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HELLFROST

PIRATES OF THE CRYSTALFLOW





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PIRATES OF THE CRYSTALFLOW



● INTRODUCTION ●

This particular adventure is designed for a group of four Novice characters, though it can easily be adjusted to suit higher Ranked parties. Novice characters will find certain parts quite difficult if they get their tactics wrong, but they have the opportunity to retreat and acquire healing before heading back into the fray. A selection of pre-generated Novice characters can be found at our website, www.tripleacegames.com.

For higher Rank parties, the GM need simply increase the number of opponents accordingly. For this adventure we advise you add two bufom warriors or human guards or one bufom shaman (when appropriate) to an encounter for each Rank the party is above Novice. For instance, if a party of four Seasoned adventures encounters bufom warriors numbering one per hero, the characters must fight a total of six warriors—one for each hero, plus an additional two because the party is Seasoned. Alternately, the party may face four warriors and a shaman.

The adventure involves some investigation. Groups which prefer to immediately wade in and start killing may find themselves up against the local authorities on murder charges. They also won't discover the entire plot—some parts can only be reached by watching the villains for a time. While it's never wise to try to change a group's habits, it might be worth reminding hack-and-slash players that their heroes are not above the law.

The adventure is set in the Crystalflow Confederacy, a Hearthland realm comprising several towns and numerous cities along the banks of the Crystalflow River. The temperature is less important in this adventure than some others in the *Hellfrost* line. Still, the GM should still keep an eye on temperature and the characters' winter protection if he elects to set the tale in any season except summer. See the *Savage Worlds* rulebook for the effects of cold weather and the *Hellfrost Players' Guide* for how the rules work in this setting.

Bufom Overview: Bufomi (singular bufom; “boofom”) are toad men, and are jokingly referred to as “toadies.” They stand about the same height as a human child, are humanoid, but have glistening skin, webbed fingers and toes (three digits per limb), bulging eyes, and wide, toothless mouths. They live simple lives as hunter-gatherers. Bufomi are territorial creatures, and centuries of conflict with gatormen and lizardmen have made them quite aggressive to outsiders of all races.

Static Time: Although several parts of the adventure can only be discovered at night or take place in “two days,” these encounters are static. No matter how much time the heroes waste, the encounters occur as listed in the adventure.

Generic Treasure: For ease, assume each bufom warrior and human guard carries 1d4 gs in assorted coins and easily sellable goods. Shamans carry 2d10 gs worth of loot. The main villains possess 1d10 x 10 gs of booty in the form of jewelry on their person. This treasure is in addition to their standard gear. No other monsters carry any mundane treasure. Magical treasure is detailed in the appropriate encounter section or stat block.

PLOT OVERVIEW

The Crystalflow Confederacy, whose territory follows the course of the Crystalflow River, exists because of one thing—trade. The Crystalflow is navigable for about half its length, with the seaport of Drakeport at one end and the merchant town of Bridgwater at the other. Beyond Bridgwater, the river rapidly narrows and shallows. Bridgwater is a major nexus for northern merchants, as the trade roads link it not only to surrounding lands but also the distant Winterlands. Similarly, Scathmoor, which lies halfway between the two main ports, is a hub for traffic in the eastern Hearthlands.

Between Scathmoor and Bridgwater the river flows northeast and then curves to the northwest around Gnatmarsh, a low-lying morass of quicksand, treacherous bog, fenlands, and rotting vegetation. (At this point the Lesser

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Crystalflow, a non-navigable tributary, flows into the river on the opposite bank.) Over the last few months a number of barges have been discovered floating in this stretch of the river, devoid of crew and stripped of cargo. Pirates are not unusual along the Crystalflow, but their activities are usually confined to expensive cargoes. What makes these attacks so strange is the cargoes were all low value goods, such as pottery, textiles, and foodstuffs.

The raiders are not true pirates, but bufomi, a humanoid species of “toad men.” The bufomi of Gnatmarsh have largely ignored the outside world for many centuries. On occasion a shaman has arisen with dreams of grandeur, but aside from a few cattle raids against the settlements bordering the marsh, their plans have come to naught.

Several months before the raids began, a shaman by the name of Kraakroa came to power. Soon after his ascension, an engro merchant, Oswald, strode boldly into their temple-home and demanded to see their leader. Such a move was not only audacious, but also reckless, for the bufomi are extremely territorial and brook no intruders.

Oswald had not come to stir up trouble, however, but to offer them a mutually beneficial pact. He would supply the bufomi with the details of trade barges passing Gnatmarsh, barges the warriors would raid. The bufomi could keep any humans they captured for whatever purpose they desired, while the merchant would be given the cargo. Suspecting a trick, Kraakroa asked for more—he demanded the merchant supply the tribe with armor and metal weapons. To his surprise, the merchant agreed, though he made a counter demand—the right to trade arms and armor for captives.

No fool, Kraakroa insisted on knowing why an engro would seek an alliance with the bufomi. Oswald was candid in his reply. He was, he said, a member of the Gray League, a consortium of merchants who sought mercantile supremacy of all Rassilon. The cargoes the warriors would take were all low value, but immediate wealth was not the merchant’s aim. Rather, he would select only certain cargoes to be taken. These would all be common items, easy to resell but vital to the merchants who transported them. Instead of seeking a quick financial gain, Oswald’s plan was to drive several competitors out of business, allowing him to buy up their warehouses and barges cheaply.

Of course, the wily merchant had not told the bufomi the entire story. His long-term plan was to use the bufomi as agents and then, at an appropriate time, “discover” their involvement in the piracy and arrange for a crusade to eradicate them. Even if a bufom was captured and interrogated, who would believe that a respectable merchant would stoop to dealing with barbaric toad men?

