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# VILLAGE BACKDROP: REFUGE



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# VILLAGE BACKDROP: REFUGE

*An uncharted atoll, the secret isle of Refuge is a haven for pirates and cutthroats. Its laws are few: pay your due to the Buccaneer King, every Captain gets one vote and do not cheat or kill your fellow pirates. Without witnesses, that last one is more of a guideline. Life here is short, brutal and filled with golden opportunity for those willing to seize it at the point of a sword. While discontent at the Buccaneer King's rule grows in the hearts of the other captains, rumours swirl of spies working for the pirates' many victims lurking on the atoll. And finally something terrible is stalking and killing drunken pirates and the children of the Maze. Surely, bloody war and ruin will soon be visited upon Refuge.*

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## CONTENTS

Refuge At a Glance.....	2
Notable Locations .....	4
Life in Refuge .....	6
Did you Know? .....	7

## STAT BLOCKS BY CR

CR		PAGE
4	Athela Female natural wereshark human ranger 4	6

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## REFUGE AT A GLANCE

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An uncharted atoll, the secret isle of Refuge is a haven for pirates and cutthroats. Its laws are few: pay your due to the Buccaneer King, every Captain gets one vote and do not cheat or kill your fellow pirates. Without witnesses, that last one is more of a guideline. Life here is short, brutal and filled with golden opportunity for those willing to seize it at the point of a sword.

### DEMOGRAPHICS

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**Ruler** Captain Nye, the Buccaneer King

**Government** Autocracy (elected by a majority of Refuge's pirate captains)

**Population** 190 (132 humans, 11 dwarves, 7 half-elves, 23 half-orcs, 4 halflings; 13 other); population can swell to several hundred if all the crews are in residence at once

**Alignments** CE

**Languages** Common, Dwarven, Halfling, Orc

**Corruption** +1; **Crime** +0; **Economy** -4; **Law** -6; **Lore** -1; **Society** -5

**Qualities** Notorious, Prosperous

**Danger** +30; **Disadvantages** Hunted

### NOTABLE FOLK

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Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

**Athela** (location 8; CE female wereshark ranger 4) Athela is a squat, solid woman with a voracious appetite. With a mob of weresharks and lacedon allies, there is nowhere on the isle she cannot sate her hunger.

**Bloody Nib McFullen** (location 4; LE male dwarf fighter 1/rogue 3) Nib runs the warehouse and by extension, most trade on the island. He has a reputation for fairness and violent reprisals against those who cheat their fellow pirates.

**Captain Morgein** (location 3; N male human fighter 1/wizard 1) Allus Morgein is a conniver who chafes under the violent and chaotic rule of Captain Nye. He has quietly begun building a coalition of the reasonable and the ostracized so that he might challenge Nye when the next election is called. Morgein is the captain of the *Intrigue*.

**Captain Nye** (location 5; CE male human fighter 5) Olger Nye is a brutal drunk who has held the title of Buccaneer King for the last three years using a combination of bribes and terror.

**Captain Vask** (location 3; CE male half-orc barbarian 3) The captain of the *Night's Fury*, Zik Vask and his crew are vicious monsters responsible for the fearsome reputation of Refuge's pirates. They rarely leave anyone alive, and have been known to eat captives they do take.

**Deklan Fints** (location 2; NE male human magus 3) Deklan fronts a crew for hire named the Venom of the Sea. They have no ship and work for anyone that will have them. They are extremely talented and have a diverse range of classes among their number, however, they are not the most trustworthy of pirates and have been known to be the only survivors when hired by others to help take a lucrative prize.

**Eveleena Van Hollen** (location 2; CN female human bard 4) The raven-haired Eveleena runs the Three Legged Cat, but only

as a cover. She is actually a clever spy for the Consortium, a group of merchants who seek to lay the pirates low.

**Jingles** (location 6; CG male human rogue 1) The birth of children in Refuge is not an uncommon event, but few are cared for by their parents. Instead, they band together into gangs of cutpurses and thieves that infest the Maze. Jingles, a happy-go-lucky lad whose name comes from the sound of his mark's pouch as he runs away with it, leads one of the most successful gangs, the Minnows.

