyphers). One consequence of this change is that Persamlorans breed like other creatures of the world, so they are akin to naiadapts—which is ironic, given that naiadapts are seen as impure and unclean in Persamlor, and hunted and killed.

In fact, hunting teams often depart Persamlor on missions to find and slay naiadapts, which earn the teams a breeding bounty. Some hunting teams go so far as to find and kill normal humans and then partly

integrate the dying bodies with dyremmi to give them the appearance of naiadapts. But most teams depart Persamlor to gather devices, cyphers, and artifacts of non-dyremmi origin, because understanding and mastering the tech of the prior worlds is seen as the true mission and purpose of the Persamlor dissidents.

Persamlor is located in a renovated prior-world structure made of black crystal that sticks out of the ocean floor like a leaning spike, about 100 miles (160 km) from Minifera. Instead of a council, it is ruled by a hereditary monarch—currently *Queen Ralaw*, who dwells in a chamber that exists in a tiny pocket dimension at the spike's tip. She is distinguishable from other Persamlorans by her elegant black bodysuit with diamond tracery. The queen is guarded by Persamlor soldiers whenever she rides forth from the spike on the back of a seahorse-like automaton, which is usually to pay out bounties to hunting teams.

Communion, page 100

Queen Ralaw: level 6; Armor 3; long-range sonic lance attack inflicts 7 points of damage; moves up to a long distance each round on the back of swimming level 5 automaton

Meutha: level 4; can use two random active dyremmi abilities

Cedarama: level 3; can use three random active dyremmi abilities

MINIFERA HEARSAY

Forced Adaptations: *Meutha*, a naiadapt who sometimes visits the Minifera embassies in Qi, thinks that humans would greatly benefit from dyremmi interventions. He may have gone so far as to capture some humans against their will, in an effort to more systematically create naiadapts. Word is, several people have died due to his efforts.

Plague: A terrible plague of corrupt dyremmi afflicts certain domes in Minifera, sickening naiadans and naiadapts alike. Those affected seem driven to dive headlong into the Implosion Zone or disable their deep adaptation constituent dyremmi.

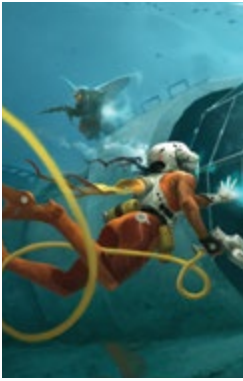
Intelligence Required: The Myessach council suspects that spies from Persamlor have infiltrated Miniferan society. Given the nature of communion, that's hard to believe. Still, it's clear that Persamlorans seem to know what Minifera will do almost as soon as the council finishes deliberation. Perhaps a visit to Persamlor will ferret out the truth.

Ancient Seabed: A naiadan named *Cedarama* says she has opened a one-way time portal back to a more primordial era on Earth, well before naiadans, and even before the first of the eight prior worlds grew to dominance. In that ancient ocean, only primitive sea life swims, sans intelligence or modifications introduced by a billion years of exploitation and adaptation.

THE WEIRD OF MINIFERA

Smart Gravity: A small gravity storm escaped from the Implosion Zone and moved past the Trench Midzone. The storm almost acts as if it has gained limited intelligence; it “hides” in an abandoned Minifera dome, visible as a distortion in the water.

Message: Sometimes when two or more naiadans finish communion, they discover a few rogue dyremmi constituents that possess fragments of a message hidden deep inside. Because it's incomplete, the nature of the message, and who could possibly be sending it, is unknown.



Deep Dark, page 9

Invisible corridors, page 12

Urtilla, page 155

CHAPTER 11

MORENEL AND THE FALLEN TOWER

Located almost three miles underwater, an enormous metropolis stands next to an ancient structure half buried in silt and muck. The stone upon which it was built has long since crumbled, toppling the once-tall tower, but the structure remains mostly intact.

GM SUMMARY

The Fallen Tower is a destination underwater explorers may seek, as it is said to be filled with numenera treasures and wonders. It does hold a variety of discoveries, but also a dangerous, flesh-devouring fungus and weird, reality-warping effects loosed by (perhaps) malfunctioning machines. The tower also contains the sentient, extremely knowledgeable Violaceous Eye, which sometimes grants wisdom and insight, and sometimes destroys intruders with its mental powers.

Near the tower lies the city of Morenel, which serves as an interspecies trade city and meeting spot. Not far from there is a vast graveyard for marine creatures that choose—for some reason—to come to the Fallen Tower to die.

GETTING TO MORENEL AND THE FALLEN TOWER

The *invisible corridors* lead directly to the oceaia of Morenel, which is very near the Fallen Tower. (Most likely, it was built at a nexus of the invisible corridors to make it easy to reach.)

There are also many places where a submarine or similar craft could dock with either the city or the ruined tower, although in the tower, there are no places where one could move from air-filled environment to air-filled environment (air-filled areas of the tower are never so near the outer portions of the structure).

SURVIVAL IN AND AROUND THE FALLEN TOWER

Morenel and the Fallen Tower are located far down in the *Deep Dark*, where the cold and the pressure will be serious problems for a land dweller, and uncomfortable even to some aquatic creatures. The city of Morenel offers protection against these dangers.

Reportedly, some areas of the Fallen Tower are filled with a surfacelike atmosphere and pressure (and perhaps even heat), but to reach them, explorers must make their way through many sections that are filled with water.

USING MORENEL AND THE FALLEN TOWER

The Fallen Tower is the ultimate carrot on the stick to get explorers to leave the relative safety of the surface to travel deep underwater. It holds the promise of almost any numenera secret, discovery, treasure, or innovation.

In addition, the city of Morenel itself is a fantastic hook. The PCs might travel to that trade and diplomatic city to conduct business or negotiations with any number of aquatic NPCs. Or, in a real twist, perhaps it is the only place remote enough to meet with a surface-dwelling envoy who desires utter secrecy.

Last, the PCs might come because of the Deep Graveyard. A wounded aquatic companion or mount—perhaps an *urtilla*, for example—might suddenly begin its last journey to the eerie place, perhaps taking an unwilling rider or two with it.



MORENEL

Morenel is one of the largest undersea cities in the seas between the Steadfast and the Rayskel Cays. Almost 300,000 residents dwell there. The community serves as a place of commerce where a variety of races meet to trade and discuss issues. Most regard it as a safe ground, more or less neutral, where few will openly risk violence. Although the city is visited by many species, most of the residents are humans.

The existence of the humans of Morenel challenges much of what even the most learned scholars of the Steadfast (and the Beyond) believe about their own race. The history of Morenel extends back well beyond 2,000 years, more time than the Ninth World is said to have existed, and certainly far longer than any known human history on the surface. Morenel's own records show that humans from the surface fled some great enemy or calamity long ago, and built the underwater city using fantastic technology. The people of Morenel have lost some of that knowledge, but in general they retain a considerable mastery of what the surface people call the numenera.

Residents of Morenel have their own language, and it seems to bear no relationship to any familiar tongue spoken in the Steadfast. A council of elders rules the city, selected by a larger (but still relatively small) group of influential and wealthy residents.

TECHNOLOGY OF MORENEL

All of the equipment listed in the introduction is available in Morenel. Certain artifacts are also quite common here, maintained and (in some cases) still manufactured, although they might have a specific design unique to this city. These include but are not limited to the following.

- Chiurgeon sphere
- Food scanner
- Food tube
- Hover belt
- Hover square
- Imager
- Molecular bonder
- Nightvision goggles
- Plant jar
- Repair sphere
- Safe corridor

There is no connection to the datasphere in Morenel.

Generator: level 10

Abadis, page 13

The gates into and out of Morenel are level 7.

Inner Sea, page 124

Unpronounceable (properly) to humans, "Tshangng" (t-shan-ng) is a close approximation of the name that the vroaordun give to the city.

Prince Trleng: as a standard vroaordun, but level 6 for all types of interactions; can become invisible; see page 157

Weapons and armor in Morenel are more basic. Few artifacts of this nature exist. The city guards use spears and shields and wear chainmail hauberks.

However, all artifacts in Morenel, along with all vehicles, elevators, air cyclers, food producers, and other devices, are powered by a single massive **generator**. This well-guarded and well-maintained generator is located in the heart of the city, just above the Waterways. Items removed from the city cease to function and are depleted. The only exceptions (for obvious reasons) are the numerous submarines and submersibles outside the city, and any devices to help survive outside its confines. If anything ever happened to the generator, the entire city would likely be doomed.

There are also many cyphers and oddities found in the city, but they are not related to the generator.

THE VROAORDUN

The second most numerous race in Morenel is the vroaordun. Vroaordun can be found throughout the deeps, in their own groups and mixed in with other races. They possess a variety of strange abilities they claim were granted to them by ancient gods that live deep in the sea, supposedly far deeper than anyone (including vroaordun) have ever been. This could be a reference to the **Inner Sea**, but the vroaordun have no knowledge of such a place—and in fact, most people don't.

The vroaordun in Morenel trace their history back even farther than the humans do, as they remember when the humans first arrived. They aided the surface dwellers' transition to living on the sea bottom, and in exchange, the humans helped build a water-filled section of the city for their new allies. This section is called the Waterways and lies at the base of Morenel.

The vroaordun prince that currently rules their section is an individual named **Trleng**. His flesh is inky black, and his eyes are glaring yellow. He is usually attended by a small group of guards, servants, and courtiers. Wealth and power motivate the prince, and because of his control of this particular city, he is among the wealthiest and most powerful of his kind. He also possesses the ability to become invisible whenever he wishes.

THE CITY

Morenel is a single mile-high structure, more or less like a hollow, elongated egg with one end resting on the ground. Within it lies a sprawling complex of interconnected buildings, towers, bridges, platforms, and multilevel structures. Everything is made of stronglass and advanced metals.

Floating platforms, elevators, and flying vehicles allow people to move within this giant space vertically as well as horizontally. The buildings provide spacious accommodations for living, commerce, food production, and manufacturing as well as recreation and art. **Abadis** are the commonly used currency in the city.

The builders of Morenel equipped it with numerous airlocks for submersibles or individuals equipped to survive outside the city. Visitors come and go frequently from this busy metropolis.

THE WATERWAYS

Telekinetic vroaordun created the Waterways out of the rock at the bottom of the city. In other words, this lower portion of the city used to be an open area of great size, but the vroaordun filled it with an almost mazelike complex of hallways and chambers of stone. They use their powers at the various entrances, controlling the airlocks that allow transition between the air-filled and water-filled portions of Morenel. Others with different powers keep fresh water flowing into the city via conduits, provide light, and maintain other necessary aspects to keep the area functioning, for vroaordun do not have an affinity with the numenera.

The interior of the Waterways is ornately decorated with carved stone reliefs and sculptures, veined with a variety of exotic minerals, fossilized remains, and the remnants of ancient structures. Shells (some quite enormous), bones, and other organic objects add to the elaborate adornments.

The main sections of this lower city are marketplaces and small chambers for private exchanges and discussions. A portion of all transactions goes to pay the vroaordun. If the city is used by someone who conducts no transactions, the vroaordun still make a profit from tolls paid to get in and out, payment for lodging, and so on. As above, the generally accepted



currency is abadis, although some vendors and merchants take other currencies, including barter.

One particularly important position among the vroadun is that of rtng (pronounced r-t-ng), those with the ability to freeze time around an individual. The rtng keep the peace in their section of the city, freezing any troublemakers into temporal stasis and releasing them much later when they can be dealt with more easily.

Many of those who come to Morenel find the Waterways more comfortable (water breathers need to equip themselves with apparatuses to breathe in the air of the main city). The vroadun do not use numenera, but others bring it to them. Such devices have been used to create many chambers that provide warmth, additional light, and other comforts.

VISITORS

When *octopi*, *skeane*, and *naiadans* come to Morenel, they spend more of their time in the Waterways rather than above. Some visitors, such as *Glanae* and *echryni*, enjoy both parts of the city.

Most of the visitors to the city are merchants, buyers, and diplomats. Many of

the non-native merchants and diplomats, in fact, have taken up permanent residence in Morenel, particularly in the Waterways. The vroadun cater to these individuals, for they bring more visitors and thus more wealth to the city.

Some of those that come to Morenel do so because of its proximity to the Fallen Tower. These explorers make the city their base of operations, more or less. Merchants sometimes stock exploratory gear and survival equipment more heavily for these individuals, with prices often artificially high. And of course there are those (mostly charlatans and hucksters) trying to sell maps, keys, or other things an explorer might want inside the ruined tower.

Last, scholars and tinkerers spend their time in Morenel to purchase and study the things that explorers bring back when (or if) they return from the Fallen Tower.

THE DEEP GRAVEYARD

For reasons unknown, many deep-sea creatures come to this place to die. Even animals that do not normally come to this region or descend to this depth are sometimes compelled to travel here

Octopus, page 146

Skeane, page 59

Naiadan, page 100

Glanae, page 117

Echryni are amphibious humanoids who hail from an archipelago called the Rayskel Cays. They're strong swimmers who can control and change the structure of water. For more information, see the Ninth World Guidebook, page 216.



Massive fish, aquatic mammals, cephalopods, sea snakes, and other prodigious animals settle here on the ocean floor, along with tiny fish and other creatures, their bones becoming a mixed landscape of salt-encrusted white.

when they know they are going to die soon. Massive fish, aquatic mammals, cephalopods, sea snakes, and other prodigious animals settle here on the ocean floor, along with tiny fish and other creatures, their bones becoming a mixed landscape of salt-encrusted white.

Scavenger creatures feed off the corpses here. Most common are the **tetterigs**, crustaceans about the size of a human hand with a shell large enough to store extra food. Also found in number are the almost translucent **deepworms**, plucking flesh from bones with a nasty mouth on each end.

THE FALLEN TOWER

The Fallen Tower is a prior-world remnant, massive and dangerous. Speculation is that this area was not underwater long ago, and the tower stood on dry land. Those with a (long-view) understanding of geology know that that's quite plausible.

The tower lies on its side on the ocean floor, mostly intact. It is a slowly tapering cylinder of mainly metal, more than 1 mile (1.5 km) long, and averaging about 800 feet (240 m) across. Various doors, airlocks, and open rents provide access to the interior, which is about 70 percent water filled. The remaining 30 percent is still completely sealed and airtight, but getting access to it might involve flooding more of the tower. The fallen structure contains literally thousands of interior chambers and is not laid out in any way intuitive to a human mind. Most of the interior chambers have machinery and devices that can be scavenged, but there are many dangers.

THE FUNGUS

A rare underwater fungal growth called **grayscourge**—or **hjuoun** (pronounced *huh-joo-oun*) in the language of the **vroaordun**—infests water-filled parts of the tower. This fungus grows very quickly when provided with organic material,

which not only gives it sustenance but also stimulates its growth just by its proximity. In some cases, grayscourge been known to grow so fast over a living creature that touches a patch that it seems as though the fungus swallows the victim. Even creatures protected by armor or environment suits are not immune, as the fungus can somehow sense the presence of organic life that is encased in inorganic materials.

In the case of proximity to a patch of grayscourge, a character must make a Speed defense roll with a difficulty of 5 to avoid being overwhelmed by the fungus's sudden growth. An overwhelmed character is encased in the fungus, unable to see or move unless he makes a Might-based roll to break free (again, difficulty 5). Overwhelmed characters with exposed flesh suffer 5 points of damage per round of contact with the flesh-eating fungus. Overwhelmed characters without exposed flesh suffer no damage, but if the armor or suit is lower than level 5, the fungus destroys it in two rounds to get at the character.

THE EFFECTS

Throughout the tower, strange effects distort the very nature of reality in unpredictable and often extremely dangerous ways. This can involve gravity, time, energy, matter, or any of their various relationships. These effects vary throughout the tower. Examples include but are not limited to the following.

- A doorway shrinks as one swims toward it, always becoming too small to pass through by the time it's reached.
- Sound becomes a semisolid form of matter in one area.
- The closer one comes to the center of a round chamber, the slower time moves, and at the very center, time stops.
- Gravity is five times stronger than normal in a corridor, except that it affects only organic matter.

Tetterig: level 1; Armor 2

Deepworm: level 3, Speed defense as level 4 due to translucency and quickness; makes two bite attacks as a single action

The sudden appearance of grayscourge or one of the strange effects of the tower can be handled as GM intrusions.



MORENEL AND THE FALLEN TOWER HEARSAY

Spies Wanted: The vroaordun are always looking for members of other species willing to work with them as agents and informants. Such individuals would observe transactions and report those in which the vroaordun should be getting a percentage, but are not.

The Automaton: Supposedly, deep within the Fallen Tower lies a large, dormant automaton of great power, as well as the master module that grants a person the ability to awaken the automaton and control its actions.

The Moaning Jellies: Floating through the Deep Graveyard are jellyfishlike things that some say emit subsonic calls at varying times. These people believe that it is the moan of these creatures that draws the dying marine life. Others think this rationale is far too simplistic.