BRIDGWATER

Although a significant portion of the adventure is set in Bridgwater, no city map or detailed locations are provided. The town serves only as the backdrop for the first part of the tale. Should the heroes have need to visit an inn, store, or blacksmith, the GM should invent appropriate personalities and ambience as desired.

Bridgwater is a bustling mercantile city of just under 18,000 souls. Technically now one settlement, Bridgwater began as two rival villages on opposite sides of the Crystalflow. Locals still refer to East and West Bridgwater, despite the former villages merging some two centuries ago. A single bridge, the Bridge of Scales, crosses the Crystalflow. Made of stone and lined with shops and stalls, it marks the end of the navigable river.

The entire waterfront on both banks houses warehouses, merchant offices, and rowdy taverns. Although the waterfront is quieter at night, it is rarely deserted.

have agreed to meet with a local merchant who has a job offer.

Judging by the cramped office, old furniture, and heaps of paperwork, your potential patron, a merchant by the name of Rodger ap-Margwin, is neither rich nor organized. The young merchant, who sits behind a battered desk, is scruffily dressed and shows signs of not having slept well for some time.

“Thank you for coming,” he begins. “Over the last few months pirate attacks between here and Bridgwater—that’s the port at the north end of the navigable stretch of the Crystalflow River—have increased. A dozen or more barges have been found without crew or cargo. No ransoms have been demanded, so the gods only know what fate befell the hapless crew. I’m not sure of how many merchants have been targeted, but there are at least three here in Scathmoor who have lost men and trade goods.

“None of us is particularly rich, but we’ve managed to gather some funds. What we’re looking for is a discreet band to investigate the problem and put an end to it. Our preliminary investigations reveal that someone is profiting from our misfortune, a certain Oswald. He’s a big shot in Bridgwater, a very rich and influential engro. We have our own agents in Bridgwater, of course, but their faces are too well known. If he is somehow involved, we need people he won’t immediately recognize.

PLAYERS' INTRODUCTION

The adventure begins in Scathmoor, a small port on the Crystalflow River. As part of the back-story, the heroes

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GUARDS, GUARDS!

Law-abiding heroes might be tempted at some point to try and involve the city watch in their investigations. Unfortunately, Oswald has far more wealth and influence than the party can hope to muster, regardless of their Rank. In addition to frequent bribes, his reputation alone is enough to quash investigations before they begin. The party will get no help from the authorities in this adventure.

"The deal is 1,000 gold scields each, payable on successful completion. If you somehow manage to return our cargoes, you'll be given 10% of the resale value to split as you like."

Rodger can't increase the cash reward, but he can be bartered as high as 25% of the profits on any retrieved cargo. Similarly, he won't pay any monies upfront.

If the party is interested, the merchant suggests they travel to Bridgwater on his next barge leaving Scathmoor. It departs in two days, enough time for the party to do any last minute shopping or prepare alchemical devices or herbal remedies. Since the barge won't be making any stops along the way, it should reach the town in about four days. Typically, barges only sail during daylight hours, mooring up at night to avoid the risk of running aground or being caught in an unseen eddy. Since the barge is heading upriver, it has a maximum speed of just 5 mph.

Rodger can provide little extra information about Oswald—he knows his merchant's mark is a sun dragon head. On the plus side, he adds, a well-known figure should be easy enough to track down once they reach Bridgwater. The only other information of note Rodger supplies, and then only if asked, is that all his stolen cargoes were fruit and vegetables.

The barge the heroes are due to catch will be carrying carrots, onions, and cabbages. These will be sold in Bridgwater to merchants from other realms.

QUESTIONS AROUND TOWN

Inquisitive heroes may wish to ask questions of Scathmoor's locals and of the crews of the merchant barges which dock here. After all, they may have picked up snippets of information. This requires a Streetwise roll and takes four hours. With success, the adventurers learn that every cargo stolen has been low value items, such as pottery, textiles, food, and the like. Shipments of ore, wine, and other expensive goods have been unmo- lested. On a raise, they are informed all the raids must have taken place along the west bank, as the Lesser Crystalflow enters the Crystalflow from the east and creates a dangerous and unpredictable current.

Heroes who ask why the latter fact is significant, or who make an appropriate Knowledge (Area) roll, are told that Gnatmarsh lies along the west bank. Numerous

inlets and channels among the rotting vegetation and tall reeds provide ample hiding places for pirates.

THE RIVER JOURNEY

Two encounters occur during the trip to Bridgwater. Read or paraphrase the narrative text to the players.

Word of Caution: Toward evening on the first day, a barge heading down the river (from Bridgwater) hails the adventurers' barge.

"Aboy!" the captain cries. "We've just come from Bridgwater. Another barge was found derelict just yesterday, up by Gnatmarsh. No crew or cargo aboard her, but there were signs of a violent struggle on deck. She's tangled in reeds, so she won't present a shipping hazard. We've already informed another barge a day ahead of you, and she's agreed to tow her to Bridgwater. Keep your eyes peeled!"

The owner, a minor merchant from Drakeport, which lies at the other end of the Crystalflow, knows no other details of interest.

First Sight of Gnatmarsh: On day three the captain steers the barge near to the west bank. Read or paraphrase the following text to the players.

The captain points over to the western bank and grunts, "Gnatmarsh. Make sure your weapons are ready." Casting your eyes to the bank you see a morass of rotting vegetation, tangled trees, tall reeds, small hillocks, and fetid marsh. The buzz of vast swarms of gnats, no doubt after which the marsh was named, is clearly audible.