### NOTABLE LOCATIONS

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Most of the village comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **Harbour Chain House:** This lighthouse controls the raising and lowering of the massive spiked chain that guards the harbour.
2. **The Three Legged Cat:** The largest inn and brothel in Refuge, the Three Legged Cat is neutral ground where many a blood-soaked coin is spent.
3. **Docks:** The sheltered docks of Refuge are open to any pirate crew who chooses to dock. At any time, there are at least three ships in port. When a storm beckons or an election has been called, there may be twenty or more.
4. **Nib's Warehouse:** Bloody Nib McFullen owns the warehouse where pirate crews sell their stolen goods or trade for the supplies they need.
5. **King's Manor:** Built into the side of the dormant volcano, the King's Manor is the tallest point on the island. Home to Captain Nye, the Buccaneer King, the King's Manor is home to many drunken revels and the occasional blood sport.
6. **The Maze:** The floating wrecks in this part of Refuge are closely packed and filled with danger.
7. **The Cutlass:** The Cutlass is the largest and most powerful of Refuge's pirate fleet and rarely strays far from home. Nye keeps it close to protect the island.
8. **The Tubes:** Lava tubes riddle the island below the waterline, and are avoided by the pirate crews. Unbeknownst to the dangerous men and women of Refuge, a far greater danger lairs here.

### MARKETPLACE

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**Resources & Industry** Coral, fish, pearls and stolen booty

**Base Value** 700 gp; **Purchase Limit** 5,000 gp; **Spellcasting** 3rd;  
**Minor Items** 2d4; **Medium Items** 1d4; **Major Items** –

When the PCs arrive in Refuge, the following items are for sale:

- **Potions & Oils** *potion of sanctuary* (50 gp)
- **Scrolls (Arcane)** *charm person* (25 gp), *gust of wind* (150 gp)
- **Scrolls (Divine)** *alter winds* (25 gp), *water walking* (375 gp)
- **Wondrous Items** *pirate's eye patch* (2,600 gp)

## VILLAGE LORE

A PC making a Knowledge (geography) or Knowledge (local) may know some information about the village. A successful check reveals all the information revealed by a lesser check.

**DC 10:** Piracy is on the rise and the scoundrels go to ground when organized resistance is raised. No one seems able to find them but rumours persist of a secret safe harbour somewhere on the open sea.

**DC 15:** Those in the know speak of a place called Refuge where pirates can find a haven, sell their plunder and purchase their fill of rum and women.

**DC 20:** Refuge is ruled by a king elected by a majority of the other pirate captains. It is a violent place with few laws. Only the captains and their navigators know its exact coordinates.

## VILLAGERS

**Appearance** If there is any uniform appearance among the diverse pirates of Refuge, it is a general unkempt dirtiness wrapped around a package of aggression, steeped in strong ale.

**Dress** Most residents of Refuge generally dress as common sailors, regardless of their profession. Boots, bandanas and loose shirts are common.