WEIRD OF THE FALLEN TOWER

Sometimes They Come Back: Very, very rarely—perhaps only once per year—a dying creature that comes to the Deep Graveyard is miraculously restored to health and swims back to its life.

Mysterious Visitations: Unknown creatures in an unknown underwater craft sometimes hover about the Fallen Tower, shine searchlights on portions of it for a few minutes, and then leave.

The Impostor: A vroaordun wanders the halls of Morenel, claiming to be the prince, and all other vroaordun act as though he is—even though he most certainly is not. This pretender never stays in one place for long and avoids contact with non-vroaordun. If questioned, the vroaordun who interact with him have no memory of doing so.

- Random creatures and objects vanish and reappear from the visible spectrum in a section of the tower.
- The perspective of everyone in a chamber shifts a few feet to the right (so they can see their own bodies from the side).
- Light inflicts harm on matter in a large chamber. Only darkness is safe.
- Random objects in the room turn to energy and explode.

THE TREASURES

Explorers can find all manner of artifacts in the Fallen Tower, as well as cyphers, oddities, and shins. But it is said there are greater treasures to be found. These include secrets of everything from curing disease to interstellar travel. Transdimensional portals. Vehicles. Temporal travel devices. Machines that can create or destroy entire cities. And much more.

THE VIOLACEOUS EYE

In one chamber of the tower, explorers can find the only intelligent inhabitant, the infamous Violaceous Eye. This biomechanical creature is entirely immobile, but also effectively immortal. From its lonely chamber, it contemplates reality and existence, and reaches out into the world (both in the deeps and on the surface) telepathically, watching events, reading minds, and generally observing and learning. It also taps directly into the [datasphere](#).

If found and approached, the Eye grants an audience and asks visitors why they have come. Obsequious or respectful individuals who have a successful interaction with the Eye can gain the answer to one question. Others end up on the wrong end of its powerful mental attacks.



Datasphere, page 12

Violaceous Eye: *level 8, all knowledge as level 10, Speed defense as level 5; health 250; regains 15 points of health per round; mind attack affects all within long range or one target within 1 mile (1.5 km) and inflicts 10 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor)*



CHAPTER 12

ONISTELES

GM SUMMARY

Onisteles is an underwater city located in the Argent Valley, a deep trench between sunken mountains on the ocean floor. The city looks like a “high-rise” of oval buildings, but the buildings are actually the many mouths—filter baskets, if you will—of a giant sea sponge.

The city and its inhabitants, a humanlike race called the Glanae, exist in a carefully balanced symbiotic relationship. What the Glanae don’t know is that another partner has entered into that relationship: the predatory ebons, which protect the sponge in exchange for an easy meal of Glanae.

The city’s location in the Argent Valley means it sits above a unique confluence of both hydrothermal and endothermic vents. These vents create a pocket of ambient water through the valley, but they periodically erupt in a violent spew of chemicals, debris, and even creatures.

WELCOME TO ONISTELES

Onisteles is a beautiful city with a dark secret. Nestled in the Argent Valley between the Broken Mountains, this city of nearly 14,000 inhabitants looks like it is made up of hundreds of discoidal buildings haphazardly stacked upon each other. These buildings are actually the many external mouths of a giant sea sponge.

The sponge’s main dietary need is keratinocytes, and the skin that humanoids (and other creatures) shed is a fantastic food source. Rather than filter its food from the ocean and hope for the best, the sponge creates a hospitable atmosphere for humanoids inside its many mouths and essentially eats up the millions of skin cells that slough off them daily.

That’s not the dark secret. That’s the part that everyone knows. And in fact, it’s a symbiotic relationship that works out well for both parties. Or it would, if it wasn’t for the ravenous hunger of the predatory

USING ONISTELES

The GM can incorporate Onisteles into a campaign in a number of ways. Because it is not commonly known on land nor easy to discover due to its location, the most obvious way to get player characters involved is by a confluence of events that accidentally puts the city on their maps.

- The vehicle the characters are in is rocked by a violent explosion from an erupting vent. The ship is damaged, and they bring it into the valley in an attempt to repair it. In doing so, they discover Onisteles.
- While traveling in the area, the characters recover an injured creature that looks almost, but not quite, human. They find a way to communicate with it and the creature asks, in what seems to be a very complicated way, for help getting home.
- The characters are on a mission to discover an unusual plant that grows only around hydrothermal vents. They don’t find that plant in the Argent Valley, but they do find Onisteles.
- Another option is to use the hidden history of the city. Perhaps the characters uncover an old letter or tome that seems to talk about a beautiful underwater city buried in a turquoise valley. The writer says that everyone should go there once in their life, and has drawn a rough map of the location.



creatures called ebons. These dark, silent swimmers have discovered that Glanae are quick and easy food sources.

The dark secret is that the city-sponge actively encourages the ebons to draw near by secreting a special hormone, and then bursting open one of its mouth sacs to present the ebons with an easy meal. By encouraging the ebons to stick around, the city-sponge ensures that it has protectors against one of the few creatures that will attempt to eat it: the *abyss slug*. These dark blue creatures grow up to 3 feet (1 m) around and 5 feet (1.5 m) long and appear to be covered with swirling black holes that spew ebonic acid when the creature is threatened. Abyss slugs can burrow into a sponge and eat it from the inside out in a matter of weeks.

Some Glanae believe the city-sponge is intelligent and self-aware, but that's not been proven; it either can't or won't communicate with its inhabitants.

The ebons get free dinner from the sponge. The sponge gets protection from the ebons. And the inhabitants—at least the ones not in the exploded center of town—get free room and board. *Almost* a win-win for everyone.

Not knowing the truth, the Glanae work ceaselessly to find a way to stop their city from self-destructing. Some worry that the city-sponge is dying from disease or old age. Others believe it's being weakened by the crystal gardens or the growing population.

GLANAE

The people of Onisteles are called Glanae. Although they look very similar to the humans that live in places like the Steadfast, there are some discreet differences. Glanae have a thin layer of fat and tissue, called banding, under their skin. Banding keeps them warm and helps offset the constant deep-sea pressure on their organs. Their eyes are crystalline and nearly spherical, allowing them perfect underwater vision.

Glanae also have two small blood-vessel-rich openings at the base of their spine that allow them to absorb oxygen from the water. However, it is considered passé by current cultural norms to breathe this way, so many Glanae cover their openings and breathe underwater via other methods, including gill implants. They also “grow” gardens of crystals, called amulstones, that produce and store oxygen, and then release it into

Abyss slug: level 4, defend as level 3 due to speed; spew acid that does 3 points of damage to living creatures within short range

Glanae: level 4; Armor 2; most carry one or two knives, as well as a ranged aquatic weapon



the nearby water. If picked at the right time, amulstones can be used as oxygen sources.

A Glanae's natural lifespan is forty years on average, but many extend this (or attempt to) through technological means. They don't desire to live forever; they just want to live a very, very long time and to do so with all of the luxuries they can manufacture.

A communal people, Glanae are used to living and moving in large, close-knit groups. Maintaining one's proper place in society is important to the Glanae, so most quickly learn and follow the complicated social norms that are expected of them. These range from how to properly position

your arms when you greet others (down, across your body, or touching their arms, depending on their age and social standing in relation to you) to the proper way to ask for help (Glanae consider it bad form to refuse a request for help, so getting out on a technicality if the request isn't "proper" is essentially the only way to say no).

Glanae wear ornate dress crafted from chitin, shell, coral, and other hard materials. It is considered proper to design and decorate your own dress, as well as any weapons and tools you use. In fact, it is bad form to purchase items, so Onisteles has very little in the way of economy. If you can't make a thing or do a job yourself, it's acceptable to receive help from someone more skilled. Many technologies, buildings, and tasks are co-created in this way (some for better, some for worse).

Although Glanae can speak, they use touch as a primary means of silent communication. A tap, a brush, a light poke—these all mean different things depending on the angle, proximity, and accompanying word or sound. The concept of individual names is not something the Glanae embrace. Instead, individuals are identified by a category name, based on their craft or societal place. Maker, venter, and mastercrafter are common monikers.

The group of Glanae that runs the city—called **Glins**—changes every generation. Glins are chosen at birth and raised by the city's six oldest residents, a collective known as **Maasqs**. Maasqs impart all of the proper knowledge and skills Glins need to become part of the ruling group when they turn fifteen years of age. They rule until they turn twenty, and then the next generation takes over.

Glins mostly have the power to enact punishment for social transgressions. Punishments for true infractions, particularly murder, thievery, and destruction of communal property, are decided upon and enforced by Maasqs. The sentence is almost always death by electrical charge. Few Glanae break the law unless they are sure they will get away with it.

EBONS

These sleek, streamlined creatures are master hunters, slipping through the shadows with speed and stealth. Their elongated, finned arms and strong tails allow them to move from a still float to a

Glin: level 5, knowledge of etiquette and social mores as level 4

Maasq: level 4; carries a markmaker, a telescoping rod designed to deliver the maximum shock to a Glanae's nervous system (does 4 points of damage to Glanae, and 3 points of damage to all other living creatures)





Due to the lack of sunlight and seasons in the valley, the Glanae do not track years in the same way as land dwellers. A new year is considered to begin when the eggs of the rosepop fish hatch, so a Glanae year is only about eight months long.

prey-dive in less than a second. They require large amounts of food, particularly fat, to fuel their revving metabolisms.

Ebons hunt in loose packs, usually of two or three. They hunt by a combination of scent and sight. When they see something they desire, they zoom toward it, wrap their finned arms and tails around it, and sting it repeatedly with their poisonous vibrissae.

VISITING ONISTELES

The city of Onisteles is unusual due to its positioning. Both hydrothermal and endothermic vents regularly open up in the valley where Onisteles is located. Hydrothermal vents are due to volcanic activity beneath the valley, and they produce water that is hot enough to boil if not for the extreme pressure. The endothermic vents here are due to an unknown source and cause the water to freeze temporarily as it rises. The two mixing temperatures create a large pocket of temperate water along the entire valley.

Those wishing to visit the city will need breathing apparatuses and equipment to offset the extreme pressures, but once they are inside the valley, they will find the water pleasantly temperate and unusually light—endothermic vents release a bioluminescent, microscopic bacteria that thrives in the valley. These creatures give off a turquoise glow that creates a sense of constant murky light.

One of the easiest ways to get to the city (and it should be cautioned here that *easiest* is relative and certainly doesn't mean *easy*) is to travel most of the way via the **invisible corridors**, which run along the southernmost end of Argent Valley. Here, fields of giant tube worms up to 30 feet (10 m) tall grow in clusters around hydrothermal and endothermic vents. Moving along the tops of the tubes allow travelers to move swiftly. Be careful not to fall, however, as a tumble means a high

HYDROTHERMAL AND ENDOTHERMIC VENTS

Argent Valley is rife with both hydrothermal and endothermic vents.

Typically located over volcanic plates in the earth's crust, hydrothermal vents release water so hot that it would be boiling if not for the extreme pressure. Endothermic vents release water so cold it sometimes freezes into tall plumes as it rises. It's unknown what causes endothermic vents in this location.

Tube worms grow up to 30 feet (10 m) tall in large clusters around both types of vents.

Both hydrothermal and endothermic vents occasionally erupt in a violent expulsion of chemicals, gases, debris, fragments of metal, and bacteria. Endothermic vent eruptions are especially likely to kick out pieces of metal, glass, **synth**, and even rarer items like **shapestone** and **azure steel**. Much of this windfall is collected by Glanae and used for research and manufacturing.

When a vent erupts, it can send objects as far as 200 feet (60 m) away. Glanae who go vent-diving wear special padded suits that protect them from flying debris and fluctuating temperatures. Rebreathers with special filters also keep the wearer from inhaling any chemicals and bacteria that were released in the eruption.

Anyone caught in the path of a **vent eruption** takes 3 points of damage. Those who attempt to vent-dive without a special filter are subject to 2 points of damage for every minute they stay in the eruption area.

Vent eruptions sometimes expel creatures into the surrounding water, including **finterfuge larva**, translucent **crystal crabs**, and young **ice sharks**.

Ebon, page 139

Ebon: level 4. In their first attack, they wrap and poison their prey (does 5 points of poison damage and increases the difficulty of the prey's next action by one step). In their second attack, they bite their prey for 4 points of damage.



Poison, page 95

Vent eruption: level 5

A vent-diving suit provides +3 to **Armor**, protection against extreme temperatures, and a filtered rebreather. It does not protect against extreme pressures.

GM intrusion: The eruption from a vent spews larger-than-normal debris, doing 5 points of damage and stunning the character. Stunned characters lose their next turn.



Stunned, page 95

Synth, page 78

Shapestone, page 77

Azure steel, page 77

Finterfuge larva, page 121

Crystal crab: level 2; **Armor** 3; does 2 points of pincer damage

Ice shark, young: level 4; **Armor** 1; bite does 2 points of damage and injects a substance that causes the victim to begin freezing, increasing the difficulty of her next action by one step





Venter: level 5

Moving across the top of tube worm clusters is a level 4 task, but it enables you to move as quickly as if you were running across land. Anyone who tumbles from the top is frozen or burned by the vents below for 3 points of damage per round until they make their way back up to the top.



Search Terms:
hydrothermal vents,
endothemic vents



Moving in deep water, page 100

chance of quickly boiling or freezing to death (depending on which vents are below you at the time).

Visitors may try to hop a ride aboard a venter. Venters are mechanized vehicles that make a wide orbit of Onisteles, tracking existing and potential vents in the valley. They were designed for two people to ride inside and one person to ride on top. However, many are now on a self-driven course and are unmanned. Jumping on top of one and hanging onto it as it returns to the city is a level 2 task. Finding a way to open the hatch and get inside is a level 5 task, and provides the user with a breathing device. Figuring out how to take control of a venter to pull it off its predestined course and steer it elsewhere is a level 7 task.

THE HISTORY OF ONISTELES

It's unknown how the first citizens came to Onisteles. Where did they come from? How long ago was it? All that anyone knows is that there are currently four living generations in the city, and those families have stories that stretch back another four generations, and there is no tale of arrival among them.

The city has few outside visitors and few non-Glanae, although tales speak of a time when that was not the case. According to the stories, before the Great Succumb, land-dwelling humans and Glanae lived together in peace. Asking about the Great Succumb will most likely get you a wide eye and a sharp poke in the arm—a signal not to speak of such things—but here and there,



Occasionally, a large number of new vents will develop or be extinguished at once, causing an extreme temperature fluctuation that kills off the bacteria (and other creatures and plants). When that happens, the valley is shrouded in deep-sea darkness until the water temperatures—and the light-producing bacteria levels—return to normal.

you might find someone who will tell the story of two sponge-cities living side by side in the valley in harmony: one Glanae and one human. After that, the tales vary widely.

For those who know where to look, the evidence of such a past life can be glimpsed. Many Glanae adorn their dress with a symbol for good luck that looks eerily like the symbol of the **Convergence**. A common children's story tells of a scary spidery humanoid called **Culova** who comes out of the coral woods to eat tasty boys and girls. And here and there, one will find an Onisteles inhabitant who doesn't bear the typical banding or spherical eyes of a Glanae. Perhaps the most pertinent piece of evidence is that many Glanae speak a bit of **the Truth**, having learned it from a grandparent or other elder when they were young.

However, it's hard to know how Glanae will react to visitors, should they arrive. Will they be met with ire over a half-imagined and mostly forgotten slight? Will they be looked at as a threat, or perhaps as long-lost family? Only those early visitors—or perhaps re-visitors—to Onisteles will know.

THE LAYOUT OF THE CITY

Onisteles grows as the sponge grows. The buildings vary in size and are water-filled—the sponge's mouths have small, square openings that allow for a constant exchange of water. These are the same openings that Glanae use as entrances and exits.

Inside each building, the semi-transparent floor, roof, and walls are concave and spongy to the touch. Moving around inside them feels much like moving inside a large, gelatinous, translucent mouth that's filled with water (as that's essentially what they are). Inside most of the buildings, bone-colored fibrous filters run from the floor to the ceiling, dividing the space into semi-private rooms. Although the buildings quiver lightly, they're mostly still inside until a vent explodes or a storm sweeps churning water through the interior space.

The sponge grows both upward and outward at the same time, so the oldest buildings are located along the bottom interior of the city. These are mostly communal creator spaces, labs, research centers, and other places where scientific discovery, manufacturing, and

creation occur. The Glin nursery and the Maasq headquarters, training center, and observatory are also housed in this location.

Most buildings have a mix of dwellings, labs, workshops, amulstone gardens, and whatever else might get added as the space expands.

The buildings are connected to the core of the sponge by its many “throats”—chitinous tunnels that deliver food from the buildings to the digestive system of the sponge. Glanae sometimes use the curved tops as swimways, but more often they are planted with amulstone gardens.

Some of the buildings appear to have large, jagged holes in their sides, as if a strong force from inside has burst them open. Unbeknownst to the Glanae, these are the places where the sponge is plying its dark secret. After it releases a hormone into the water that draws the ebons close, it bursts open one of its mouth sacs with enough pressure to push everything out of it. Surprised (and often stunned) ejected Glanae are easy pickings for the ebons.