From here on up to Bridgwater, any hero on duty must draw a card from the action deck each time he pulls a watch shift (the captain insists at least one hero a day does guard duty to ease the burden on his men. A black numbered card indicates biting gnats and midges plague him. He must make a Vigor roll or suffer a level of Fatigue from itchy bites. On a black face card, his Vigor roll is made at -2. Fatigue from the bites is removed after 24 hours or with the application of a single dose of anti-histamine rubbed into the skin.

Characters with knowledge of herbalism can concoct an insect repellant. The captain stops each night, and agrees to let the heroes go ashore in the rowboat (towed behind the barge).

Insect Repellant (+1): Insects, whether swarms or giant insects, must make a Spirit roll if they wish to attack the user. The roll must be made before each attack. A single dose rubbed into the skin lasts for two hours. Because the gnat swarms don't have stat blocks, use of insect repellant works slightly differently during the trip to Bridgwater. A sentry using the herbal brew suffers an attack only if the card value is 2-4 or an Ace. Otherwise, the midges are just a buzzing annoyance.

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ARRIVAL IN BRIDGWATER

At last the barge pulls into Bridgwater. West Bridgwater lies close to Gnatmarsh and seems at first impression to be the poorer half of the city—the buildings are less grand and more rundown than those on the east bank.

Both sides of the river are crowded with barges, busses, and smabyrdings. Great warehouses line the harbor side, each emblazoned with a merchant's mark on the large front doors. It doesn't take long to spot the stylized sun dragon head mentioned by your patron. It stands on the east bank. Merchants, laborers, hawkers, urchins, doxies, and customs officials crowd the wide street between the warehouses and the waterfront. Further back, you can make out the roofs of a few grand houses and temples.

Your captain hauls in the sail and steers the barge toward an empty berth. The crew immediately leaps ashore and tethers the barge.

"This is Bridgwater," he says with a sweep of his arms. "We'll be here for a few days taking care of business. If you're ready to leave when we are, we'll be glad to give you a lift back to Scathmoor."

INITIAL INVESTIGATIONS

Since the heroes are here to investigate a specific person, it makes sense they may wish to gather information on him quickly. A successful Streetwise roll and two hours spent asking questions reveals the whereabouts of the merchant's townhouse. They also discover he is an important citizen and has the ear of Baron Gallandros ap-Morgwen, Bridgwater's ruler. On a raise, the characters also learn he is frequently out of town. Unfortunately, no one they speak with knows whether or not he is currently at home.

THE DERELICT BARGE

The recently robbed barge mentioned by the other barge captain is moored on the western waterfront. Clearly emblazoned on the side is the owner's mark—a raised hand with the middle and ring finger folded down. Unless a hero happens to have a mercantile background there's no chance he has ever seen the symbol before. Merchants can make a Common Knowledge roll at –6 to recognize it as belonging to a minor merchant from Drakeport. A Streetwise roll made around the docks reveals the same information.

The barge has been checked over by the watch, but is still under guard. The lone sentry hasn't been given

any specific orders, so he's charging one gold scield to curious individuals who want to see the "bloodstained site of the mysterious disappearance."

Dry bloodstains on the deck are clearly visible. There are similar stains in the main cabin. A hero making a Notice roll at –2 discovers a partial footprint in the blood near the bow. The print is from a bare foot, similar in size to that of a child or engro, but appears flatter and wider than the footprint of any of the civilized races. There is not enough of an impression to identify what creature made it.

The captain who towed the barge here can be found at a nearby tavern. For the price of a mug of good ale (1 ss) he tells what little he knows.

"Aye, I towed her back. A captain warned me about the derelict and asked me to bring her here for the authorities to check over. She was wedged against the bank, her rudder tangled in reeds when we got to her. We gave her a quick check, but there was nothing aboard save a few rats and the usual garb—provisions, crew's personal items, blankets. Judging by your faces that news to you, eh? I guess the city sold them on to cover berthing fees.

"Anyway, there was no crew or cargo, just some bloodstains. We freed her by cutting loose the rudder and then brought her back here. Once the authorities give me the nod I'll be collecting the salvage money, heading south again, and staying there until these damned pirates have been brought to justice."

THE MERCHANT'S HOUSE

Oswald's townhouse is located in an affluent part of town. While the majority of Bridgwater's houses are single story buildings constructed of stone and timber, the manses of the rich and powerful citizens are two stories and built entirely of stone. The city's older sections retain a village feel, with detached buildings surrounded by small allotments. The newer parts, which include the upper class districts, were constructed to limit the buildings' footprint and prevent wild expansion. Hence, the street on which Oswald's house stands comprises terraced houses with small, enclosed rear gardens.

Terrain: The street is 4" wide. At night, a lantern hangs on either side of the door. Whenever he goes away on business, Oswald casts *lock*. (Because the spell stays active until the lock is opened, the spell is not Maintained.) The front door has Toughness 14 and Lockpicking rolls are made at –2. See the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* for rules on illumination.

Monsters: A detachment of guards stand duty outside the house day and night, whether their master is home or not. Their orders are to prevent intruders, not harass

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THE LAW

If a fight breaks out in a public area, the watch is quickly informed. A squad arrives 2d6 rounds after the skirmish begins. The watch officer demands everyone drop their weapons. Oswald's guards comply immediately, though they keep their shields raised in case the heroes aren't so compliant. If required, the watch engages the characters. A second watch patrol arrive 1d6 rounds after the first.

The officer in charge questions Oswald's men first, who give an accurate portrayal of events—the heroes tried to illegally gain entrance to the warehouse. A number of passersby corroborate their story. The characters are charged with public affray if no one was killed and fined 20 gold scields. Those who can't or won't pay are marched (or dragged if they need to be knocked senseless to get them to comply) to the nearest watch stationhouse, where they'll be spending the night unless the fine is paid. Anyone actually arrested, as opposed to merely fined, loses 2 Glory.