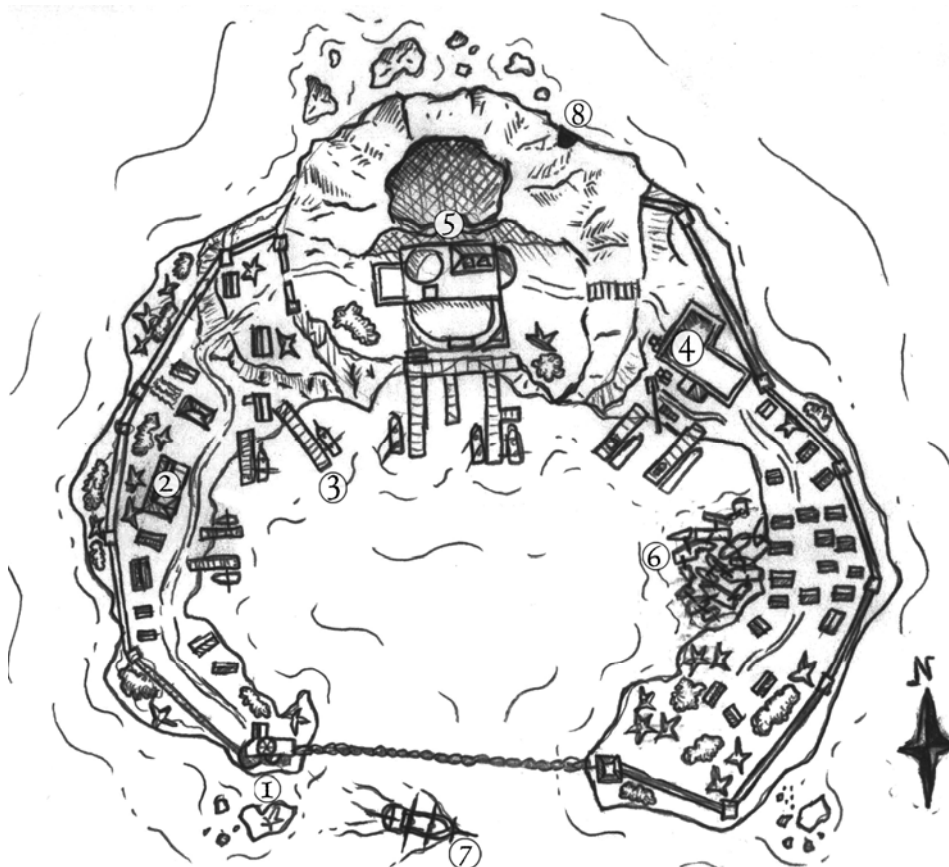
**Nomenclature** *male* Hob, Jahk, Padney, Tobias; *female* Beetha, Gatia, Mai, Sallee; *family* Carabis, Werk, Zalleny.

## WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A PC can use Diplomacy to gather information about Refuge and its surroundings. This takes 1d4 hours and requires a DC 10 check. A PC exceeding this check gains one additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10. Use the table below to determine which rumour(s) the PC learns.

D6	RUMOUR
1	The Consortium's man o'wars sent to stamp out piracy get closer to finding Refuge every day. Someone in Refuge is a rat selling out his brothers.
2	A lot of people disappear in Refuge. A lot more than one might expect, even for a town filled with scallywags and brigands.
3*	Captain Morgein is a witch who trucks with demonic forces. It won't be long before Captain Nye puts him down.
4*	A vault is hidden in the foreman's office of Nib's Warehouse. It is filled with the fortunes of hundreds of prizes; enough gold to buy a kingdom.
5	Those who displease Captain Nye may find themselves fighting for their lives in the Pit; a small, private sand-filled arena in the King's Manor.
6*	The crew of the Night's Fury keeps a baby linnorm as a pet to which they feed their captives.

\*False rumour



## NOTABLE LOCATIONS

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### 1: HARBOUR CHAIN HOUSE

This stout lighthouse is perhaps the most reinforced building in Refuge short of the King's Manor. Always staffed with rotating shifts of six men (human warrior 3) loyal to Captain Nye, the Chain House controls the raising and lowering of the massive spiked chain (hardness 10, hp 240) that blocks access to the harbour. It takes twelve rounds to raise or lower the chain.

Three spouts for pouring flaming oil point towards the approach. Pumps inside allow the oil to be sprayed out as far as 100 ft. offshore (4d6 fire damage; DC 18 Reflex halves).

### 2: THE THREE LEGGED CAT

Hanging above the largest public house in Refuge is a great sign displaying a cat, complete with peg leg, eye patch and pirate's hat; his mouth open in song and toasting the customer with a large foaming mug of beer. The Three Legged Cat offers food and drink, as well as rooms for let with or without additional company. The inn is rarely quiet except in the late hours of the morning, and indeed never closes. The Cat is neutral ground among competing crews, and indeed the many bouncers (human warrior 2) strive to keep the bloodletting to a minimum.

The endless rooms and halls of the Cat are the source of much intrigue in Refuge. The proprietress, Eveleena Van Hollen (CN female human bard 4) seems a friend with a sympathetic ear to all the sailors, but it is only a cover. Nearly five years ago, she got herself captured in an attempt to locate the pirates' secret hold while working for the Consortium, an alliance of angry merchants who have had enough of piracy. While that portion of her plan worked perfectly, she didn't count on being blindfolded and chained in the hold for the entire journey. Now Eveleena has a rough idea of atoll's location, she fears she couldn't locate it again without more complete charts and maps. On top of that, she has no way off the island and back to her Consortium masters who now must assume she is dead. So she gathers more information and looks for sympathetic allies, or at least those who might be bought for the right amount of coin.