Various fixes are used, from patching the holes to coating the entire mouth with special substances to try to keep buildings from blowing. But so far, Glanae have had little luck solving the problem.

FLORA AND FAUNA

Rosepop: These tiny fish with their bioluminescent pink middles often swarm in giant schools around ebons to scavenge their leavings. They are sometimes kept as pets by Glanae due to their rose-colored light.

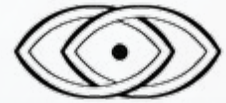
Scarpworm: A spined sea serpent that grows up to 50 feet (15 m) long, the scarpworm is a fearsome opponent. Dwelling in creviced and dead vents (ones that are still open but no longer pump out near-boiling or -freezing water), a scarpworm attacks and eats anything that crawls or swims within reach. Its body is pearly white, and it bears multiple purple eyes. Scarpworms attack by generating an electrical charge of up to 600 volts, which disables the muscles of any creature within long range.

Finterfuge: Finterfuges spend most of their lives in a larval state, tiny grubs buried in the ocean floor, eating as many of their siblings as they can manage, until they are nearly 1 foot (30 cm) long. When they reach

Convergence,
page 223

Culova, page 236

The Truth, page 133



Rosepop: level 1

Scarpworm: level 6;
electrical attack disables the muscles of any creature within long range. Victims who fail Intellect defense rolls are paralyzed for two rounds. Victims who fail Might defense rolls move one step down the damage track. When it bites a paralyzed victim, its sharp tug and tear does 8 points of damage.

ONISTELES HEARSAY

Wrongful Deaths: There is talk that Maasqs are using captive young scarpworms to torture criminals before killing them. A Glin has been trying to learn the truth but is afraid of what the Maasqs might do if they discover the investigation.

Blood Bulbs: A young Glanae was badly bitten while playing in an amulstone garden. It was discovered that bioengineering has turned some of the amulstones carnivorous. There is a citywide drive to find the rogue amulstones and wipe them out.

THE WEIRD OF ONISTELES

Dark Lullaby: One patch of the valley floor stays in shadow, even when the rest is bathed in bioluminescence. Anyone who enters it begins to hear a soft, sweet song that makes them want to take off their equipment and lie down among the coral.

Hello? While on a vent-dive, a venter heard someone talking on the other side of the vent. When the venter peered inside the opening, five glowing yellow eyes peered back.

Finterfuge grub: level 1

Finterfuge pupa: level 3; a host who fails a Might defense roll begins to experience mental changes, including hallucinations and changes in personality. The host may find himself good at things he usually has an inability in, and bad at things that he is normally skilled at. When the adult emerges, it does 1d6 points of damage to the host, depending on where it exits.

Finterfuge adult: level 4; Armor 1; does 4 points of damage with its pincers

Harvesting an amulstone crystal without breaking it is a level 3 Intellect task, unless you have a Glanae-crafted amulknife (which makes it a routine task). Sucking on an amulstone crystal allows the user to absorb oxygen into his saliva for up to an hour.



Routine task,
page 15



Search Term:
chemosynthesis

this size, they push up through the dirt and sand and begin their search for a host. A good host is anything with an intestine. A great host is a creature with a large, warm intestine, and an easy way to access it.

During the resting stage, a finterfuge is vulnerable, so it settles into the host's body and curls up as small as possible. During this time, the host typically experiences hallucinations, changes in personality, and other mental effects.

In a few days to a week, the adult finterfuge emerges through whatever opening it can find. Typically it prefers the mouth or nose, perhaps because that's how it likely entered, but it may also make its own hole on the way out.

The black-and-white striped body of an adult finterfuge is nearly 2 feet (60 cm) long, and its striated, wing-shaped fins can be twice that in width. It has a beetlelike head with a set of sharp black pincers that can grip and hold onto something twice its size and weight.

Amulstone: These orange and pink crystals grow higher up, off the valley floor, along the sides of the mountain range. They spread by bulbed roots, forming extended colonies. In their naturally occurring form, amulstones are chemosynthetic, releasing small amounts of oxygen into the water as a waste product. The Glanae have cultivated bioenhanced versions of amulstones that release much larger quantities of oxygen into the water. They plant them extensively in and around the city and use the harvested crystals in various breathing devices.

EQUIPMENT

Visitors wishing to purchase equipment in Glanae will find it difficult and confusing. The very idea of selling or buying things offends most Glanae sensibilities, and they respond as if the suggestion is a personal affront (which it is, for them).

The only real way to get something in Onisteles (other than by stealing it) is to ask for help making it. According to the conventions of Glanae society, it's impolite to refuse a request for help, so visitors may use that to their advantage—but only if they learn how to ask the correct way.

To ask for assistance properly, you must bring a handcrafted item of your own making to a Glanae and explain—with just the right amount of pride and humility—how your skill sets allowed you to create such a thing. When the Glanae murmurs appreciation for the craftsmanship (which they will, whether the item is good or not), you must then tell a story of how you used the item. This shows that you did not make the item just for the purpose of impressing them and shows good faith that you will use the item that you are asking for help with. After finishing the story, you ask the Glanae what they are skilled in (as if you didn't already know). They will go through the same ritual of showing you an object they made and telling a story about it. Then you must concede that they are the better craftsman, and ask for their assistance.

The best way to learn the ritual of asking for help is to watch it being done. Figuring it out on your own is a level 4 Intellect task.



Most Glanae know how to craft a number of common artifacts. With a Glanae craftsman at your side, the task of making your own device can take anywhere from ten minutes to a few days. Other more unusual or complicated devices can also be created, but they require more time and the assistance of a mastercrafter.

AMUL LUNG

Level: 1d6

Form: Small needle connected to a tube and a fist-sized bulb with an amulstone in it

Effect: When the needle is inserted into the skin and the bulb is activated, it compresses the amulstone so that it slowly releases stored oxygen into the bloodstream for about four hours.

Time to make: 2 hours.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20 (check every hour the device is worn; upon depletion, the bulb can be replaced)

CRYSTAL INJECTOR

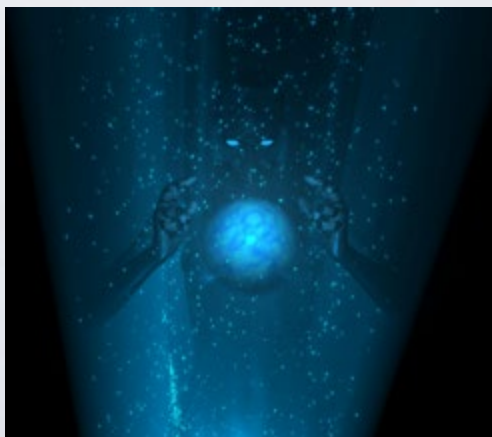
Level: 1d6

Form: Injector

Effect: Injects ground-up amulstones into the user's bloodstream, where they release high amounts of oxygen. The first few minutes of the experience are nauseating and likely vomit-inducing, but they are followed by a great sense of euphoria. Once that passes, the injection keeps the user oxygenated for four to six hours. It's not uncommon for users to become addicted to the oxygen-high euphoria, despite the negative side effects.

Time to make the injector: four hours. Time to make ground-up amulstones: ten minutes.

Depletion: 1 in 1d6



GILL IMPLANTS

Level: 6

Form: A medical procedure done only by special doctors known as gilleums, gill implants are a long-term solution for underwater breathing. The optimal position is along the sides of the neck, but some people choose to implant them at the femoral or brachial arteries, or directly in front of their lungs. Those seeking gill implants are expected to help the gilleum with the surgery, so they must stay awake during the procedure.

Time to make: 8 hours.

Effect: Once the implants are properly installed, they allow the user to absorb appropriate levels of oxygen from water. Gills should be covered with a gill cap when on dry land to prevent collapse.

Depletion: —

PLINEY

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Projectile weapon that straps to the user's back and is fired by a remote mouth trigger

Effect: When the user squeezes the mouth trigger between his teeth, the pliney shoots a heat-seeking pellet toward the nearest item that is producing heat. Upon impact, the pellet expands, creating a crater-shaped impact. It does damage equal to the artifact level.

Time to make a pliney and ten pellets: two hours.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

PULSESHOT

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Probably the most common ranged weapon created and used by Glanae. Designed after [pulse snails](#), whose shells emit a honed blade of light so sharp that it can slice right through the mouth and teeth of a creature that attempts to bite it, this weapon is mounted on the shoulder, with an extendable eyepiece for aiming.

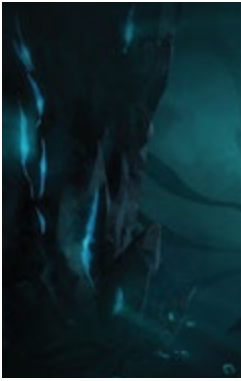
Effect: Delivers a triangular pulse of light that slices through flesh and bone. Does damage equal to the artifact level.

Time to make a pulseshot and ten projectiles: two hours.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100

Scarpers are Glanae who go out in large groups and attempt to hunt down and capture a young scarpworm. It's a dangerous task that nearly always meets with failure, but the creature's electrical charge is invaluable, as the Maasqs can harness it to power devices within the city.

Pulse snail: level 2; Armor 5; razor-sharp pulse of light does 3 points of damage (ignores Armor)



CHAPTER 13 THE INNER SEA

Deep beneath the Earth's solid crust lies a second ocean as large as the one on the surface. This hidden sea's existence is suspected by a handful of the learned. They call it the Inner Sea and suspect that surviving descendants of one of the prior worlds hid themselves away in the hot waters far beneath the world's outer rocky rind. That places the Inner Sea some 250 miles (400 km) below the surface. Why those prior-world survivors were driven to hide—or indeed, if the creatures that reside there now even have a direct connection with their forebears—is a question for philosophers, because the truth is lost in deep time.

Whatever its origin, the Inner Sea assuredly remains. The water-filled region is so large that it defies human comprehension. No one's ever crossed it completely to measure its full span. Most surface dwellers have never even heard of it, and those who have know it from rumors and tall tales by another name: the Beneath.



Search Terms: *crust, mantle, lithosphere, outer core, inner core*

GM SUMMARY

The Inner Sea is a secret, hidden ocean layered between the world's crust and mantle, a sea maintained by artificial supports known as the Towers. The most wide-ranging inhabitants of the Inner Sea are the chearrans, a race of humanlike creatures who have become so dependent on parasites called the **niephris** that chearrans aren't truly intelligent without a niephris bond. The chearrans inhabit mobile prospecting cities that flit all about the Inner Sea, but which also sometimes burrow up to the surface oceans.

Niephris, page 127

RUMORS OF THE BENEATH

One tidbit of information surface dwellers have on the so-called Beneath is based on a psionic audio relay discovered years ago by one of the Aeon Priests in Ledon. The audio relay was believed to be quite old, and the language was unknown. There have been many different interpretations of the message. Most consider the relay to be the rantings of a mad creature, but others believe that the speaker's ship found something—an impossible place of light and life—far beneath the darkness.

I hereby swear that I have translated this psionic audio relay to the best of my ability, and without swaying the testimony either toward or away from its possible true intent. Signed this day, Gadya Erdos

Day Y3ui. Captain's Log. The dark goes on and on and on. It eats you like a many-toothed shadow, like a thousand wriggling water maggots, like your own nails pulling your skin from your bones. It makes us crazy, it does. Every one of us. We have lost our minds, we tug our hair just to release the pressure from our brains, we scrape our eyeballs to see what covers them. We talk into these recorders and our own voices scare us to wailing, because they are not our voices anymore. They belong to this great, horrible expanse, to this place of great nothingness.

Day somewhere. Everything. Nothing. Mmmm. My tongue went disappeared. This speak is tentacle voice. This button. Push. What.

Light. Lightlightlightlightlightlightlight.

Day B8hh. Captain's Log. We have found something here, beneath the very black bottom of the sea. There is light and food

USING THE INNER SEA

The GM can use the Inner Sea several ways in a campaign. The following scenarios could be provided as hooks to player characters.

- The PCs encounter a city-sized spherical clump of levitating earth. When they investigate, the sphere opens a wide maw and scoops them up into a stasis holding cell, and then descends into the sea, through the crust, and into the Inner Sea. The clump is a “prospecting city” operated by a race of creatures known as **chearrans**. Returning to the surface requires coming to understand chearran society, and perhaps even escaping to a location more sympathetic to humans.
- The PCs’ craft gets caught in a massive whirlpool off the coast of a small island called **Meaqos**. The whirlpool sucks them down an insanely long, living, peristaltic throat that vomits them into the **Serpent Forest** of the Inner Sea. If the PCs don’t have the means to survive on their own, they are saved by a group of Golloch Ventures explorers who provide the characters with a means to breathe the water.
- The PCs are asked by Aeon Priests to find a route to the fabled Inner Sea.
- The PCs begin as beings native to the Inner Sea. They agree to leave the hot ocean and ascend to the surface to report back on rumors of some sort of worldwide danger that threatens the surface, and perhaps that which lies below.
- Parts for a machine capable of moving the entire Earth once used by a prior-world civilization are claimed to lie in the region of the Inner Sea called the **Upwelling**, and the PCs are asked to investigate.
- The PCs enter the Inner Sea with the express mission of getting access to a **line node** that lies in the Tower-city of **Achmosar**.

and the pressure in my head goes. I blink and blink. I am the only one of the crew alive, but there are others here, wild creatures of innards and invisibility. We cannot talk, but they have taken me into their sphere. More soon.

This, of course, reveals that there is a direct connection between the ocean and the Inner Sea—a place where one can somehow descend and descend until reaching its deep, comparatively safe, and surprisingly illuminated environment. This place—or at least, perhaps, one such place—exists to the southwest of the Steadfast, almost a thousand miles. Whether you call it the Beneath or the Inner Sea, it is an extraordinary place.

The hidden ocean is relatively dense with odd objects and devices. The most obvious examples are the equally spaced **Towers** that rise like pillars from floor to ceiling of the Inner Sea, each about a half mile (1 km) in diameter. The Towers directly maintain the structural integrity of the vault overhead, moderate the water pressure, keep the water from boiling, and possibly continuously conduct other less obvious functions. If explorers from the surface want to find fascinating relics of earlier worlds, they need look no farther than beneath their feet.

GETTING TO THE INNER SEA

A variety of means to get to the Inner Sea exist, including those described under Using the Inner Sea, a random cypher or artifact, or being teleported via an artifact called the **Sealorn** kept by the **University of Doors**. It can also be physically reached by a submersible able to find the entrance and survive the unimaginable pressures of diving hundreds of miles beneath the waves.

Finding the Inner Sea is an achievement, but given the extensive volume of the hidden ocean, moving between various locales *within* it could be something of a challenge without a vehicle or other special means.

SURVIVAL IN THE INNER SEA

The **invisible corridors** don’t reach down to the Inner Sea, so characters will survive their visit only if they are prepared for the environment. That said, the water pressure is about the same as in the shallow regions of the surface seas. The temperature of the water is somewhat warmer than balmy, in that it never fluctuates far from 90 degrees F (32 degrees C). Though some would consider that uncomfortably warm, the sea isn’t the boiling hellbroth it would otherwise be without the influence of the Towers.

The native creatures of the Inner Sea are perfectly adapted to the waters here,

Chearrans, page 127

Meaqos, page 133

Serpent Forest, page 132

Upwelling, page 133

Line node, page 132

Achmosar, page 130

Sealorn, page 134

University of Doors, page 216

Invisible corridors, page 12

The Towers, page 128



Although the Inner Sea has a day and night cycle, the days are about twenty-six hours long, and thus slightly confusing to surface dwellers.

but humans from the surface will require equipment allowing them to breathe underwater, at minimum, and perhaps a way to mediate the overly warm waters so that heat exhaustion doesn't set in.

One issue of deep-sea exploration that does not arise in the Inner Sea is constant darkness. The towers provide a day-night cycle of light and dark, so much so that when it is "day" the illumination is equal to that of being very close to the surface, in crystal clear water.

Water-adapting cyphers and artifacts found and used within the Inner Sea are usually one-of-a-kind devices, whether they are mechanical, psychic, biological, or rely on some other underlying principle. For example, an artifact known as the chronice seems to work by curling reality around the wearer, so that instead of trying to breathe and swim through bath-hot water, the wearer feels as if she is operating in an air-filled environment (because she actually is). The frang suit encloses the wearer in a second skin, which from the outside gives her the semblance of a creature native to the Inner Sea (a frang) with a similar ability to survive and move through the water.

CHRONICE

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Mask with dark crystal lenses

Effect: The wearer can operate in any watery environment without penalty, regardless of the surrounding pressure, temperature, or lack of breathable air. The wearer loses the ability to swim but can walk, run, or even sprint along a surface as if moving through an air-filled, rather than a water-filled, environment.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100 (check per day of use)

FRANG SUIT

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Pseudo-living fishlike suit with inner cavity large enough for a human

Effect: The wearer can use the frang suit as if it was his own body. The frang suit allows him to breathe, to survive hot or cold water without coming to harm, and to swim a long distance each round.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100 (check per day of use)

FLORA AND FAUNA OF THE INNER SEA

The Inner Sea boasts a great deal of life just as the surface ocean does, with as large a variety in form. An extensive ecosystem thrives here, though only because the Towers keep the temperature and pressure in check and provide illumination—visible sun-bright threads glowing through the water about thirteen hours out of every twenty-six.