Should anyone have been killed, the charge is far more serious—murder. The characters are automatically arrested and hauled off to jail while the local magistrate is informed. Unless the characters wish to escape, in which case they'll have the authorities hunting them down throughout their time in Bridgwater (the GM should add at least one encounter with the watch to the adventure), they are brought in front of the magistrate in the morning and officially charged. They are remanded in custody for a week, after which the trial begins.

It's up to the GM how he wishes to handle the trial (assuming the characters hang around that long), but he shouldn't be lenient on the characters. They are coldblooded murderers and should face some form of justice for their unprovoked crimes. At best, mitigating circumstances might result in them being fined *wergild*. At worst, they'll be sentenced to death by hanging.

Escapees gain the Major Wanted Hindrance in Bridgwater and the Minor version elsewhere in the Crystalflow Confederacy. These are reduced one level after a month (so they won't be wanted outside Bridgwater after that time) and by another level after a further six months—Bridgwater has plenty of criminals and the authorities can't afford to waste resources hunting down the murderers of a few private guards.

🕒 **Watch Officer:** See page 25.

🕒 **City Watch (2 per hero):** See page 25.

visitors (who might be potential customers or clients settling debts). As such, the guards react only with mild curiosity if the characters openly approach the front door.

Adventurers knocking at the door receive no reply. The guards stare at them blankly. Only if they openly ask

do the guards inform the party no one is home. They know Oswald left this morning on business and won't be back for a few days, but they have no idea where he has gone.

🕒 **Guards (1 per hero):** See page 25.

🕒 **Watch Officer:** See page 25.

🕒 **City Watch (4 per hero):** See page 25.

Tactics: In the event of an attack the guards huddle together and use the Defend maneuver. The city watch is never far away, and the guards know they only need hold their own for a minute or two before help arrives.

Treasure: Aside from a few coins, one of the guards has a key to the front door. Should it be used, the *lock* spell on the door is negated. The door henceforth has Toughness 12 and Lockpicking rolls suffer no penalty. The guards are under orders not to unlock the door except in an emergency.

Continuation: The street is quieter than the waterfront or market districts, but there is still considerable traffic. Any assault on the guards is reported to the watch by a passing citizen. A double strength patrol (money talks) arrives quickly on the scene. See the sidebar **The Law** for more details.

BREAKING AND ENTERING

Unless the characters somehow manage to kill the guards without causing a ruckus, there is little chance they will be able to enter the house from the front. At the rear is a small garden enclosed by an 8' wall (the wall is for privacy, not security). Once in the garden, it is a short walk to the back door.

The back door is locked with a *lock* spell. It has Toughness 12 and Lockpicking rolls are made at -2. The windows are easily broken, but without precautions, such as covering the panes in a cloak to muffle the sound, those inside the house have a chance of hearing the sound. Make a Notice roll for each group of occupants, with a -2 penalty per room away from the window. Success means the occupants investigate.

When Oswald is away he sets his ferocious hounds loose in the house (he doesn't trust his minions). The dogs pad through the rooms at random for the exercise. Before the heroes enter the house, draw as many cards from the action deck as there are dogs. Compare the card value to the key below—the value indicates which rooms the dogs are in when the intruders break in. A Joker indicates the dog is in the same room as another canine (GM's choice). Since the shrine door is locked, it has no associated card value. Similarly, Oswald has no wish for the dogs to enter the larder or storage room, so these doors are kept closed (but are not locked).

The dogs are inactive sentries, but any sounds within the house quickly make them active. Once active, any obvious sounds that someone is in Oswald's manse cause the dogs to investigate. They are trained not to bark.

When Oswald goes away for long periods, he puts his two servants, a cook and a butler, up in a local inn. It's

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a little odd, but Oswald pays well and the servants don't begrudge him his eccentricities.

🐕 **Guard Dogs (1 per hero):** See page 25.

KEY

| Room # | Card | Function |
|--------|-------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | Entrance Hall |
| 2 | 3 | Waiting Room |
| 3 | 4 | Dining Room |
| 4 | 5 | Kitchen |
| 5 | — | Larder |
| 6 | 6 | Lounge |
| 7 | 7 | Study |
| 8 | 8 | Gallery |
| 9 | 9 | Guest Bedroom |
| 10 | 10 | Guest Bedroom |
| 11 | — | Shrine |
| 12 | Jack | Cook's Quarters |
| 13 | Queen | Butler's Quarters |
| 14 | — | Storage/Linen |
| 15 | King | Library |
| 16 | Ace | Master Bedroom |

LIBRARY

Oswald's library is impressive for a private collection, numbering almost 50 tomes plus 100 or so pamphlets and scrolls (none of which are magical). Most are on business matters, but there are several volumes on military strategy, politics, history, and geography. All are written in Classical Anari.

Treasure: A strongbox sealed with *lock* (Toughness 16, Lockpicking -4) contains a blank piece of parchment. This is actually a relic. The parchment contains the *speak language* power (d8 arcane skill), but only affects written words. When placed on a piece of writing, the magic automatically activates. The original words are then transposed onto the blank sheet in a language the user understands. To end the spell, the parchment need only have a hand wiped over it, erasing the current text.

Investigation rolls made in the library are +2 regarding business and +1 for the other subjects. One of the volumes is a +2 tome of lore concerning Knowledge (Crystalflow Confederacy).