Eveleena isn't the only dangerous inhabitant of the Cat. Deklan Fints (NE male human magus 3) and his crew for hire, the Venom of the Sea, practically live in the tavern while waiting for their next job. The Venoms are a dangerous lot, numbering seventeen of the blood-thirstiest cutthroats in Refuge. Loyal to each other like a family and with several spellcasters among their number, the members of the Venom of the Sea do anything for money. However, they are just as likely to kill their employer, as take his money for completing the job.

### 3: DOCKS

The life's blood of Refuge is the docks. Open to all pirate crews with plunder to sell or that need to restock their supplies, the docks are the busiest place in the village surpassing the Three Legged Cat in round-the-clock activity. There are regularly several ships in port with their crews coming and going.

Two of the largest and well-known crews frequently docked in Refuge are those of the *Intrigue* and the *Night's Fury*. The *Intrigue* is captained by Allus Morgein (N male human fighter 1/wizard 1), an intelligent and crafty leader who plans five possible moves for every one that he actually makes. Morgein is not pleased with the brutal and decaying rule of Captain Nye. Believing Refuge could be much more than the bloody cesspool it currently is, he plans to challenge Nye at the next vote (once he is sure he has a comfortable and secret majority).

Captain Zik Vask (CE male half-orc barbarian 3) leads the *Night's Fury*. With a deserved reputation for uncontrolled violence, Vask and his crew care little for the rules of Refuge. They take what they want, when they want and they do not bother with what others may think. They are dangerous to encounter and lethal to cross. They have few friends in Refuge.

### 4: NIB'S WAREHOUSE

If the docks are the life's blood of Refuge, Nib's Warehouse is its heart. In this vast warehouse, crews store their booty or supplies. In a village of thieves and plunderers, it is no surprise the security on the warehouse is vicious and thorough, earning its owner the moniker of Bloody. Bloody Nib McFullen (LE male dwarf fighter 1/rogue 3) manages the warehouse for the good of all, and anyone that even considers cheating him is usually executed publicly by Nib's guards in some horrific manner. Nib is particularly fond of flaying, though the clean picked bones of thief sealed in a barrel with rats for four days currently decorates the doors. The doors to the warehouse are magically locked at night (CL 7) and the walls are magically enchanted to resist fire. Nib carries the only key.

Nib asks no questions and offers a fair price on all items sold to his warehouse. He is also the man to see if you are looking for hard to find items. Nib's trade keeps Refuge afloat and the pirates won't take kindly to anyone causing trouble in the vicinity of the warehouse.

The roof of the warehouse is covered in huge barrels filled with water, and Nib operates several boilers and evaporating distillers to meet the islanders' need for fresh water. A skin of water can be purchased from the warehouse for 2 gp; half the cost if you have your own container.

## 5: KING'S MANOR

The atoll rises to the north, creating a large sloping hill. Into the side of this hill, facing the harbour, is the King's Manor. The seat of power in Refuge, this walled manor is home to the Captain Olger Nye, called the Buccaneer King (CE male human fighter 5). Nye is a drunken sot with a taste for blood sports that is rarely sated.

Since winning the last vote three years ago, Nye has cemented his power. He has sponsored revels, handed out gifts and kept a steady stream of rum and ale flowing through Refuge's streets. Those few that have criticized him often find themselves invited to fight in the Pit, the small arena he has installed inside the walls of the King's Manor.

Many of the crews consider Nye to be a jovial bear of a man known most for his wide smile and long black beard that hangs to his waist. This image is only half of the story. Nye is a deeply paranoid man who has a base cunning with little talent for long-range planning. He suspects some of the other captains are plotting against him but he has not been able to identify the ringleaders. He feels the pressures of real and imaginary conspirators pressing in from all sides at the same time as the very real threat of the Consortium ships scouring the seas for the hidden atoll of Refuge. It is only a matter of time before Nye's base instincts take over and he begins culling those he suspects of plotting against him.