Kelp, seaweed, seagrass, algae, and other plant varieties that blend the distinction between plants and animals are abundant within the Inner Sea. Most occupy similar niches as those found in the surface ocean, though many are unique. For instance, the miles-long lengths of redweed release a mucous diffusion into the water—red as blood—whenever they are prodded. Those who fail an Intellect defense roll (difficulty 3) suffer 2 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) and are afflicted with strange visions, usually of a terrifying nature.

Eel-like frang swim everywhere in the Inner Sea, and they are notable for their relatively large girth, their long trailing tails, and the flashing lights of the bioluminescent spots that dance down their lengths. Most frang are innocuous, but some varieties, like the *whisper frang*, are deadly poisonous.

Crabs of every size and shell conformation swim the Inner Sea. One species in particular is well known by natives for its dislike body hiding a nest of claws and a long trailing tail spine. Called the *crown crab*, these creatures continually grow throughout their lives, often reaching sizes in excess of 10 feet (3 m) in diameter with a tail trailing twice that distance behind them. Their many eyes rim the outer circuit of their shells. Crown crabs are mostly scavengers, but if encountered in a group of five or more, they could attack if they smell unfamiliar prey (like humans).

Swift predators called *glare sharks* are also plentiful, though usually only within a few miles (4 km) of a Tower or flitting among the tube-trees of the Serpent Forest. Glare sharks are large, quick, and deadly. Unlike their smaller cousins, they do not feel the need to lie in wait in order to ambush prey. When a glare shark senses something that looks like food, it attacks with its massive, tooth-filled mouth.

NATIVE RACES OF THE INNER SEA

The Inner Sea holds many races of intelligent beings. One of the most prolific are the chearrans.

CHEARRANS

Chearrans are an aquatic race that somewhat resemble humans, but who are adapted for underwater life. They are paler than humans and have no body hair except for often-dramatic eyelash fringes around their yellow, pupil-less eyes.

The most significant chearran feature is that most adults visibly display *niephris* parasites, which resemble large blue insects that ride chearran heads like living crowns. Without a *niephris*, a chearran has the intelligence of the average animal. But when bonded to a *niephris*, the average chearran is articulate, curious, and highly intelligent. This is why *niephris* are such an integrated part of chearran society. Left to their own devices, the chearrans presume they'd be just another creature of animal intelligence swimming the Inner Sea, hunting, mating, and striving to stay alive for no greater purpose than to beget ever more generations.

But thanks to the mind-expanding *niephris* influence, chearrans number among the most populous and wide-ranging race in the Inner Sea; most other



Niephris: level 2; when specifically targeting a bonded *niephris*, attacker must trade 2 points of damage she would otherwise inflict

Trading Damage for Effect, page 113

Whisper frang: level 4, Speed defense as level 2 due to large size; poison inflicts 2 additional points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) if a target fails a Might defense roll

Crown crab: level 3; two pincer attacks as a single action or one spine tail attack that inflicts damage and (on a failed Might defense roll) 1 point of Speed damage for three rounds

Glare shark: level 6, Speed defense as level 4 due to enormous size, bite as level 7 for targets who can see the shark's glowing eyes; bite inflicts 8 points of damage

creatures who've encountered the chearrans fear them and their sometimes ruthless ways. Chearrans wield great technologies in the pursuit of uncovering still-greater mastery. They are well aware of the surface, including the various intelligent races sprawled across the main continent. With their expanded dual minds, chearran intelligence is likely superior to that of humans, though given relative proximity, a connection may exist between the two species. The chearrans suggest that a lost prospecting nodule sent to the surface some twenty thousand years earlier engendered the human race that lives there now.

The learned may note some similarities between chearrans and the **lattimors** that live on the surface. However, unlike lattimors, a chearran never operates with one intelligence in greater control than the other. If a chearran is somehow separated from its bonded niephris, the chearran is no better than an animal, while the niephris acts essentially like a large insect.

Chearran life can be exciting, chaotic, and filled with discovery, at least after a "bond mate" (a niephris parasite) is selected, usually for chearrans who've reached the age of eight or nine years. A celebration similar to a wedding leads up to the event. Afterward, a child (who had the position and cognitive abilities of a treasured pet) is considered an adult. Awakening to self-awareness and thought is often an overwhelming experience, and newly uplifted chearrans are given time to adapt before they begin life anew, which frequently involves throwing themselves into studies.

When niephris are not bonded, they scuttle around special breeding pods with the apparent intelligence and awareness of their situation of insects. Chearrans revere unbonded niephris, though not quite so much as they cherish unbonded chearrans. Indeed, unbonded niephris, if not confined and regularly fed, can become aggressive.

Chearrans speak their own language and many other languages of other intelligent creatures living within the Inner Sea. Interestingly, one of those languages (spoken by the people of Achmosar) is very close to **the Truth**. Chearran currency is counted in faintly luminous blue-purple gems called zans. Other creatures value the currency for its beauty. A human might pay up to 20 shins for one zan.

Most chearrans live in massive, mobile spherical cities that move about the Inner Sea. These cities have the capacity to burrow above or below the Inner Sea through solid rock—the cities can apparently levitate in open air as easily as they move through liquid and stone. Each city exterior resembles an orb of rough stone gleaming with hot lines of magma. Exits and observation ports are opened as need be. Inside, a hivelike confusion of water-filled tunnels lead to chamber after chamber filled with tech required to keep the cities operational. Many chearrans are employed in clambering across these machines to keep them in peak condition. The rest operate at deeper levels of the city, engaged in all the many duties required to keep a community in food, clothing, entertainment, medicines, and so on, as well as duties like research, leadership, and piloting the city.

Each city has a Custodian, who has absolute power over every other chearran in the city. Custodians are awarded an implement of their office in the form of a psycholon.

Most of the cities cooperate, but a few rebel cities have gone their own way.



Lattimor, page 122

PSYCHOLON

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: 6-foot (2 m) long staff of blue-purple crystal

Effect: A psycholon serves as a medium melee weapon that inflicts 2 additional points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor). It can also project a long-range bolt of psychic decoherence that inflicts 5 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor). If the psycholon is used against a niephris, an affected niephris is stunned and loses its next turn. Against a bonded chearran, the niephris is forced to detach.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

THE TOWERS

Most creatures of the Inner Sea accept these pillarlike structures as a natural part of their environment. The Towers stretch from the floor to the ceiling, a height of some 50 miles (80 km), are about half a



The Truth, page 133



mile (1 km) wide, and are approximately 50 miles (80 km) from each other. Morning comes when vertical lines along the surface of the Towers kindle to faint golden radiance. The day proceeds as the golden light strengthens to a brilliant shine over six and a half hours, and then fades over the same span of time. Night falls when the light is extinguished. At least, that's true for creatures within about 25 miles (40 km) of a Tower; light doesn't usually travel much farther, which means many small pockets of the Inner Sea are eternally dark, though still quite warm.

The chearrans recognize that, in addition to providing light, the Towers moderate what would otherwise be unbearable pressure and heat conditions. Not even they know the origin of the Towers, but they accept that the columns are artificial constructions created by intelligences far greater than their own. Though the chearrans like to believe that they themselves are remnants of a prior world, they couldn't replicate the tech that goes into these ancient pillars. In some ways, merely by existing, the Towers challenge chearran claims of supremacy.

Close up, each Tower is barnacled and overgrown with sea life (except along wide vertical striation lines of gold crystal that shine each day). The Towers are honeycombed with passages and inner cavities, but these spaces are defended by inimical creatures, apparently formed of solid water, called *curusa*. *Curusa* seem

numberless when it comes to turning back small- or large-scale attempts to enter a Tower.

INNER SEA LOCATIONS

A very limited selection of Inner Sea locations is provided below, but they are only examples of the amazing variety and wonder the hidden ocean contains.

PROSPECTING CITY OF CARNULLFAR

Carnullfar is a mobile spherical city inhabited by chearrans. The city spends a good portion of its time exploring areas far from the Inner Sea. In fact, it specializes in burrowing up through the ceiling and rising to the world's surface, where the gleaning is unopposed by rival prospecting cities. Carnullfar houses just over a thousand chearrans.

Surface dwellers have noticed the city floating like a solid thunderhead over the oceans and sometimes over solid land as Carnullfar conducts its enigmatic surveys. When the city finds something of interest, more often than not it merely scoops up what it wants, whether that's a creature, a ruin, or even an entire *aldeia*, complete with all those living there.

Sometimes a **landing party** of chearrans is dispatched if the nature of the investigation doesn't lend itself to being brought within Carnullfar (as is the case if something is too big to fit, like a city or a large ruin).

Normally, bright light travels about 3,000 feet (1,000 m) through seawater. Given how much farther it travels from the Towers, it's possible that some hidden Tower influence allows the light to propagate much farther.

Chearran landing party member: level 3; long-range focused light weapon inflicts 5 points of damage and dazes target for one round, making all its actions one step more difficult

Curusa, page 138



RAY EMITTER (CURUSA CONTROLLING)

Level: 1d6 + 2

Internal: Subdermal implant

Wearable: Contact lens, glove, ring, wristband, headband, belt buckle, shoulder-mounted device

Usable: Handheld device

Effect: Allows the user to project a ray of energy up to 200 feet (60 m) that opens a telepathic communication channel between her and the target for one minute. If the target is a *curusa*, the user can mentally direct it each round for one minute as her action.



Carnullfar Custodian: level 6, health 30; +3 to Armor from an esotery; long-range attack inflicts 5 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) from a psycholon; carries a ray emitter (curusa controlling) cypher

Niephris, page 127

Humans who survive their arrival in Achmosar but have no way to stay alive there are fitted with sculions, symbiote creatures that breathe for humans and similar beings suited to breathing air.

Terec tril: level 7; Armor 4; integrated artifact can produce and fire a detonation (curusa) cypher once every other round (Depletion: 1 in 1d20)

Chearrans on the surface wear lightweight air suits that allow them to breathe normally.

The Custodian of Carnullfar, a chearran male whose niephris crown constantly hums and whistles, often visits the Inner Sea city of Achmosar to trade, especially for cyphers that give him the ability to manipulate or summon curusa. But his fascination with curusa is nothing compared to his obsession with humans—specifically, how humans seem to have almost chearran-level intelligence without niephris bonds. The Custodian wonders what might happen if a human formed a niephris mind-link, despite deep chearran cultural taboos that prohibit allowing niephris to bond with any other creature. He continually revises half-serious plans for capturing a breeding stock of humans in order to experiment and see what would happen.

ACHMOSAR

Achmosar is a city that exists within—and crusted upon the exterior of—a Tower that ceased to function long ago. No longer providing illumination for any but its current residents, the massive artificial structure has been continuously inhabited for a couple of thousand years. Whatever wonders its interior may have once held were looted long ago. Those water-filled spaces now serve as grand city plazas alight with leashed globes of the radiance that the Tower once used to illuminate the Inner Sea.

In addition, the Tower retains its ability to generate curusa for defense. That defense function is controlled by the self-described “benevolent despot” named Terec tril. Terec tril is almost certainly an automaton, given its metallic, eel-like lower body, its bladelike sculling limbs of synth, and its metal-plated humanoid upper body. Terec tril has ruled Achmosar for as long as it can remember, partly thanks to a weapon integrated into its body that fires curusa detonation cyphers. Terec tril allows pretty much anyone into Achmosar and almost anything is permitted, except for slavery of any kind, attempts to wrest control of the city from Terec tril, and vandalism or theft of property.

Chearrans predominate in Achmosar, but the city also holds a representative sample



DETONATION (CURUSA)

Level: 1d6 + 2

Wearable: Wristband projector (long range)

Usable: Explosive device or ceramic sphere (thrown, short range) or handheld projector (long range)

Effect: Bursts in an immediate radius, draining moisture from everything within the area. Living creatures take damage equal to the cypher level. Water in the area is sucked into a central globe. One round later, a curusa is called into being and does the bidding of the detonation user for ten minutes before it disperses.

of the menagerie of different intelligent creatures that live within the Inner Sea. Citizens might be creatures that look like colorful fish, bubbles, eels, masses of wet hair, and many that defy easy description. Among all these are also a few humans. Some of the humans hail from the surface, though many descend from surface dwellers who arrived even earlier. Other humans in Achmosar arrived via a technological device in the bowels of the city called a line node.

SCULION

Level: 1d6

Form: Tentacled creature that fits over user’s nose and mouth

Effect: Allows an air breather to extract oxygen from water so she can breathe underwater. Most creatures forced to rely on a sculion find that it doesn’t provide quite enough air; the difficulty of all Might- and Speed-based rolls, including attacks and defenses, is increased by one step.

Depletion: —

Getting around the city is as easy as swimming, but given its size, citizens prefer to use a variety of personal movement gear and vehicles, many of which qualify as artifacts because they were salvaged from much older tech. The most popular means of conveyance include impellers and various Inner Sea creatures that serve as swimming mounts. Knowing where



to go is more important, as few accurate maps of Achmosar exist. That's where the many touts come in handy—those in the city who advertise their ability to get anyone anywhere based on their superior knowledge, for a modest fee.

IMPELLER

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Finned tube, 3 feet (1 m) long and 8 inches (20 cm) wide, with grips

Effect: Sucks in water at one end and expels it at the other, allowing anyone holding the grips to move up to a long distance each round in which she makes a Speed roll (level 1). On extended trips, it can move up to 80 miles (129 km) per hour.

Depletion: 1–2 in 1d100

It's no surprise that such a cosmopolitan, multiracial city like Achmosar hosts amazing markets. Goods and produce from all across the vast Inner Sea can be found in the market districts that stretch for miles along the city's vertical length. The chearran

currency of zans is accepted everywhere, and most places accept *abadis*, but other valuables are usually readily bartered. A popular saying has it that a shopper who spends a minute at each shop would die of old age before she ever visited them all. Foodstuffs, decorations, gear, and even cyphers and artifacts can be purchased in the market. The only things that can't be bought are slaves or contracts for the same, at least not without eventually drawing the attention of the Vigilants or Terec tril itself.

Vigilants: It's a popular myth that Terec tril cares about only one thing (slavery) and lets everything else sort itself out. In fact, Terec tril also frowns upon theft, kidnapping, coercion through threat of violence or economic sanction, and other activities that might make living in Achmosar seem less than idyllic. Terec tril wants to make certain that shop owners in the market districts never balk at paying for the right to sell their wares. For first-order issues that require an immediate and vigorous show of power, Terec tril calls up *curusa*. For everything else, there are the Vigilants. The Vigilants are citizens of the city deputized to act in Terec tril's name.

Abadis, page 13

Perra, niephris: level 4; Armor 4; operates a humanoid automaton body with integrated long-range energy blast that inflicts 6 points of damage and stuns victim for one round

Upwelling, page 133


Crown crab, page 127

Glare shark, page 127

Whisper frang, page 127

Serpent, active: level 7, Speed defense as level 3 due to size; health 50; Armor 2; acidic bite inflicts 7 points of damage for three rounds

Christo: level 5, Might- and Speed-based tasks as level 4, knowledge of Achmosar as level 8; wears a sculion artifact; carries a serpent blood cypher

 **SERPENT BLOOD**
Level: 1d6 + 2
Usable: Injector
Effect: For 28 hours, the user's touch becomes acidic, granting her a touch attack (that she is practiced with) that inflicts damage equal to the cypher level on a target.



Nebalich, page 208

Branu's Kiss is a bubble of blue-green water about 30 miles (48 km) in diameter tumbling through the endless night between Earth and the sun. For more details, see Into the Night, page 16.

An entity called **Perra** controls the Vigilants. Perra is a niephris that has chearran-level intelligence despite having never bonded with a chearran. Perra interacts with others from its perch with a crystal-helmed humanoid-shaped automaton that allows it to speak.

The Gangs: Despite the curusa and the Vigilants, many in Achmosar would prefer to flout the law rather than abide by Terectril's desires. The Gangs—so called because there are dozens—are usually smart enough not to actively cross the line and risk reprisal. On the other hand, they survive by existing in the grey areas. Graffiti, sale of goods that should possibly be banned, and contracts on nebulous deeds that might or might not involve killing a rival are things the Gangs specialize in.

One of these groups, Golloch Ventures, provides services that include transporting clients to distant parts of the Inner Sea to exciting locations such as the **Upwelling**, the **Serpent Forest**, and other interesting, dangerous sites. Golloch Ventures is classed as one of the Gangs because it purportedly takes some clients against their will. Whenever they're investigated, all the permissions seem to check out. Still, some clients never return from their trips. Those who decry Golloch Ventures (usually family and friends of the missing victims) say that Golloch must sacrifice a certain percentage of clientele in order to retain rights of free passage through contested areas. But rather than use actual paying clients, Golloch grabs innocents to serve that role.