SHRINE

Like many rich merchants, Oswald is a follower of Var. As such, he retains a small shrine for private worship. What isn't widely known is that he is actually a priest of Var.

Terrain: The door to this room is *locked* (Toughness 12, Lockpicking -2). The furnishings comprise a table adorned with a set of solid gold scales. Two leather-bound books sit on a small shelf.

Treasure: On one side of the scales is a single gold shield and on the other a lightweight pouch (empty). Carved around the base is a psalm from the holy text of

Var—"All men may profit in my grace" The entire object has a value of 300 gold scields.

The two tomes are ledgers. Like many priests, Oswald keeps a brief copy of all his mercantile dealing ready for his eventual death, so as to prove he faithfully followed Var's teachings in life.

One of the ledgers is an account of his charitable donations. It is written in Anari. Despite what folk say of him, he donates a lot of money to charity, though mostly anonymously. Too many open donations might give folk reason to assume he is a priest of the god of merchants, and he'd lose his advantage of using hidden magic in negotiations. Over the years, these donations amount to over 50,000 gold scields.

The other lists every business deal he has made in short format. Understanding the shorthand requires a Smarts roll at -2 and two hours of work. Success indicates Oswald is a very astute merchant, and a very rich one. It also reveals one important fact about a number of recent transactions. In recent months a lot of shipments have arrived by land. Coincidentally, these all occurred one to four days after a barge was robbed. It is not damning evidence, but it's enough to raise an eyebrow. Sadly, the ledgers do not detail the exact contents of any transaction.

STUDY

Oswald's study contains a large desk behind which is a plush armchair. Two uncomfortable looking chairs are in front of the desk. There is a small fireplace, which hasn't been lit for at least 24 hours (the ashes are cold), and an ornate engro-made rug lies on the floor. A shelf contains dozens of accounts ledgers. Unlike the ledger in the shrine, none make reference of any of the recent overland transactions.

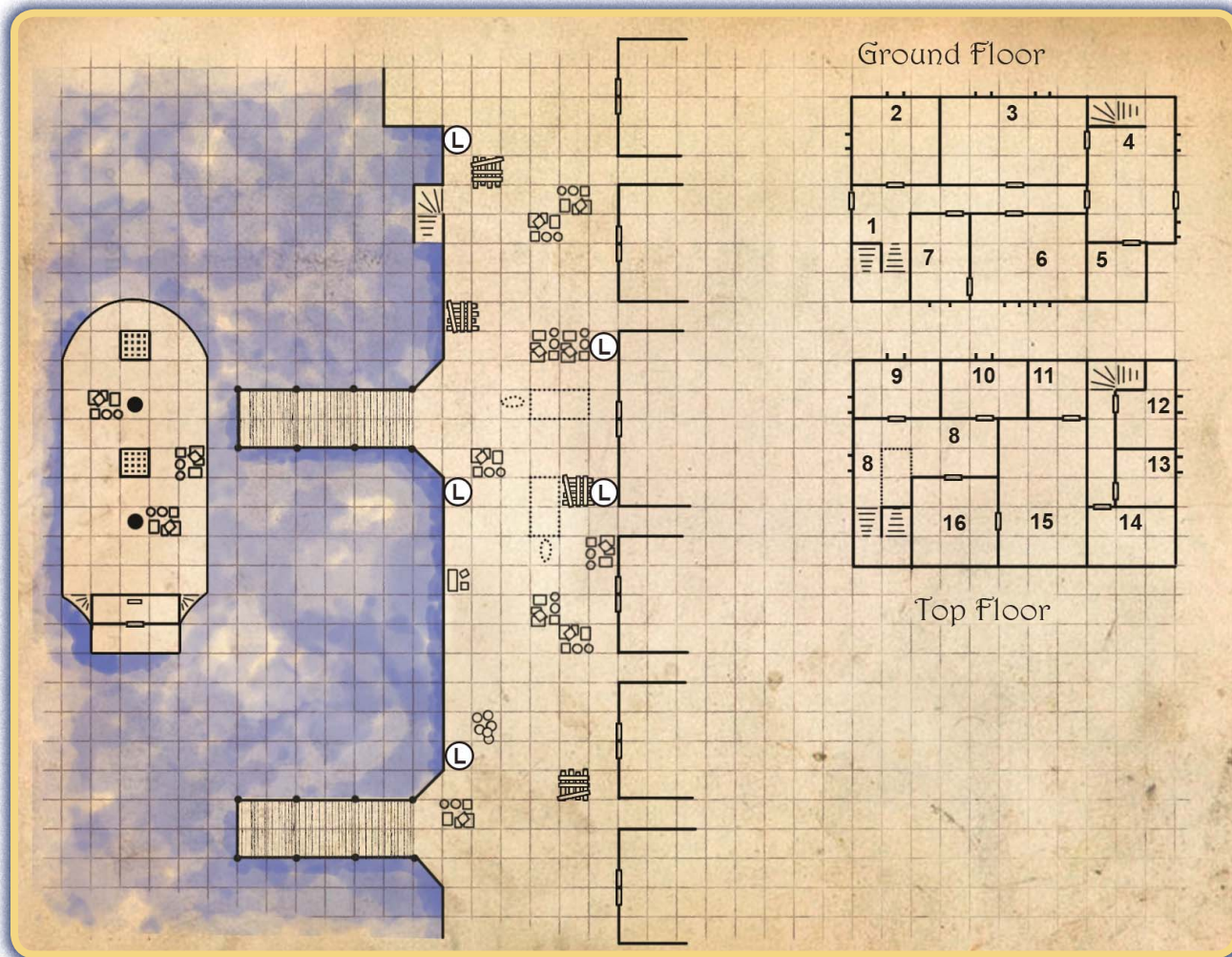
Treasure: The top paper is a letter written in strange pictograms. Translation requires a hero to speak Lesar-detongue or know *speak language*. Fortunately, Bridgewater has several scribal offices and temples which can help for a small (20 gold scields) donation. The letter gives a place and time for a meeting—the day after tomorrow at a spot some 30 miles down river. The missive makes mention of a shipment of arms and armor. It is unsigned.