## 6: THE MAZE

The Maze is a creative solution to the lack of available land in Refuge. Many of the prizes captured by the pirates are no longer seaworthy but still float. By binding them together with a host of ropes, chain and planks the citizens of Refuge have doubled the living space on the atoll.

The Maze is a disorganized mass of dark corners and tight floating quarters with even less law than other parts of the village. Dark dealings and murders are common in the Maze and the various wrecks are claimed by whichever gang can defend them. The worst parts of the Maze are inhabited by the poor and wretched, too worthless to be worth protecting by one of the gangs. Dangerous madmen are also common.

Children whose parents are dead or no longer wish to care for them are turned out to fend for themselves. Some manage to find work with one of the crews, learning the piracy trade but most wander hungry, stealing whatever they can to survive. To the pirates, the roaming children are little better than vermin and it is not uncommon to chase them off with a stout beating when they are seen lurking. A 12-year-old boy called Jingles (CG male human rogue 1) has organized many of the youth into a gang he calls The Minnows. The Maze is their home. The children look out for each other, stealing weapons and food and

living in the bowels of whatever wreck they can find. They move frequently to avoid detection, and take of advantage of their small size to go places where others cannot reach them.

Jingles is a smart and daring lad who has planned complicated cons and robberies well beyond than what might be expected for his years. He knows the Minnows cannot match the raw strength of the pirate crews, no matter how dirty they might be willing to fight. Instead, they need to be smarter, quicker and more daring. Willing to go where others might not, it is only a matter of time before Jingles and his small allies run afoul of Athela and the weresharks or finally try the patience of the Buccaneer King.

## 7: THE CUTLASS

The mightiest vessel in the pirate fleet is the *Cutlass*. Captain Nye's own ship, crewed by thirty-five of his most loyal and skilled buccaneers, the *Cutlass* is a captured dreadnaught with both speed and power. The *Cutlass*, often accompanied by a handful of fire ships and other escort vessels, patrols the waters around the atoll, ready for the day the Consortium finally finds Refuge. It docks every two to three days for only a handful of hours. It is not as dangerous work as fighting on one of the other ships, but the work is tedious and boring. The crew of the *Cutlass* is spoiling for a fight or the chance to take a prize of their own.

## 8: THE TUBES

The undersea volcano that gave birth to the atoll is no longer active, but under the waterline, its sides are riddled with natural tunnels and caves. Since the founding of Refuge, these tunnels have become a refuge to a band of natural weresharks who have made Refuge their private feeding ground. Athela (CE female wereshark ranger 4) is a blunt and thuggish predator who's one insightful idea was to form an alliance with a pack of lacedons. The addition of the undead to her band has greatly strengthened her position, and both groups of predators work together to feed off of the pirates.

The weresharks and their ghoulish allies occasionally grab inebriated pirates who stray too close to the water's edge and drag them back to the Tubes where the bones of dozens cover the floors. However, once a month, Athela adopts her human form of a thick, bald woman during the day and walks Refuge gathering information for her minions. Then as darkness falls when the moon is new, she and her allies swim up into the harbour and climb into the maze, where they prowl the half-sunken wrecks in search of enough victims to feed on for the weeks to come.

## LIFE IN REFUGE

Refuge seems lawless at first glance, but its citizens live by a strict code. Within the bounds of that code, they spend their days with wine, women and song, whiling away the hours between hunting fat merchant men with rough revels.

### TRADE & INDUSTRY

The atoll is not self-sufficient. Inhabitants harvest what food they can from the sea and the orange trees growing in the fertile volcanic soil, but fresh drinking water is a constant problem. There are no wells in Refuge, and each household desalinates water by evaporation. Fortunately, the pirates are happy to substitute rum whenever possible.

The main trade of Refuge is piracy. Crews prey on any ship or small port within range and bring their trophies back to the village where they sell them to Bloody Nib who in turn sells them to other crews or ships them to less reputable ports for resale.