Line Node: A human named **Christo** controls the fabled line node of Achmosar. Christo is an obese man in a white jumpsuit, lined with pockets for tools, who wears a sculion. The line node is a level 8 mechanism consisting of a circular hoop of green stone about 10 feet (3 m) in diameter. Some humans who arrive through it say they come from a city on the surface called **Nebalich**, though others say they come from a water region called **Branu's Kiss**.

Christo sees to the comfort of arriving humans, providing them with sculions if they have no other way to breathe water. Christo himself wears a sculion, despite having better options available, because he's grown quite attached to the symbiote. He treats it something like a treasured pet.

Christo sometimes accepts prisoners remanded from the Vigilants, or explorers who want to see where the portal will take them, allowing them to use the line node in return for a small fee. Christo simply warns that no one he's ever sent through the device has ever returned, despite many indicating they would certainly do so. A small inn and tavern is associated with the chamber where the line node is installed. Also run by Christo, the inn is usually filled with creatures getting up their nerve to try their luck on the hoop. Most never do.

SERPENT FOREST

Enormous, verdant, and dense with living, rooted, tubelike worms commonly referred to as serpents, the **Serpent Forest** grows in thick profusion along a vast region of the Inner Sea's rocky ceiling. It's known for the eponymous serpents, some of which reach down for miles. Within the forest of serpents and other less prodigious growths, gulfs of darkness exist where even the light of the Towers can't reach. In addition to the serpents, a wide variety of sea life swims, though **crown crabs**, **glare sharks**, and **whisper frang** are also abundant. The ceiling-rooted serpents are generally innocuous but can be roused from their torpor if attacked, though sometimes a serpent randomly becomes active when a hunger pang strikes it. Then the reason the normally quiescent living tubes are called serpents becomes abundantly clear. Though rooted somewhere on the ceiling, their incredible length allows **active serpents** to "move" about through great swaths of the forest.

One serpent in particular dangles into the depths some 20 miles (32 km) when fully extended. Called the **Serpent Emperor** by chearrans, it can purportedly speak and interact with creatures, but only those who please it with some sort of gift, story, or other amusement. Sometimes the **Serpent Emperor** vomits forth a bolus of organic material that doesn't come from the Inner Sea, and that bolus might include living creatures. That's because this mighty worm is *far* longer than the tiny portion of it that normally extends into open water; most of its bulk extends through the uppermost mantle and crust of the Earth, all the way up to an island in the Sea of Secrets called **Meaqos**.

The Serpent Emperor is thousands of years old, maybe millions. It is a being of vast memory and lore. It's seen everything. Despite its weary soul, it will bestir itself to swallow anyone who wishes it and deliver them up to the surface through miles of mantle and crust, where they can seek their fortune in dry air.

UPWELLING

Along the border of regions where Towers stand dark and broken is the Upwelling. Here, black water vents into the Inner Sea from irregular, pillar-like fountains thousands of feet tall. Between them, the Inner Sea floor is cracked with great crevices, and what appears to be red-hot raw magma glimmers in their depths. Some residual effect of the Towers keeps the water in the region from boiling, but the temperature is even higher than the already-warm temperatures in the rest of the Inner Sea, inflicting 1 point of damage per ten minutes—even to creatures normally comfortable with the warmth of the surrounding sea. Those struck directly by a black water geyser are subject to far more extreme temperatures (which deal 5 points of damage per round of exposure).

The Upwelling is famous for the strange devices that it routinely throws up, which lie along the surface between the vents and

fissures, like seashells on a beach. Most are tiny, broken, or half-melted blobs, but some are as large as houses, and a few seem like they once might have been part of structures at least as big as the Towers. Collectors brave the black geysers, which can suddenly vent upward in new locations with little warning, seeking cyphers and clues to what the Earth's core might contain. Of more immediate concern are the *sasquand*, entities of crystal that wander the cracked plain, possibly for a similar purpose as the intruding collectors, but only because they share some unknown connection with the devices they collect. *Sasquand* usually attempt to kill any creature they notice collecting cyphers from the area.

At least one chearran prospecting city usually hovers along the edges of the Upwelling, watching for anything large and new. Thus, getting into the Upwelling to collect the goodies requires an explorer to brave not only the black geysers and the *sasquand*, but also the jealous attention of artifact-hungry chearrans. The prospecting city likely keeps a lookout using a pressure watcher artifact, which is usually held by the city's Custodian, unless observation duty has been delegated.

Serpent Emperor: *level 10, Speed defense as level 3 due to size; health 100; Armor 7; can coil and strike at a target up to 1 mile (1.5 km) away, inflicting 20 points of damage*

Sasquand, page 149

MEAQOS

The island of Meaqos is only 37 miles (60 km) in diameter. It features lush jungle growth and a community of humans who live in relative isolation from those found not far away in the Steadfast. The most significant thing about Meaqos is the regular appearance of a whirlpool in the wide bay that the human islanders regard as a holy manifestation. They surf the edges of the whirlpool as part of a religious ceremony, throw in offerings, allow pilgrims (who say they are following an ancient text to enter the "Hollow World") to throw themselves into the swirling water, and on occasion, welcome "avatars" of the Great God Below that sometimes emerges from the bay.

PRESSURE WATCHER

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Handheld device with crystal display

Effect: Sighting through the display, the user can view underwater objects and creatures up to 2 miles (3 km) away as if they were a short distance away. Once a target is sighted, the user can choose to observe for up to ten minutes, or to cause the volume of water surrounding the target to contract as if under vastly higher pressure for a few moments. The pressure pulse inflicts damage equal to the artifact level on the target and all creatures and objects within a short distance of it.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20





Dread destroyer,
page 239

INNER SEA HEARSAY

Belarbulon: A massive habitat of synth and glass called Belarbulon half protrudes from the floor of the Inner Sea. It is inhabited by intelligent crablike creatures who call themselves the Children of Belar. Belarbulon possesses advanced knowledge of the numenera about on par with that of the chearrans. They say that their habitat once had the ability to interface with a massive liquid metal machine that lies in the Earth's core.

Sealorn Door: Those who inhabit the University of Doors claim to keep an artifact called the Sealorn, which appears to be seawater sealed in a transparent synth cylinder no taller than a human. During certain planetary alignments, the Sealorn expands in volume to the size of a large chamber. When the Sealorn returns to its former size, everyone and everything in the chamber is gone, transported (it is believed) to a hidden ocean beneath the Earth's crust called the Inner Sea.

Insane Serpent: As happens sometimes, an elder serpent has uprooted itself from the Serpent Forest (or a similar region) and now swims freely throughout the Inner Sea. Cut off from its society, it is apparently completely insane, and only a force strong enough to put one down can end the danger it represents. That is, unless it can somehow be lured back and convinced to put roots down again in the Serpent Forest, or perhaps to found a new forest.

Invasion: A fleet of crystalline craft from the eastern reaches of the Inner Sea bearing unfamiliar designs and never-before-seen creatures moves toward Achmosar. Habitats and communities in its path have

been annihilated, as have chearran mobile cities that investigated. Terec tril of Achmosar seeks a diplomatic envoy to intercept the fleet before it reaches his Tower-city and find some way to divert the invaders.

War Machine: A colossal machine with a vague semblance to a living creature has been noted patrolling the middle waters, sculling through the sea using propellers located on its insectile abdomen. The chearrans have unearthed lore describing the thing as a “**dread destroyer**” of immense power. It might be guarding some ancient site, but if so, it must have lost track of that location because the entity appeared only a few months ago. Everyone who encounters the thing gives it a wide berth. Those who do not are never seen again.

THE WEIRD OF THE INNER SEA

Bad Water: Rumors of dead water regions, where even a sea creature adapted to breathing water can't get sustenance, gain ground. The Towers' influence is known to prevent such stale regions from spreading beyond the edges of the Inner Sea, but these areas of dead water seem to move and flow almost like living things—albeit living things with no discernable shape other than the asphyxiation that heralds their presence.

Dead Coral: A mountainscape of dead coral stretches north along one region of the Inner Sea's floor. Once a living community as large as a continent, the entire area perished in just days after the arrival of an animate globule of slime that rests at the region's center. Rumors suggest the entity is merely in repose, and once it finally finishes digesting the life force of the Coral Mountains, it will move on.

PART 4:

CREATURES OF THE DEEP





CREATURES OF THE DEEP

Many of the creatures presented in this section can be found in the specific locations described in this book, but as always, GMs are free to use a creature however and wherever they want. The ocean depths are so vast—the majority of Earth, remember!—that this chapter only begins to explore the types of creatures that characters might encounter in their travels.

The most important element of each creature is its level. You use the level to determine the target number a PC must reach to attack or defend against the opponent. In each entry, the difficulty number for the creature is listed in parentheses after its level. The target number is three times the level.

A creature's target number is usually also its health, which is the amount of damage it can sustain before it is dead or incapacitated. For easy reference, the entries always list a creature's health, even when it's the normal amount for a creature of its level. For more detailed information on level, health, combat, and other elements, see the Understanding the Listings section in the *Numenera* corebook.



Understanding the Listings, page 228



CREATURES BY LEVEL

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Heeldran | 2 |
| Mercurial wasp | 3 |
| Octopus | 3 |
| Phayclor | 3 |
| Viscid watcher | 3 |
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| Karestrel | 4 |
| Shore stalker | 4 |
| Tarak | 4 |
| Urtilla | 4 |
| Vroaordun | 4 |
| Jybril | 5 |
| Omath ranger | 5 |
| Spiny scishan | 5 |
| Stinging cloak | 5 |
| Cleoid | 6 |
| Curusa | 6 |
| Morigo | 6 |
| Sasquand | 6 |
| Spirril | 6 |
| Kaorund | 8 |

CLEOID

6 (18)



The spiral shell was partly translucent, revealing a mass of gelatinous slime wrapped along the tight interior path. Then a portion of it emerged, spreading spiny water wings, a whipping tail, and a hideous face whose gaze drank minds.

~a passage from Darnet's Exploration Journal

The legacy of a dead race survives concealed within "tainted" cyphers and artifacts as psychic seeds. Victims who use these devices are slowly transformed into massive monsters of slime and hate, partly enclosed in a protective shell. Dubbed "cleoids" by Ninth World explorers, these creatures want revenge against all living things for their genocide.

Motive: Restoration of the cleoid race; revenge

Environment: Almost anywhere underwater

Health: 27

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Immediate; swim a short distance each round

Modifications: Speed defense as level 4 due to large size; tasks related to insight, detecting falsehoods, and knowledge related to psychic phenomena and psychic engineering as level 8.

Combat: A cleoid's main mode of attack is a psychic assault, which it can use against a single foe's mind within short range. The attack inflicts 4 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor), and a victim must make a second Intellect defense roll or lose its next turn. A creature that would be killed by a cleoid instead falls into a 28-hour coma, during which time the victim is slowly transformed into another cleoid.

Interaction: Vastly intelligent and filled with hate for other living things, cleoids generally do not deign to communicate telepathically with other creatures.

Use: A strange plague afflicts a fishing community. Investigators find that those who succumb to its effects are slowly transformed and finally wake as cleoids.

Loot: A tainted cypher or two, such as a mind rejuvenator or life rod, can usually be found near cleoid infestations.



What cleoids call themselves is a term that is longer and more ominous, and one that can be conveyed only by telepathic contact. Victims hear this name each time they are psychically attacked by a cleoid, though most fail to appreciate the underlying meaning.

Mind rejuvenator, page 29

Life rod, page 29

GM Intrusion: The character's attack cracks the cleoid shell, but out of that hole oozes a half-strength cleoid (sans shell; level 3) that joins the fight against the PC.

Inner Sea, page 124

Towers, page 128

Artificial entities of shaped water, curusa are usually found guarding remnant structures of the prior worlds that stud the Inner Sea, especially the pillarlike structures that natives call the Towers. Curusa may not actually exist until called to action in a predetermined situation by devices that otherwise lie dormant for hundreds or thousands of years. Once formed, a curusa persists only until it fulfills its guardianship role. If it fails to accomplish its purpose when first created, a curusa can persist for months or even years, growing more unstable and desperate all the while, as it seeks to accomplish its goal.

Motive: Guard remnant structures

Environment: The Inner Sea

Health: 36

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Movement: Long when swimming; can flow through tiny cracks and reform without harm

Combat: A curusa can make attacks with its fists, which temporarily become as hard as diamond. Once every other round, a curusa can create a miniature whirlpool in the surrounding water. All creatures within short range of the curusa must succeed on a Might defense roll or be violently swirled and tumbled around and around it, taking 5 points of damage in the process and losing their turn.

In addition, as an action a curusa can disperse its form and reassemble a new body anywhere within long range that is underwater. A curusa regains 2 points of health each time it travels in this fashion.

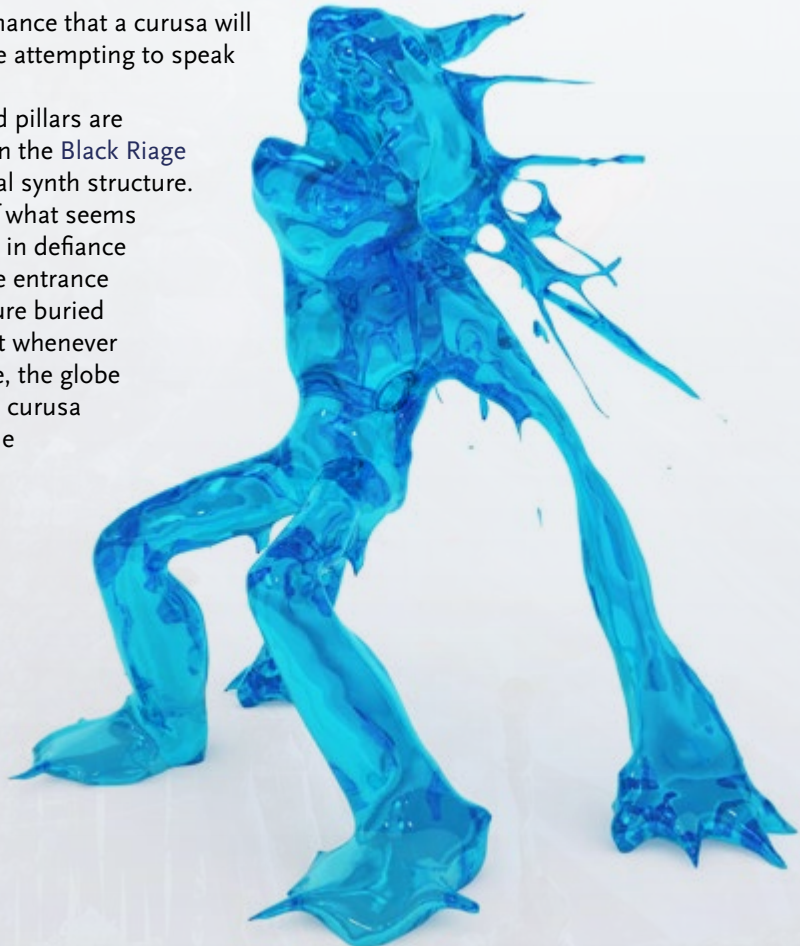
Interaction: Curusa are barely sapient and usually respond only to the rare few who have artifacts or cyphers that provide the means to call or control the artificial entities. Even then, there is a chance that a curusa will turn on a creature attempting to speak to or control it.

Use: Strangely carved pillars are discovered high in the Black Riage around a spherical synth structure. Inside, a globe of what seems to be water floats in defiance of gravity over the entrance to a larger structure buried underground. But whenever anyone gets close, the globe transforms into a curusa and tries to kill the explorer.



*Black Riage,
page 177*

GM Intrusion: *The curusa's touch injects or hardens water in the character's lungs (or a similar breathing organ). The character must succeed on a Might defense roll or descend one step on the damage track.*



EBON

4 (12)

Like the shadow of a shadow, an ebon slips through the water soundlessly, noiselessly, and nearly imperceptibly. Streamlined and sleek, they are designed to be the perfect hunters. They can move from a still float to a prey-dive in less than a second, thanks to their elongated, finned arms and strong tails. They hunt and eat almost constantly, as they require large amounts of food, particularly fat, to fuel their revving metabolisms.

Ebons fight among themselves constantly for power, position, and the best bits of food. They often start eating their prey before it's completely dead to ensure that they get the choice bits before another member of their pack swoops in for a steal. Additionally, the sooner they eat after an attack, the more of their own poison they ingest, which temporarily increases their toxicity.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Anywhere in the ocean, but particularly in the Deep Dark

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 5

Movement: Long

Modifications: Speed defense as level 5 due to quickness; stealth as level 5

Combat: Ebons hunt in loose packs of two or three creatures.

When they see or scent something they desire, they zoom toward it, wrap their finned arms and tails around it, and then sting it repeatedly with their poisonous vibrissae.