OTHER ROOMS

The other rooms contain nothing of importance to the adventure. As such, no space is wasted describing them. The GM should add appropriate furnishings based on each room's function. For groups who value thievery, a total of 1d10 x 100 gold scields can be gained in stealing small objects, such as pieces of jewelry and pieces of art. Five times this can be made if the heroes really want to start stealing the furniture.

GM's will have noticed there is no mention of a strongbox full of Oswald's riches. The engro isn't stupid—he keeps his money at the well-guarded and magi-

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cally protected temple of Var. Any attempted break-in should result in the characters at best being captured and at worst being killed.

A WATCHFUL EYE

This scene occurs whether the party stakes out Oswald's house before or after dealing with him at the secret meeting. Parties who watch the house, whether before or after breaking in, are rewarded after four hours. A large-set man with close-cropped hair, tattoos up both his bare arms, and a scar across his face approaches the manse. He speaks briefly with the guards, who can be seen shaking their heads and shrugging. After a few more exchanges, the stranger departs, looking angry. Spellcasters invoking *wandering senses* at the appropriate time and who speak Trader overhear the conversation (see below).

Stranger: "Is Oswald in? I have a meeting with him."

Guard: "I'm afraid not, sir. He left in a hurry ear-

lier this morning. Won't be back for a few days, he said."

Stranger: "What? He knew we had a meeting."

Guard: "He never mentioned it to us, sir, but like I said, he left in a hurry. Probably had something to do with a letter he received last night. All very mysterious it was, sir."

Stranger: "I don't give a damn about any letter. Tell him to contact me the moment he gets back. I have an order that needs fulfilling before I can dispatch my cargo. Tell him it's urgent. I'm losing money every day having to feed them."

Guard: "Will do, sir!"

The guards don't know much of the man. They've seen him a few times before, but no names have been mentioned. Characters who enquire of the guards about the surly individual are told only he is a business partner of Oswald. Should the party mention any specifics of the

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conversation, such as the mysterious letter, the guards become suspicious—after all, the heroes weren't in earshot. Persistent questioners are threatened with the city watch. The guards will summon the watch if the party fails to get the message and move on.

The man is a slave trader. Oswald sells suitable captives purchased from the bufomi to the man in return for hard cash.

🗨 **Slaver:** See page 23.

FOLLOWING THE SLAVER

Following the man through the crowded streets is not easy. He takes several unnecessary turns, doubles back, stops off at shops and taverns, and always tries to move through the most crowded places. He is also an experienced slaver, and is always on the lookout for trouble.

Assuming the characters are after information and not a fight, run this scene using a variation of the Mass Battles rules. The slaver begins with eight tokens (equal to his Stealth die). The party must nominate a lead character. His Notice or Tracking die (hero's choice) represents how many tokens the party receives.

Terrain: The slaver knows the alleys and backstreets extremely well. The characters have a -1 penalty to their "Battle" roll.

Characters in Mass Battles: Instead of attack rolls, party members except the leader make a Notice or Tracking roll. It's assumed the characters are trying to avoid being detected, so no Stealth rolls are required. No damage is inflicted on the heroes, but the Battle modifiers still apply in the next phase. Alternately, spellcasters may make an arcane skill roll if they possess spells useful to tailing someone, like *detect*, *invisibility*, or *wandering senses*. The GM has the final word on whether or a not a spell is useful in this circumstance. The arcane roll must be made each round, even if the spell is Maintained.

Battle Rolls: Each round, the slaver makes a Stealth roll and the lead hero a Notice or Tracking roll. This replaces the usual Battle roll. Tokens are lost as normal.

Morale: No Morale rolls are made.

Outcome: If the slaver is "defeated," the party successfully follows him to his lair. A defeated party loses the trail in the crowds. In order to locate his house, the party must make a Streetwise roll at -2. Each attempt takes two hours (the time is only really important if they intend to visit a location at night or know about the secret meeting).

🗨 **Slaver:** See page 23.

THE SLAVER'S DEN

Through tailing the slaver or dealing with the local underworld, the heroes eventually track the man to a rundown, single story house in West Bridgewater's Old Quarter. The windows are boarded up. Listening reveals sounds of someone moving about, but nothing specific.

Terrain: The house comprises just a single room. Furnishings include a bed, a table, two chairs, a large rug,

and a fireplace (not lit). The interior measures 5" by 3". Concealed beneath the rug is a trapdoor. A sturdy bolt secures it in place.

Monsters: The only occupant is the slaver. Whenever the party enters, he is on his bed, awake and alert.

🗨 **Slaver:** See page 23.

Tactics: The slaver is a skilled combatant, but he knows when he is outnumbered. He attempts to close to melee and Sweep his foes aside. If given the opportunity, he bolts through the door and runs into the streets. He makes no attempt to call the watch, but instead flees. Run any subsequent pursuit using the Chase rules.

Continuation: A ladder leads from the trapdoor into the basement. Sitting shackled and gagged on the floor are five men. Once freed, they thank the party profusely. Questioning the prisoners is handled through possible questions posed by the party and the captives' answers, as detailed below.

Q: Who are you?

A: *"We're sailors, working the barges along the Crystalflow. Our barge was attacked a while back. I've lost track of time, but it can't be more than a few weeks in total."*

Q: Who attacked the barge?