### LAW & ORDER

The Buccaneer King's men usually only emerge from the King's Manor for a specific purpose; such as to enforce the tenets of the code: First, every crew must pay a portion of their earnings to the Buccaneer King, ostensibly for the upkeep of the island though Nye has managed to become quite wealthy off the proceeds. Second no citizen of Refuge may cheat or kill another. This edict is rarely enforced, unless there are many witnesses or a man of means or influence is wronged. Lastly, each Captain gets one vote, with a majority electing the King. The vote can be called by any Captain. In this way, Refuge is quite democratic. Crimes outside the code are dealt with by whoever feels wronged and generally involves a severe beating.

### EVENTS

While the PCs are in the village, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

D6	EVENT
1	At the new moon, a band of weresharks and lacedons raid the blocks near the Three Legged Cat, dragging drunks, soiled doves and random folk into the water.
2	A killer stalks the maze. Each night for ten nights a child is found dismembered in a dark hold of one of the ruined ships. Eveleena Van Hollen offers a reward of 50 gp for the culprit. The Minnows might know something useful, but are in hiding until the killer is caught.
3	Captain Nye declares a festival to celebrate the sinking of the <i>Gauntlet</i> , a Consortium man o'war. In addition to an evening of merriment, he plans to force the survivors to fight to the death in his arena, culminating in the <i>Gauntlet's</i> captain facing Nye's two hungry crocodiles, armed with nothing but a spiked gauntlet.

4	Nib has hired a strange darkly robed man to lay further enchantments upon the warehouse, but the man demands some payment Nib refuses. The stranger moves into the Cat, glowering at all who look his way and unnerving the working girls.
5	Someone sabotages the chain mechanism in the Harbour Chain House. As the <i>Cutlass</i> moves to defend the opening, it suffers an unexplained fire in the rigging.
6	One of the <i>Night's Fury</i> murders a crewman of the <i>Intrigue</i> over a dice game. Captain Morgein demands recompense, but Nye refuses to adjudicate. Captain Vask orders his men to kill any <i>Intrigue</i> crew they find.

### ATHELA

CR 4 (XP 400)

Female natural wereshark human ranger 4

CE Medium humanoid (human, shapechanger)

**Init** +5 (+7 in water); **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Perception +7 (+9 vs. humans), Sense Motive +0 (+2 vs. humans)

**Speed** 30 ft.; **ACP** 0; Climb +2, Stealth +1 (+3 in water), Swim +9

**AC** 13, touch 11, flat-footed 12; **CMD** 15

(+2 armour [leather], +1 Dex)

**Fort** +6, **Ref** +5, **Will** +1

**hp** 33 (4 HD)

**Space** 5 ft.; **Base Atk** +4; **CMB** +6

**Melee** mwk cutlass (Power Attack [-2/+4]) +7 (1d6+2/18-20)

**Atk Options** favoured enemy (human [+2])

**Special Actions** change shape (human, hybrid and shark; *polymorph*)

**Combat Gear** *potion of cure light wounds*

**Abilities** Str 14, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 9

**SQ** companion bond (humans [+1]), favoured terrain (water [+2]), lycanthrope empathy (sharks and dire sharks), wild empathy (+3, -3 vs. magical beasts)

**Feats** Endurance<sup>B</sup>, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack<sup>B</sup>, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bite)

**Skills** Bluff -1 (+1 vs. humans), Intimidate +6, Knowledge (geography) -1 (+1 in water), Knowledge (local) -1 (+1 vs. humans), Profession (sailor) +7, Stealth +8, Survival +7 (+11 tracking, +13 tracking humans or in water, +15 tracking humans in water)

**Languages** Common

**Gear** as above plus belt pouch, 12 gp, 15 sp

**In hybrid form, Athela has the following altered statistics:**

**Senses** blindsense (30 ft.)

**AC** 19, touch 11, flat-footed 18

(+2 armour [leather], +1 Dex, +6 natural)

**Fort** +7

**hp** 37; **DR** 10/silver

**CMB** +7

**Melee** mwk cutlass (Power Attack [-2/+4]) +8 (1d6+3/18-20), bite +3 (2d6+1 plus curse of lycanthropy [DC 15])

**Abilities** Str 16, Con 16

**Skills** Swim +10



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