In their first attack, ebons wrap and poison their prey. If this attack is successful, they inflict 1 point of damage, and the poison inflicts 5 points of additional damage (unless the victim makes a successful Might defense roll). Either way, the ebon's grasp increases the difficulty of the victim's next action by one step. In subsequent rounds, ebons bite grabbed prey for 5 points of damage.

Use: As the player characters are engaged in some other activity, they begin to get the sense that someone or something is following them through the water. That sense continues to grow stronger as an ebon hunting pack sidles ever closer.

In some areas of the world, ebons are a myth, a bedtime story to scare children. In those stories, they're called death shades.

GM intrusion: *Another ebon joins the fight and attacks the character immediately.*



HEELDRAN

2 (6)

Heeldra mucus huts pock the exterior of the Skelirroth Fleet like barnacles, and predate the humans that live inside the massive undersea vehicles.

Skelirroth Fleet, page 77

Able to breathe in both air and water, heeldra are an aquatic abhuman race that builds dens out of hardened self-secreted mucus. Heeldra communities are usually in out-of-the-way places that are still close enough to human dwellings that heeldra infiltrators can steal away children, the old, and those otherwise too weak to defend themselves. The heeldra will eat most anything, but they prefer human meat.

Heeldra don't speak; they communicate with each other via mucus discharge. This not only disgusts other creatures but also can physically impair those close enough to smell it (or come in contact with diffusing mucus, if underwater).

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Small communities dwell near the shore

Health: 9

Damage Inflicted: 3 points

Movement: Short when walking; long when swimming

Modifications: Perception and deception as level 5.

Combat: Heeldra prefer to fight with spears. They like to attack with surprise, rising from the water (even apparently shallow pools or runoff) in an attempt to catch their target unawares. In the face of stiff resistance, they flee back to the water (or, if in the water, onto dry land).

Heeldra mucus discharge is constant, providing an asset to any swimming task, a barrier against dryness while they are above water, and a means of communication.

However, creatures within immediate range that contact the mucus via smell or diffusion take 1 point of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) each round from a combination of several properties endemic to the mucus that is acidic, poisonous, and psychedelic.

Heeldra are immune to most poisons.

Interaction: Communicating with heeldra is nearly impossible, but they seem to understand at least a little of the human languages and can convey information through gestures or drawings in the sand.

Use: Thoroughly without redeeming qualities, heeldra consider humans to be the finest cuisine available, and they will go to great lengths to secure fresh flesh for their next meal.

Loot: Aside from weapons, each heeldran has a mass of collected valuables carried in a hardened mucus pocket. Items include strangely shaped fish bones, broken pieces of various ancient devices, and usually 1d6 shins.

GM Intrusion: A heeldran spear is coated with mucus. The struck character must make a Might defense roll or suffer hallucinogenic visions for one round, which convince her that her allies are heeldra.



JYBRIL

5 (15)

The jybril is a sea predator that routinely reaches 16 feet (5 m) in length whose flesh is infused with nanomachines that give it a truly unfair advantage over its prey and other predators. These sharklike creatures, with their massive mouths and complex eyes, are feared by land dwellers who go out to sea and by intelligent creatures of the deep, who sometimes call them “jawtails.”

Jybrils eat anything, including humans, slimes, other predators of the deep, automatons, and other jybrils. The nanomachines that infest jybril flesh see to it that no meal is too exotic for these creatures to digest.

Motive: Hungers for flesh (or anything)

Environment: Almost anywhere underwater, hunting alone or in pairs

Health: 22

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Long when swimming; can “jet” 500 feet (150 m) through the water once per minute

Modifications: Perception as level 7.

Combat: A jybril can jet through the water at incredible speed for short bursts, which it does when attacking prey, especially prey that doesn't yet know it is being stalked. When using this jet attack, a jybril inflicts 2 additional points of damage. A jybril can make a jet attack about once every minute.

The nanomachines infusing jybril bodies enable their jet movements, allow them to digest nearly anything, and provide the following additional benefits.

- Armor 5 against damage from poison, venoms, or toxin.
- Regain 2 points of health each round.
- If the jybril does nothing other than drift with the current, the difficulty of its stealth tasks decreases by four steps, until it moves or attacks.
- Once per hour (usually in conjunction with its first attack), it can release a pulse of energy that suppresses the active effects of cyphers and artifacts of the jybril's level or less for one round.

Interaction: Jybrils are predators and act that way.

Use: The PCs are hired by a nano to return with a living jybril so the nanomachines within its flesh can be studied. The nano gives them a map of a reef where jybrils are known to hunt, as well as an artifact called a normalizer.

Loot: Almost anything can be found in a jybril stomach, and a dead beast usually gives up 1d6 shins, one or two cyphers, and sometimes an artifact.

NORMALIZER

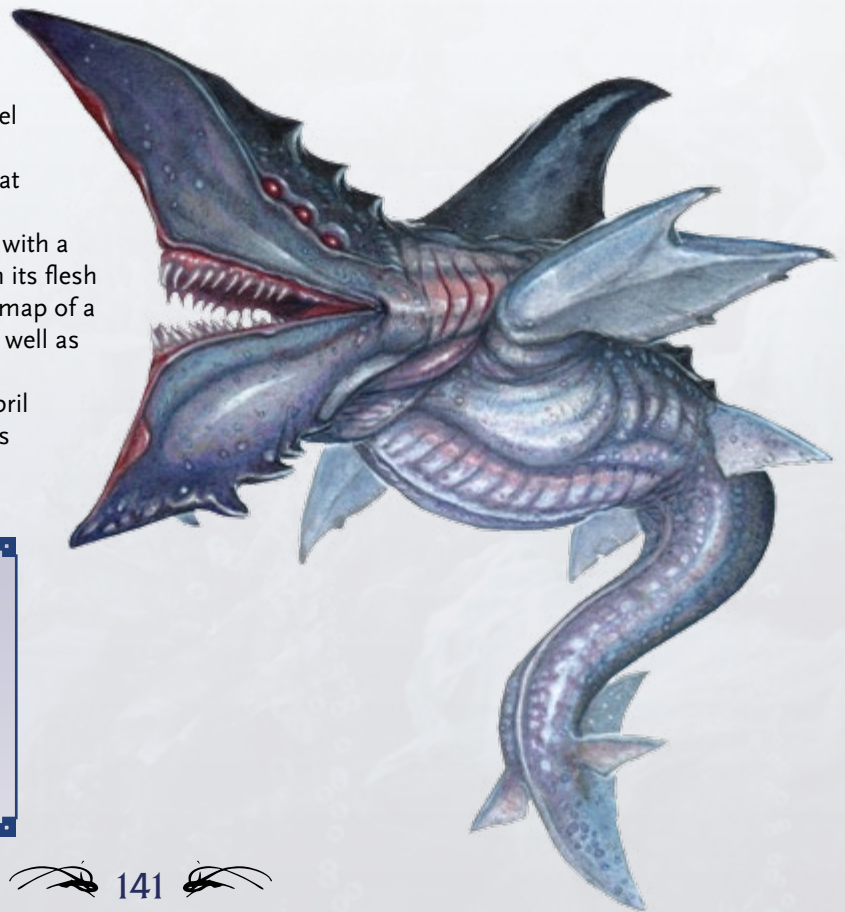
Level: 1d6

Form: Spear with devices on shaft

Effect: Suppresses all the advantages (and disadvantages) of active nanomachines in a target for one minute.

Depletion: 1 in 1d6

GM Intrusion: *The character hit by the jybril is caught in the creature's mouth, and it jets 500 feet (150 m) away from the PC's allies.*



Ormvara whale, page 23

A deadly danger, infamous in the deep, the kaorund is gigantic, almost 80 feet (24 m) long, not counting the length of its tendrils. It hunts *ormvara* whales and similarly large prey, but is happy to attack almost anything. While it sticks mainly to the Deep Dark, it's not unknown for one to come close enough to the surface to attack a ship. And of course, an entire submarine is fair game.

A kaorund has a long, spiny, snaky body, a number of tentacle arms, and a horrible mouth with powerful jaws.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Anywhere in the ocean

Health: 75

Damage Inflicted: 10 or 8 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Long underwater

Modifications: Speed defense as level 6 due to size.

Combat: As a single action, a kaorund can attack with its bite, inflicting 10 points of damage, and attack two additional foes with its grasping tendril-arms for 8 points of damage. A foe grabbed by a tendril must make a Might defense roll or be grasped and pulled toward the kaorund's mouth, so that next round the creature can use its bite to automatically inflict 10 points of damage.

But the kaorund has a different weapon in its arsenal as well. Instead of any of the previous attacks, it can lash out with two smaller tentacles near its mouth. Targets so much as touched by these get a bioelectric shock that stuns both biological and mechanical systems. Those failing a Might defense roll cannot act for two rounds.

Last, if fighting a very large group, a kaorund can simply thrash about and attack all creatures within long range with the spines that cover its body. Each potential victim suffers 8 points of damage.

Interaction: As a ravenous predator of animal intelligence, there really is no peaceful interaction possible with a kaorund.

Use: One of the scariest things in the sea, the kaorund is likely a challenge for an entire group of well-armed and well-protected characters. It's usually encountered far from a city or other such site—perhaps hunting in or near a stretch of the invisible corridors.

*Invisible corridors,
page 12*

GM Intrusion: *If the bitten character fails a Might defense roll, she is swallowed alive by the kaorund. She can still attack the creature from within, but she suffers 10 points of damage each round while swallowed.*



KARESTREL

4 (12)



“Burn a feather plucked from a karestrel’s crest and breathe in the fumes. You will become fearless and unable to feel pain for a time. You will be ready to fight as a warrior for Nalranin.”

~Nalranin priesthood teaching

Karestrels are aggressive seabirds with a wide range and a fearlessness that makes them especially dangerous. That, plus their 20-foot (6 m) wingspans, vicious beaks, slashing talons, and ability to hunt equally well on land, in the air, and underwater.

Omnivores who nest in flocks that migrate between islands and icedrifts, karestrels spend most of their time overflying wave-tossed waters looking for prey. When they sense something, they flash downward into the chop with nary a splash, then emerge from the water seconds or minutes later with their prey grasped in cruel talons.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Any cold climate in flocks of five to ten

Health: 19

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Long; long when flying or swimming

Modifications: Attacks as level 5; perceives as level 6; resists frightening effects as level 8.

Combat: Karestrels prefer to dive from the sky when they attack, and they usually gain surprise when flashing through the air and into the water to nab swimming prey. Attacks against surprised prey are modified by two steps in the attacker’s favor.

Their colorful wings provide more than physical armor and protection from cold (to which they are immune); karestrel plumage also bounces a blast of force, concentrated light, or a focused heat ray back in the direction it came from. Other kinds of energy are not redirected and affect the karestrel normally.

Some karestrels, when not in the water, can emit a discombobulating hunting scream as part of their attack. The target must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or the difficulty of its Speed defense roll against the paired attack is increased by one step.

Interaction: Karestrels have animal-level intelligence. They are vicious, yet estathin and other peoples who live near their nests still attempt to hunt them for ceremonial purposes, to show their strength, or because they believe that karestrel feathers have special properties. Some estathin have learned how to rear and train karestrels, though even a trained one is liable to snap at its master. Commanding a trained karestrel is difficult (a level 6 task) but not impossible. A child or small person might even use a trained karestrel as a mount for a short time.

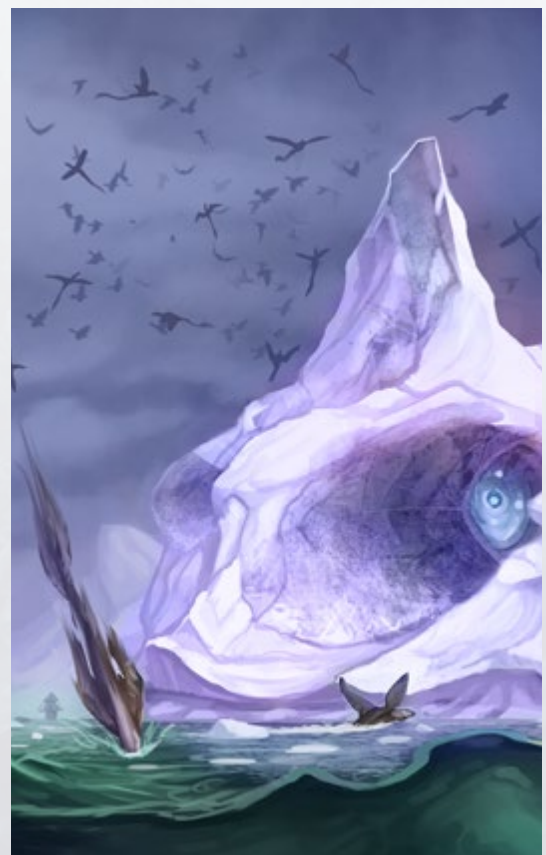
Use: A fishing boat drifts back to harbor under its own steam. The only bits of the crew that remain are bloodstains. In addition, the boat is scored as if with large talons, and many colorful feathers are found all over the ship, even within the forced-open inner crew compartments.

Loot: A karestrel nest, built high on a usually inaccessible rocky shelf, contains 2d6 shins, 1d6 cyphers, and possibly an artifact.

Surprise, page 95

Estathin, page 66

GM Intrusion: The character hit by the karestrel is carried a long distance straight up and then dropped, unless she succeeds on a Might defense roll to break free of the talons before she is carried upward more than an immediate distance.



MERCURIAL WASP

3 (9)

Aggressive. Angry. Voracious. Deadly. These are words you might use to describe a swarm of mercurial wasps, if their venom wasn't already closing your throat and paralyzing your vocal cords.

Looking much like their land-dwelling namesakes, these undersea wasps swarm through the water in groups of up to a dozen creatures at a time. While these blue-and-black striped creatures might be small—only about 1 foot (30 cm) long—they're deadly. They appear to constantly shift between solid metal and liquid metal states, making them difficult to see, much less strike.

Mercurial wasps eat metal and build their hives by chewing complex tunnels and rooms deep inside structures. A hive can house as many as three dozen wasps.

Hidden and protected deep inside each hive is the Court, a group of three slightly larger wasps that are more clearly solid metal constructs. Unlike other mercurial wasps, members of the Court have large, glowing orange eyes and no visible stingers. They are able to communicate and might attempt to beg for mercy. They flee the hive rather than fight, should it come to that.

Motive: Territoriality

Environment: Underwater, near metal structures, vessels, and machines

Health: 9

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Long

Modifications: Defend as level 4 due to shifting states.

Combat: A character struck by a mercurial wasp's sting must make a Might defense roll or be paralyzed, unable to move, for one round.

A swarm of five mercurial wasps work together to attack with stunning speed and coordination. They do so as a level 5 creature, inflicting 8 points of damage, and the paralytic effect lasts for two rounds.

Use: Due to the wasps' proclivity for metal, they may attempt to build a hive in the PC's vessel, or perhaps they've already established one among some metal ruins that the characters are exploring.

Interaction: Members of the Court may attempt to cajole or reason with the PCs if they feel threatened.

Loot: A wasp's venom sac holds enough poison for three uses. The barb can be used as the blade of a shiv or other light weapon.

Mercurial hive: level 7

Member of the Court:

level 3, persuasion as level 4; health 20; Armor 4; will flee rather than fight

A swarm of a dozen mercurial wasps is a challenge for even powerful PCs. The GM can have a group of eight to twelve wasps attack en masse as a single creature that is two levels higher, inflicting double the original creature's normal damage.



Paralysis, page 95

GM intrusion: The effects of the paralysis last for two rounds (rather than one) for the character.



MORIGO

6 (18)

Morigo are biomechanical remnants of a prior age, likely created by bioengineers with great knowledge and skill. Although no more intelligent than the other fish they hunt, they come equipped with advanced technological systems that give them clear advantages.

Morigo are extraordinarily agile swimmers, possessing biomechanical sensors that allow them to sense movement, pressure changes, temperature changes, and more with incredible accuracy.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Anywhere in the ocean

Health: 26

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Long underwater

Modifications: Perception as level 8; swim as level 7.

Combat: As an action, a morigo can generate a pulse of infrasound that reverberates through the water, affecting all in long range. A morigo has a number of hovering pods around it, each of which functions to amplify and direct the waves of infrasound. Victims in the area failing an Intellect defense roll have their mind affected by the infrasound in a randomly determined fashion:

| | |
|-------|---|
| 01–30 | Dazed for one round—the difficulty of all actions is increased by one step |
| 31–40 | Stunned for one round—no action |
| 41–45 | Utter immobility for one round |
| 46–55 | Panic for one round, during which the character moves away at top speed |
| 56–70 | 2 points of Intellect damage and dazed (as above) until those points are restored |
| 71–80 | 3 points of Intellect damage and dazed (as above) until those points are restored |
| 81–90 | 4 points of Intellect damage and dazed (as above) until those points are restored |
| 91–00 | Madness for one round, during which the character attacks nearest target |

GM Intrusion:

The morigo uses its infrasound and then makes a physical attack, all in the same round.