A: *"Toad men, sir. All slimy with bulging eyes, they were. They came at us at night, out of the water. They outnumbered us three to one. We never stood a chance."*

Q: What did they do with you?

A: *"They made us empty the hold. When we were done they took us ashore and bound us. We marched into Gnatmarsh for maybe three days. Eventually we arrived at some sort of building. It was very old, covered in vegetation and crumbling. We were singled out, though I don't know why. The rest of us they threw into the mouth of this enormous statue of a toad. I've no idea what happened to them, but it can't have been good."*

"We were held outside for a few days before being dragged back through to the marsh again. We could see the lights of Bridgewater, so we knew we weren't far away. Then some men came. We're not really sure what happened after that, as we were blindfolded. We definitely moved to at least one other building before we came here, though. Somewhere near the docks—we could hear the sound of the traders outside."

Q: Could you lead us there again?

A: *"I'd be loathe to do so in person. I reckon I could describe the terrain easily enough, though. There were plenty of landmarks."*

Q: Did the slaver tell you anything?

A: *"Only that we were being sent east."*

The slaver, if taken alive, can also be made to talk. However, this requires an Intimidation roll opposed by his Spirit. Only one roll is allowed, though it can be made Cooperatively. With success, he admits he is a slave trader. The slaves he sells are sold on to other slavers and taken somewhere to the east, beyond the Thunor Range Mountains. This information could easily lead to an adventure of the GM's devising. Slaves are eventually

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sold to Regent Orol Drakestaff, *de facto* ruler of the barony of Blackstone (see the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* for more information). Only on a raise does the slaver incriminate Oswald, and even then his business relationship with the engro only began a few months ago.

THE MERCHANT'S WAREHOUSE

As mentioned earlier, the warehouse is on the waterfront. The only entrance is the double door at the front, which faces the busy street. At the back is a narrow alley, which sits between the warehouses and the rear of rundown houses.

THE WAREHOUSE BY DAY

The sun dragon-marked warehouse is the largest in the line. Its paint is fresh and the wood well cared for, an indication of pride if not wealth. A small group of men clad in scale mail and clutching shields and spears stands attentively outside the closed main doors.

Characters who make a Notice roll at -2 realize the warehouse is well guarded. In addition to the obvious guards, two smaller groups of unarmored men are also keeping a discreet eye on the premises, though they're trying to act casual.

Terrain: The crates and wagons in the street can be crossed as difficult ground. These also provide Cover (Armor +2). The warehouse doors are Toughness 18 (4) and padlocked. Picking the padlock requires a Lockpicking roll at -1 or brute force (Toughness 10).

The circles on the map represent the area of light shed by lanterns. They are not lit during the day and thus can be ignored.

Monsters: The guards have strict orders to deny entrance to anyone not associated with the company, and they know all the employees. They can't be tricked or persuaded into granting the characters access. Intimidation causes them to cower, but they still refuse to open the doors. Instead, they threaten to alert the city watch and have the characters arrested. Heroes who try to barge past the guards are quickly engaged in melee by the door watch and the other guards positioned around the docks.

M Guards (1 per hero): Treat as city watch (see page 25).

M Unarmored Guards (2 per hero): Treat as city watch (see page 25) but their only gear is a short sword each (Str+d6). This gives them Parry and Toughness 5.

Tactics: The warehouse guards don't want to kill anyone—they're paid to protect the warehouse, not take lives. To that end, they maneuver to block the warehouse

doors and use Defend. The other guards try to convince the characters to surrender. If that fails, they use the butt of their short swords to pummel the characters. Only if a guard is killed does either group employ lethal force.

Treasure: In the unlikely event the heroes manage to gain access, there is nothing amiss in the warehouse. All the goods, which include mundane items like pottery and textiles, furniture, barrels and crates of food stuffs, and such like, are marked with the merchant's symbol. A check of the small office (at the rear) locates a wad of cargo manifests, all signed and stamped as having passed through the city gates and with import duty paid in full.

A petty cash box in the office contains 24 gold scields, 159 silver scields, and an IOU for 12 gold scields from someone called Gerrick (a teamster). It can easily be forced (Toughness 8) or picked (Lockpicking at +1).

Continuation: Any assault on the guards is reported to the watch by a passing citizen. A watch patrol quickly arrives on the scene. See the sidebar **The Law** (page 6) for more details.

THE WAREHOUSE BY NIGHT

The following scene occurs on the first night the heroes visit the warehouse. Should they mess up in some manner, the scene is repeated every 1d4+4 days.

Flickering lanterns hang from poles along the street, casting a pale orange glow onto the cobbles and warehouse fronts. The sun dragon-marked warehouse is the largest in the line. Its paint is fresh and the wood well cared for, an indication of pride if not wealth. Outside, a group of men is busy loading crates marked with the same symbol as the door onto three wagons. Each man is lifting a single crate with relative ease. A squad of armed guards stands outside the warehouse doors, seemingly oblivious to the action taking place.

The guards have orders as above. If the heroes approach the teamsters, the guards move to intercept them, ordering them to be on their way or they'll call the watch. No city watch comes if a fight breaks out—they've been bribed to stay away from this district tonight. If the party elects to watch the men and discreetly follow them, proceed to **Follow Those Wagon** below.

Terrain: The crates and wagons in the street can be crossed as difficult ground. These also provide Cover (Armor +2). The warehouse doors are Toughness 18 (4) and padlocked. Picking the padlock requires a Lockpicking roll at -1 or brute force (Toughness 10).