Morigo move in to attack those affected by their pulse with a nasty bite. They are immune to infrasound effects.

Interaction: Morigo have the intelligence of most animals. They cannot be reasoned with. It's unknown if anyone has ever tried to train or domesticate them.

Use: Morigo are nasty predators, using their infrasound attack to disable whole groups and then moving in to attack the choicest target. They are fearsome alone, but deadly when encountered in a pack.

Loot: A morigo is a biomechanical creature, and knowledgeable characters can scavenge a random cypher and an oddity from its corpse.



If the seas have a ruler, it is the octopus. Their billion-year empire spans the entirety of all seas, and their queen rules over all of it. They are, however, xenophobic and aloof, preferring to keep to themselves. Thus, many people call them the “quiet empire.”

Octopuses vary in size, color, and, to some degree, shape. For the most part, they all have eight extremely flexible limbs, a surprisingly malleable body, two sophisticated eyes, and a beaklike mouth. They can change their color and, to a large extent, their shape to appear as a rock, a fish, or some other creature. They perceive not just with their eyes but, in a limited way, with all their skin. They think not only with the brain in their head but also with the distributed neural network that runs throughout their limbs.

Octopuses are extremely intelligent, often possessing mental powers a human would deem supernatural. Thanks to their advancement in various sciences, they are also immortal.

Motive: Hungers for flesh and solitude

Environment: Anywhere in the ocean

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Movement: Long underwater

Modifications: Stealth as level 5; all defense, perception, knowledge, and Intellect-based tasks as level 4.

Combat: All octopi can use camouflage to help them hide. They can attack with their beak, but if they must fight, most use weapons such as short spears. All octopi can emit a cloud of ink in the water that blocks vision in an immediate area. Many octopuses carry a nilstone that lets them extend their telepathy into something that can affect the physical realm. Nilstone powers might include:

- Psychokinesis (uses their own strength, but at long range)
- Forceblast (at long range, inflicting 4 points of damage)
- Clairvoyance (can see something occurring up to 10 miles [16 km] away)
- Kinetic shield (Armor 3)

In addition, octopi have specialized weaponry (often nilstone based) that they can wield.

Interaction: All octopuses can communicate telepathically with each other, and about one in five can communicate in a similar fashion with other creatures—although they rarely do so. Language does not seem to be a barrier in this form of communication, although sometimes octopi lie and pretend that it is, mostly when they do not want communication to happen.

Use: A lone octopus knows the secret of how to get into an underwater installation, but getting him to talk to the PCs at all is difficult enough—and getting him to give up the valuable information may require diplomacy, trade, a favor, or serious intimidation.

Loot: A few octopuses will carry 1d6 + 4 abadis.

The plural of octopus can be octopuses, octopi, or octopodes.

Nilstone, page 49

Octopus weaponry, page 49

Abadis, page 13

GM Intrusion: *The octopus produces a small substance that it absorbs through its skin to fully restore its health, double its speed, or double its melee damage. These latter effects last at least an hour.*



OMATH



"The cold spurns death, giving life to the dead frozen into solid coffins of ice."

~Staven, wandering healer

Human bodies stare with red eyes from inside translucent slabs of unmelting ice studded with unknown devices and machines—that's how the average Ninth Worlder sees an omath. Each omath has a specialty, be that research, communication, or war, but all have the ability to speak telepathically, fly and swim via levitation, and interact with their surroundings via short-range telekinesis.

OMATH RANGER

5 (15)

Omaths who pursue the path of direct force are called rangers. They learn to unlock the latent functions of their metallic ice carapaces, gaining increased carapace integrity and various methods to inflict egregious damage on their foes.

Motive: Defense

Environment: Almost anywhere, in exploration groups of two rangers and 1d6 level 3 omath researchers

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 4

Movement: Fly or swim a short distance each round

Combat: Omath rangers can generate and direct different kinds of energy at a foe within long range. The three most common energy attacks are telekinetic force, heat rays, and psychic blasts.

- A telekinetic attack pummels a foe within short range for 6 points of damage.
- A heat ray targets a foe within long range for 6 points of damage; the ray ignores Armor provided from cold, ice, or similar methods.
- Finally, a psychic blast targets up to three foes within short range for 2 points of psychic damage (ignores Armor). Those struck by a psychic blast must also make an Intellect defense roll or lose the desire to continue attacking omaths for up to one minute, unless attacked or damaged by an omath.

Omaths (both rangers and other varieties) are immune to a wide variety of environmental conditions and can operate in air, the ocean deeps, the vacuum of space, and several other hazardous environments without coming to immediate harm.

Interaction: Omaths in general are open to communication via telepathy; however, omath rangers prefer to delegate such interaction to other omaths making up their group.

Use: Characters exploring a ruin discover a chamber filled with what at first appear to be icy coffins, but which are actually omaths in a research and exploration group. The leader of the group has been taken captive by a force deeper within the ruin; the other omaths retreated to this chamber to assess options.

Loot: Looting the remains of an omath yields a bounty of 1d6 + 1 cyphers and an artifact, all made of metallic ice that doesn't melt until used or depleted.

Omath, page 68

GM Intrusion: *The omath lands on or falls atop the character, inflicting 8 points of damage. Both the character and the omath lie prone on the ground, and the PC is pinned. A Might-based check (difficulty 7) allows the character to free himself. Each round the PC remains pinned, he takes 3 points of damage from the cold.*



PHAYCLOR

3 (9)

A famous painting in Qi features a colossal phayclor reaching up out of the ocean to pull a zeppelin to its doom.

These bizarre squidlike creatures are composed partly of flesh, partly of cyphers and artifacts that they accumulate to siphon energy from, and partly of delicate energy fields liberated from said objects, which these creatures use as a protective (and offensive) mantle. Phayclor are about twice the size of a human.

The sea is a wide and deep place, and many varieties of phayclor inhabit it, but all seek out powered devices as sustenance.

A rare few phayclor live long enough to grow far, far larger. Thankfully, these rarely stir from the ocean depths.

Motive: Hungers for energy

Environment: Anywhere underwater

Health: 18

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Movement: Immediate; long when swimming

Modifications: Defends against energy attacks as level 8; stealth as level 7 when using chromatophores to blend into surroundings.

Combat: A phayclor can attack by lashing a foe in immediate range with a tentacle that inflicts 4 points of damage and holds the target from moving (until it can escape), or it can release an energy burst in the water that stuns all creatures in immediate range, causing them to lose their next turn. This latter attack can be attempted once every other round.

A phayclor can also use a random cypher that it has incorporated into its body, either gaining the effect the cypher provides (if useful) or hurling the cypher as a level 7 detonation. Each time a phayclor uses one of the cyphers making up its body, it loses 1 point of health.

Finally, a phayclor can feast on energy directly. If a beam or energy attack made against it misses the phayclor, it is healed by the residual energy and regains 2 points of health.

Interaction: Phayclor speak with each other through rapidly flashing skin chromatophores. They have no ability to understand other creatures, unless one uses a cypher that can open a channel of communication.

Use: A colony of phayclor has taken up residence in the bay, making things dangerous for everyone who lives in the area. It's possible that they could be convinced to relocate, but only for a quantity of cyphers offered as a bribe.

Loot: Every phayclor "carries" 1d6 + 1 cyphers, though if salvaged, most are found to be at the minimum possible cypher level thanks to the phayclor's metabolic feeding.



GM Intrusion: *The cypher the character attempts to use (either on the phayclor or for some other reason) is drawn from her hand to the phayclor like iron to a magnet, and subsumed. The phayclor regains 5 points of health.*

SASQUAND

6 (18)

Sasquand are encountered mostly in a region of the Inner Sea called the Upwelling. There, they wander in a never-ending search for technological oddities and artifacts vomited up from even deeper in the Earth's core. They tend to slay other creatures who draw near and then return to their prospecting.

Motive: Collect numenera

Environment: Inner Sea, usually the Upwelling

Health: 44

Damage Inflicted: 8 points

Movement: Long

Modifications: Knowledge of the numenera as level 10.

Combat: A sasquand can morph itself or produce weapons from its body that allow it to make up to two ranged attacks as a single action.

Characters with nano abilities, who *Fuse Flesh and Steel*, who are automatons, or who otherwise integrate tech devices into their bodies find the difficulty of defending against attacks by a sasquand increased by one step. It is as if the inorganic tech somehow resonates with the will of the sasquand. (Organic devices are immune to this effect.)

Interaction: Sometimes a sasquand decides that characters, especially those not native to the Inner Sea, are not mere looters to be destroyed. In such a case, it telepathically communicates with the characters and asks about interesting items of technology they have encountered. If sufficiently impressed, the sasquand may spare their lives.

Use: A sasquand frozen into a block of ice is found floating off the coast and brought to a community for further study. For some reason, the ice doesn't melt and won't break through normal physical force. The characters are asked to help investigate.

Loot: A dead sasquand usually yields 1d6 + 2 cyphers.

Inner Sea, page 124

Upwelling, page 133

If a sasquand is killed, characters within long range must make an Intellect defense roll (level 4) for each cypher and artifact in their possession, or that device is affected. Usually, the affected device gains a new capability determined by the GM.

Fuses Flesh and Steel, page 64

GM Intrusion: *One of the character's cyphers is activated under the control of the sasquand.*



SHORE STALKER

4 (12)



“They appeared one morning without warning, a thin forest of spongy growths sprouted up along the shore. Danel waded out to investigate. I still hear his screams in my dreams.”

~Danel's widow

A shore stalker can be convinced to serve as a messenger, teleporting to find a target described by a PC. The stalker finds the recipient using an inner connection to the datasphere to narrow down possibilities; however, the better the description, the more likely it will give the message to the correct recipient.

GM Intrusion: *The gift provided by the character to the shore stalker is returned, having been transformed into a new random cypher. No explanation is given for this behavior.*

Shore stalkers look like natural—if weird—growths along the shoreline. However, they seem to appear only when no one is watching. One day, an area of water is open; the next, a thin grove of shore stalkers is growing there, as if they'd been planted there for years. But shore stalkers are not mere plants; they can command constituents of the physical world with frightening mastery. Possibly hailing from deep below the sea, their appearance always seems a mystery. Understanding their motives has eluded everyone who has tried to communicate with or study them.

Motive: Inexplicable

Environment: Shallow seawater in groves of four to ten

Health: 23

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Movement: Immobile (but able to teleport an indeterminate distance once every ten hours)

Modifications: Defends as level 1 while rooted.

Combat: A shore stalker isn't insubstantial, but its substance is a solid gel-like material hardly more substantial than air. Successful attacks inflict only 1 point of damage, unless the attack is pure force or paradimensional in nature.

A shore stalker can acidify its tissues to defend itself or attack. When it attacks, a shore stalker emits a flurry of wedge-shaped darts from its canopy, targeting up to three creatures within short range as a single action. An acidic wedge inflicts 5 points of damage for three rounds. The same damage affects a creature that touches a shore stalker.

Alternatively, a shore stalker can suffuse its gel-like body with more helpful substances, which means sometimes it can restore health, cure disease or poison, and make other positive changes in a biological creature. How to implore a shore stalker to act benignly rather than attacking is a trick that most people despair of understanding; they believe that a grove's reaction is random.

Interaction: These gel-based creatures are intelligent. When not attacking, they can communicate via touch by inserting thin gel tendrils into an interlocutor's skull (which inflicts 1 point of damage). A shore stalker asks a boon of anyone who attempts to communicate with it. If a cypher, oddity, or artifact is provided, the shore stalker and those in its grove are less likely to react negatively. Such gifts are absorbed into the shore stalker's body.

Use: A shore stalker encounter has the possibility of turning into combat, but the PCs have the opportunity to turn it into an interaction-based encounter if they are cautious when investigating the appearance of the strange “trees” out along the water.

Loot: The decomposing body of a shore stalker might contain one or two cyphers and an oddity.



SPINY SCISHAN

5 (15)

Rising just above the sand, a flutter of red and gold catches your eye. Is it the fallen flag of your worst enemy? A piece of clothing from a loved one? A delicious and easily caught fish?

The closer you draw, the more certain you are that you know that shape and color, that it's important to you in some way, but you can't quite remember exactly why.

Lucky (or rather unlucky) you: you've fallen into the trap of a spiny scishan, a 4-foot (1 m) telepathic predator that buries itself in sand or loose gravel along the ocean floor, using its kite-shaped tail to attract prey.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Along sandy or gravel ocean floors

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Long in the water

Modifications: Trickery and deception as level 6.

Combat: The spiny scishan lays its trap by burying most of its body in the sand and waving its tail about. When a creature is within short range, the scishan uses its telepathic abilities to discover an image of something the creature cares about. Then it manipulates its tail to more closely resemble that image, drawing the creature ever closer until it can pounce. It does 5 points of damage with a mouth full of thin, needle-sharp teeth.

Use: Scishans add a bit of weirdness to any underwater encounter, as each player character is likely to see something unique and personal in the kite tail trap.

GM intrusion: During the fight, the scishan hits the character with its kite tail, doing an additional 3 points of damage.



Spirrils are active most of the year, but they require twenty days every year in which they lie fallow and defenseless while undergoing an internal life-sustaining renewal process. During this period, they must hide away or risk becoming sustenance for other creatures.

A spirril is an animate piece of coiling, fibrous plant matter that can grow 100 feet (30 m) or more in length. Green and red serrated leaves grow in great spikelike tufts along its body, as do occasional smaller globular white fruits.

Spirrils can survive in air or underwater with equal facility. In air-filled pockets (or on the surface), they can slither across or up any surface, somehow adhering even to completely smooth walls or ceilings. In water, spirrils undulate like sea snakes, homing in on prey. In any environment, spirrils can squeeze through tiny apertures no more than a few inches in diameter, which allows them to hide in almost any terrain.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Usually underwater, near water, or in a humid environment

Health: 30

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Movement: Short; long when swimming

Modifications: Speed defense as level 5 due to size; perception tasks as level 4.

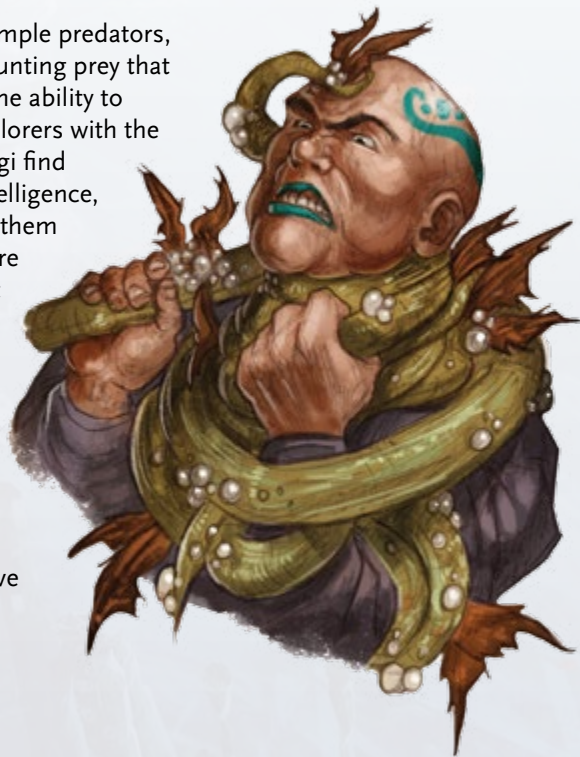
Combat: Spirrils can grab prey and encase it in coils of tightening vine. To do so, a spirril makes up to two vine attacks as a single action (with a vine end or a loop or two within its body). Anyone struck by an attack takes 7 points of damage and must succeed on a second Speed defense roll or be enveloped by the spirril's mass of coils. A victim at the center of the tightening coil suffers 7 additional points of damage each round. He can attempt to struggle free with a successful Might-based task, or attack from inside with nothing larger than a light weapon.

A spirril's fruit contains different concentrations of spores. Some serve the plant for reproduction, and others are for defense. A spirril can hurl a spore fruit up to a long distance away, where it explodes in an immediate radius and the acidic spores inflict 7 points of damage. Some spirrils can hurl spore fruit that inflicts Intellect damage (ignores Armor).

Interaction: Spirrils usually act like simple predators, but they can show a cunning in hunting prey that requires extensive planning and the ability to predict how prey might think. Explorers with the ability to speak with plants or fungi find that spirrils possess a form of intelligence, but even so, it's hard to convince them that humans and other animals are anything more than compost that hasn't stopped moving yet.

Use: A seaside community wakes one morning to find a particularly thick tide of seaweed has washed ashore. When villagers go to clean it up, the "seaweed" animates and drowns those trying to gather it. Now the animate vine lengths have besieged the town.

GM Intrusion: A character must make a Might defense roll or become blinded in a spore fruit explosion. She must use water or a similar cleansing fluid to wash out the spores and restore her normal sight.



STINGING CLOAK

5 (15)

Stinging cloaks of all sizes and colors swim with two or more wide wings. Most cloaks are benign, but one of the largest varieties is a predator sporting several stinging tails. A stinging cloak's body is more than 16 feet (5 m) from wing tip to wing tip, and is perfectly shaded to blend into its watery environment as it stalks prey. When one attacks, the stinging tails lash like a nest of disturbed snakes. Otherwise, the tails trail placidly behind the stinging cloak as it flaps through the deeps.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Almost anywhere underwater

Health: 28

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short when swimming

Modifications: Perception and stealth as level 6.

Combat: A stinging cloak is usually a lone predator whose many stinging tails are especially venomous. An attack with the tails inflicts 5 points of damage and transmits a paralytic poison that inflicts 5 points of Speed damage if the victim fails a Might defense roll. Worse, the poison continues to inflict 1 point of Speed damage per round until the victim succeeds on a Might defense roll.

The stinging tails constantly lash. Anyone coming close enough to make a melee attack on a stinging cloak suffers 1 point of Speed damage on a failed Might defense roll. Likewise, when the cloak attacks a foe, if the attack misses, the target still takes 1 point of damage from one of the lashing stingers, though it doesn't manage to inject venom. (If the stinging cloak's attack hits, there is no additional damage from the lashing tails.)

Interaction: The stinging cloak is a predator with animal-level intelligence. However, if a cloak is birthed and raised by a skilled trainer (the creatures are live-birthed, not hatched from eggs), it can be trained to guard or serve as a companion.

Use: Sometimes two or three stinging cloaks hunt together. A less expected encounter would include a stinging cloak and another creature that the cloak is guarding or accompanying. This could be as simple as a human fisher whose boat is guarded by a stinging cloak when she takes it out each day, but it could include other creatures that have made an improbable alliance with a cloak.

Loot: A defeated stinging cloak has a venom sac that some intelligent creatures of the ocean prize.



A colony of stinging cloaks trails after the constantly moving Skelirroth Fleet, hunting both heeldra and the human traders and fixers who move between the dredges.

Skelirroth Fleet, page 77

Heeldran, page 140

GM Intrusion: *The relentlessly lashing stinging tails damage a piece of equipment, an artifact, or an active cypher that adapts the character to living underwater.*

Taraken are interested in devices and machines, and they may decide to liberate such objects from other creatures if an interaction goes poorly.

Cleoid, page 137

GM Intrusion: A character attacked by a neural dampening pulse must make an additional Intellect defense roll or go temporarily insane for a few rounds, which usually means he attacks his allies or decides to remove all the gear adapting him to the water.

These aquatic automatons are vaguely fishlike and could be mistaken for such at a distance. However, a close view of these device-studded creatures makes it clear that they are animate machines of the deep sea. The creatures are 9 feet (3 m) long on average, though individuals can vary greatly in overall form.

Taraken (also called “ironfish”) school in complex geometric patterns that defy explanation by most observers. They don’t seem to be chasing prey, following diffusion gradients, or creating a pattern to evade predators. Instead, it seems like taraken are pursuing some ancient directive that can only be played out in three-dimensional aquatic movement. Some people believe that if one tracked all the patterns created by a particular school of ironfish, deeper meaning would become evident.

Motive: Schooling in complex patterns

Environment: Swimming almost anywhere underwater in schools of six to ten

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Short when swimming

Modifications: Tasks related to creating and deciphering complex patterns as level 8; Speed defense as level 3 due to size.

Combat: A tarak bashes an opponent with its iron flukes.

A tarak can also extend a metallic antenna and produce a brain-dampening pulse. With this device, it can attack up to five selected targets within short range, dealing 5 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) to each. The tarak can generate this pulse no more than once per minute.

Some ironfish also incorporate a few random cyphers into their bodies and can call on those abilities in combat. The most common is a level 5 detonation cypher that torpedoes up to a long distance before exploding within an immediate radius.

Interaction: Taraken usually ignore other creatures but will defend themselves if attacked.

A creature able to talk to machines can strike up a conversation with a school, during which time it learns that ironfish are sentient, but only in groups of six or more. Ironfish will not reveal the reason for the complex patterns they swim.

Use: A school of taraken swims into a recently collapsed sea cave where cleoid artifacts are stored. They are immune to the influence such artifacts can exert, and one or two ironfish incorporate those artifacts into their bodies. After that, they leave a trail of cleoids in their wake.

Loot: A defeated taraken yields 1d10 shins and 1d6 + 1 cyphers.



URTILLA

4 (12)

Prized as mounts, urtillas are massive crustaceans that scuttle across the ocean floor but also swim. They possess long tendrils that end in bioluminescent nodules, so they provide their own light even in the darkest depths. These meat-eaters prey upon large marine animals or entire schools of smaller fish. They are not picky eaters and will swallow a human (and his diving suit and gear) if need be.

Urtillas are not particularly bright or astute. They get what they need through brute force or not at all.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Anywhere in the ocean

Health: 24

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 3

Movement: Short

Modifications: Climb as level 6; resist trickery as level 3; Speed defense as level 3 due to size.

Combat: Urtillas have huge maws. If they strike with a bite, a foe smaller than the urtilla must make another Speed defense roll. Those failing the second roll are held fast and suffer an automatic 6 points of additional damage each round until they escape.

Interaction: Obtaining an urtilla mount almost certainly involves getting one when it is very young and training it from the start. Urtillas are never friendly companions and likely would not hesitate to eat a rider if the opportunity presents itself. Thus, most riders use a strong reward or pain incentive (or both) to keep them under control. It's not uncommon to see a rider with a long staff holding a live fish in front of the urtilla to urge it onward or direct its movements. Spikes embedded in the urtilla's shell can also control it through pain. More sophisticated riders might use some kind of electrical prod device.

Use: An encounter with a hungry urtilla, followed later by another with creatures using them as mounts, might garner some respect for the riders in most characters' eyes. Alternatively, a situation in which a PC must use an urtilla mount—ever wary that the creature she's riding would just as soon rip her to shreds—can be a real experience.

GM Intrusion: *Another urtilla joins the fray, drawn by blood in the water. The two do not work in conjunction, but they attack prey first before potentially attacking each other to see who gets the scraps.*



VISCID WATCHER

3 (12)



"It's my guess that more people are killed by viscid watchers than by any other creature of the sea. It's just that people tell stories about heeldra and others that emerge from the water to prey on land dwellers. Viscid watchers just wait in the waves, watch, and sting."

~Staven, wandering healer

Shaped vaguely like a square 3 feet (1 m) on a side, a viscid watcher is a translucent swimming mass of living jelly covered with all manner of eyes, some large and deep, some small and glowing, and others that appear as simple dots. Each variety of eye is specialized, allowing the viscid watcher to collect enormous quantities of information merely by sight. Of more concern to most people is the watcher's trailing frill of long, poisonous tendrils. Still, that doesn't prevent some from hunting the creature, for its flesh is considered a delicacy in many areas, even more so because of the danger inherent in gathering it.

Motive: Hungers for flesh, defense

Environment: Almost anywhere along coastal regions, often in groups of two to five

Health: 18

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Movement: Short when swimming

Modifications: Perception as level 10.

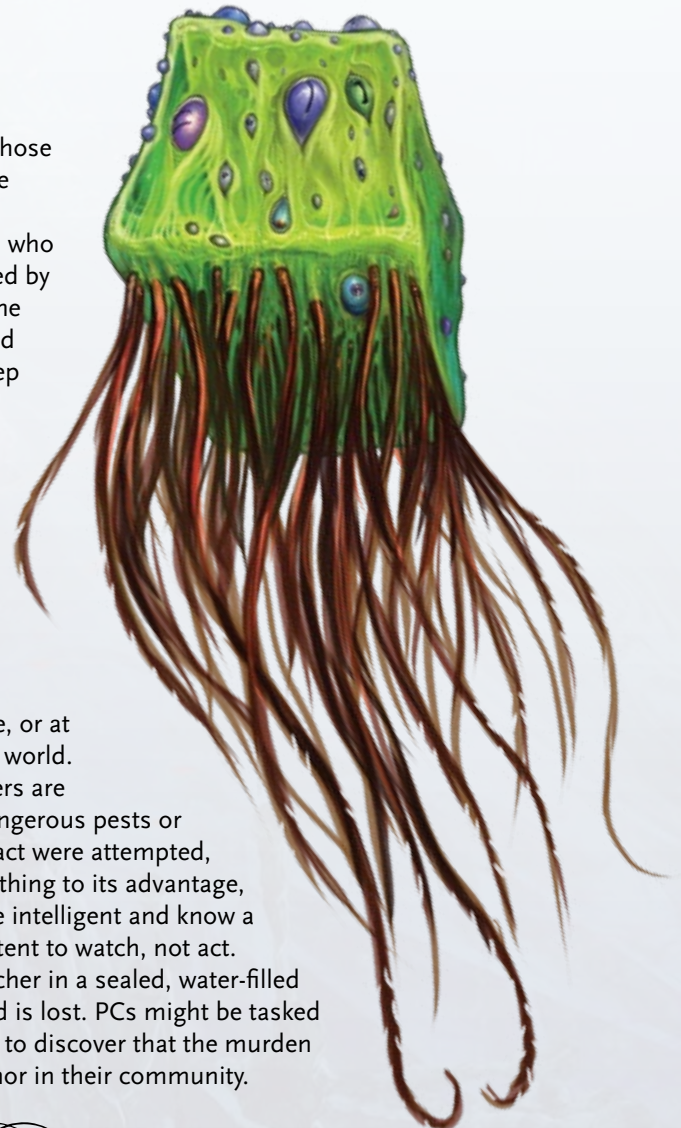
Combat: A viscid watcher first attempts to hypnotize foes by catching the gaze of those within short range who can see it. Those affected lose their next turn, which the watcher might use to get away. Hunters who aren't dissuaded by the gaze are attacked by the poisonous tendrils. A target hit by the tendrils takes damage and must succeed on a Might defense roll or move one step down the damage track.

If a foe ceases to attack a viscid watcher (either because it chooses to do so or because it has become debilitated), the watcher will usually swim off instead of pressing its attack.

Viscid watchers are immune to attacks that inflict damage or exert influence through psychic or telepathic methods. In addition, they are fully aware of creatures that are out of phase, invisible, or at a dimensional remove from the normal world.

Interaction: To the extent that viscid watchers are known, most people regard them as dangerous pests or hazardous delicacies. If telepathic contact were attempted, and a viscid watcher were offered something to its advantage, one might learn that these creatures are intelligent and know a great many things, though they are content to watch, not act.

Use: A caravan shipping a living viscid watcher in a sealed, water-filled aquarium falls under **murden** attack and is lost. PCs might be tasked to find the valuable edible creature only to discover that the murden have put the aquarium in a place of honor in their community.



Murden, page 247

GM Intrusion: A character who loses her turn to the viscid watcher's gaze has a waking nightmare that leaves her shaken and afraid. The difficulty of all her tasks increases by one step for one minute.

VROAORDUN

4 (12)

Humans cannot truly pronounce the name of this race of intelligent deep sea creatures, but “v-row-or-dun” is close. The vroaordun believe that gods of the “true deep” (a realm said to be far deeper than anyone ever goes) created them and gave them unique gifts. These gifts often manifest as incredible powers—telekinesis, telepathy, and more. The vroaordun have a few specific names for their gods: Kyrumus, Moyag, librus, and more. Some humans speculate that these powers may have come from early vroaordun exposure to something strange in the Deep Dark. Perhaps, in fact, the original vroaordun were members of another species altogether.

They have four nimble hands and swim with grace. Vroaordun have little skill or interest in the numenera, or even most simple tools. They speak their own language and rarely any other.

Vroaordun are driven by wealth and influence. Theirs is a class-based society, with a rich aristocracy claiming titles that equate to prince or king and ruling over their fellows based solely on affluence and political power.

Motive: Wealth

Environment: Anywhere in the ocean, but particularly in the Deep Dark

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Movement: Long underwater

Modifications: Interactions as level 5.

Combat: One in three vroaordun has a special ability. Roll on the [Powerful Mutations](#) list or simply choose a singular ability like teleportation or the capacity to stop time. Those without an offensive power rely on weapons to fight. However, the typical vroaordun fights only in self-defense.

Interaction: Without the help of something like telepathy or an interpreter, interaction with vroaordun can be challenging—not because they don’t want to talk, but because even those who know the Truth have great difficulty in making themselves understood (just as humans can’t pronounce vroaordun words accurately).

Use: Perhaps more open-ended in their use than any other deep sea race, one vroaordun might be an ally while another is a foe. They mix with other races and societies well, so a heeldran could have a vroaordun companion, or a pack of ebons might have a few vroaordun helpers.

Loot: Most vroaordun have a container made of shells or some other simple material to hold their wealth, usually in the form of 1d6 + 20 abadis.

Moyag: For details, refer to [The Devil’s Spine](#), page 83

Powerful mutations, page 125

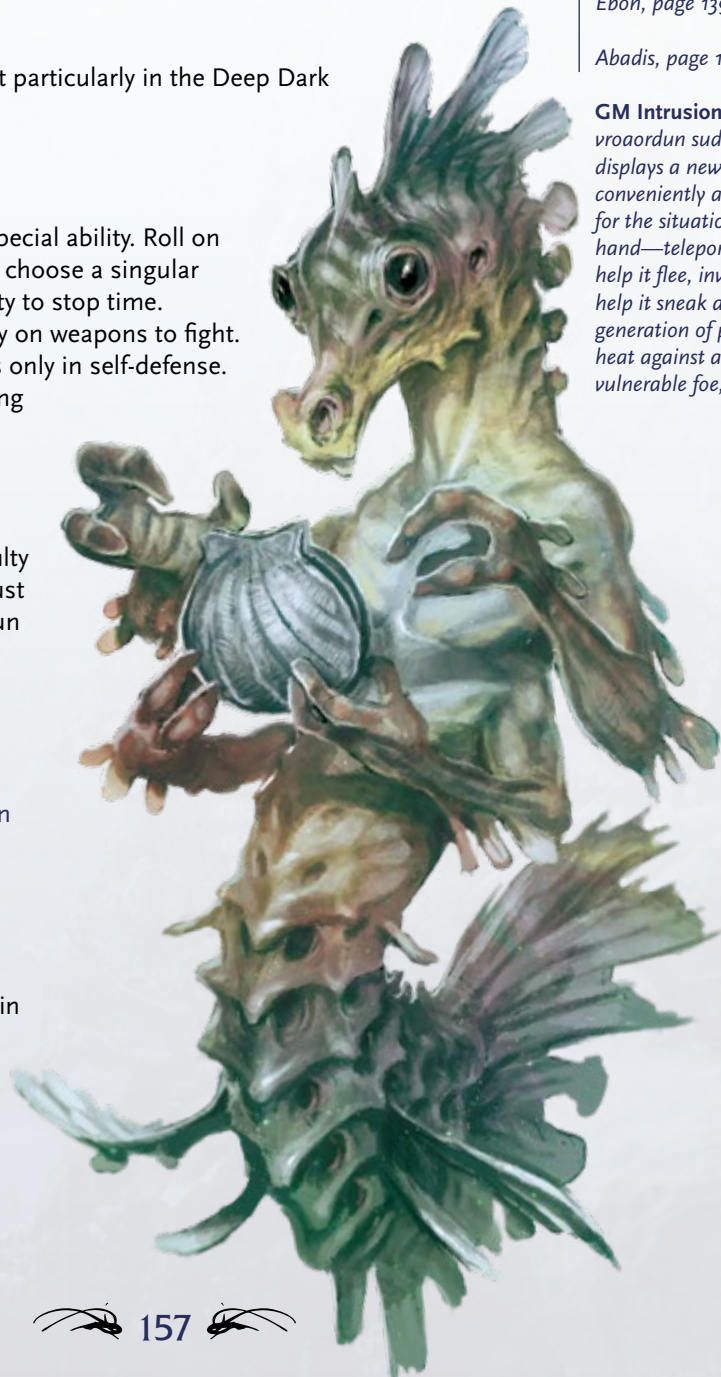
The Truth, page 133

Heeldran, page 140

Ebon, page 139

Abadis, page 13

GM Intrusion: The vroaordun suddenly displays a new ability, one conveniently appropriate for the situation at hand—teleportation to help it flee, invisibility to help it sneak away, the generation of powerful heat against a flame-vulnerable foe, or the like.



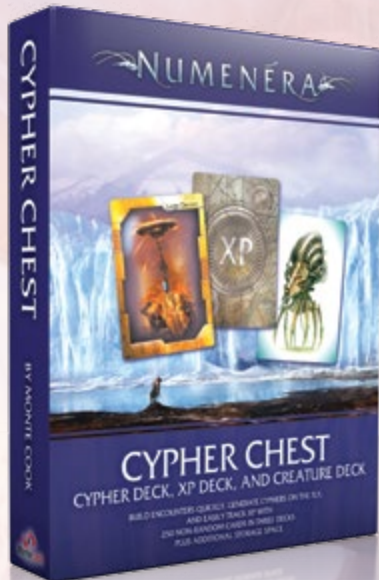
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