Squares marked L on the map indicate areas illuminated by the street lanterns. Beside the guards are two normal lanterns. All have a standard 4" radius. A lantern hangs from each wagon. These are lit only when the crates are loaded. Within illuminated areas visibility is Dim (-1), a result of cheap oil and the lanterns hanging high up. At a distance up to double the radius, lighting is Dark (-2). Beyond this it is Pitch Black (-4).

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Monsters: The four warehouse guards are active sentries. Distracted by their work, the teamsters are inactive sentries.

📄 **Guards (1 per hero):** Treat as city watch (see page 25).

📄 **Teamsters (2 per hero):** Treat as city watch (see page 25) but with leather armor (+1) and short swords (Str+d6). This gives them Parry 5 and Toughness 6 (1).

Tactics: The guards and teamsters know the watch has been bribed to keep away, so there will be reinforcements. To that end, the guards and teamsters attack with lethal force. The guards use Gang Up attacks out of training, the teamsters out of desperation and common sense. Should the party flee and leave anyone behind, the guards deliver a Finishing Move and chuck the corpse into the Crystalflow (after robbing the victim). Within a few minutes the body will have floated beyond the city limits.

Treasure: There are two dozen crates in total spread between three wagons. None are nailed shut. Each is completely empty aside from a handful of nails. On each wagon is a small hammer.

Continuation: Should a fight ensue and the heroes win, they are free to break into the warehouse. All the details you need are in the preceding section.

The party can question survivors. The guards don't know much of interest. They have standing orders to forbid entry to the warehouse to anyone not on the company payroll. The teamsters come by every now and then at night and cart off crates. The guards don't ask questions about their business—they're well paid and curiosity is not a trait their master appreciates.

The teamsters, on the other hand, know a lot more information. Given the characters have just butchered a number of their comrades they are only too willing to talk if given assurances they won't be murdered. Every now and then they receive orders to come to the warehouse at night, collect a pile of empty crates, and transport them out of the western gate.

Ten miles out of town, just inside Gnatmarsh, is a small, flat island. Here they always find other crates and official paperwork. These crates have a variety of different merchant marks. No one is ever guarding the crates, so the teamsters have no idea who drops them off. The contents of these crates are transferred to the empty crates and driven back into the city, whereupon they are inspected at the gate by customs agents. As far as the teamsters are concerned, Oswald is involved in some sort of tax scam, though they're not exactly sure how it works.

FOLLOW THOSE WAGONS

Less belligerent groups may decide to keep a discreet eye on the proceedings and follow the wagons. Once loaded, the wagons head across the Bridge of Scales, toward the western gate. The teamsters don't expect to be followed, so they count as inactive sentries. Have the party make a Cooperative Stealth roll. On a failure, the

ENTERING THE WAREHOUSE

As is obvious in the text, the characters seemingly can't gain access to the warehouse without a fight. With only a single point of entrance, the party will have to resort to brawn or brains if their curiosity is to be satisfied.

The muscle method is covered in the main adventure text. Intelligent groups may devise a plan to lure the guards away, such as by Taunting them or launching a brief attack with only part of their number and then fleeing. With the doors unguarded, the other characters can then try to gain entry.

During the day, any attempt to break in might be reported to the watch. Draw a card. If it's black, the watch arrives to investigate within 2d6 minutes. At night, the watch doesn't make an appearance.

teamsters hear a noise or perhaps catch a glint of lantern light on steel and become active sentries. Any further attempts to follow them require an opposed Stealth roll (made individually) against their Notice.

The driver of the lead wagon tosses the watch a small pouch (a bribe) and they are let out into the countryside. Parties who were detected trailing the wagons are reported to the watch officer. He refuses to grant them exit from the city until dawn. Threats to have him arrested for corruption are met with an arrest for public disorder, which results in a 10 gold scield fine and a night in jail. Spending the night in jail means the heroes have blown their one chance to follow the wagons.

The alternative is to accept the officer's word, go away, and climb the city walls. This requires a Climbing roll at -2. Parties with rope can lower it down to give others an easier climb.

Undetected parties are refused exit from the city until dawn unless they pay a bribe (10 gold scields per hero). The watch officer never openly asks for a bribe, of course, but he drops subtle hints ("Care to make a donation to the watch officer's benevolent fund?"). Once the bribe is paid, the heroes can leave the city.

Outside the gates it is much easier to follow the wagons without being detected. Although the lighting is Pitch Black (-4), the wagons have lanterns, making them clearly visible from further back than the lanterns clearly illuminate. So long as the party makes sensible attempts at being silent, no Stealth rolls are required.

After eight miles (two hours march) the wagons enter Gnatmarsh. They stick to a narrow levee for a further two miles (another hour), and then stop at a small, flat island. With the teamsters distracted, the party can easily sneak to the edge of the island without the need for Stealth rolls.

Already on the island are a number of crates. Two teamsters begin to load the wagons while the others break open the crates already present. They

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then begin transferring the contents to the crates they brought with them.

If the party doesn't interfere, the teamsters complete their transferring of contents, nail down the loaded crates, and load them back on the wagon. They then head back to Bridgwater. Assuming the characters keep tailing the wagons, the convoy reaches the gates just after dawn. The wagons enter the city, and the teamsters hand over cargo manifests. After being checked and the paperwork signed, the wagons drive to Oswald's warehouse, where the crates are unloaded.

Terrain: The island measures 12" across and is roughly circular. The levee is 2" wide and attaches to the eastern end of the island. Everything surrounding the island is swamp and is treated as difficult ground.

The wagons (3" long and 2" wide for game purposes) can be crossed as difficult ground. The crates are placed close together and fill a total of six 1" squares. Movement through these areas is difficult ground. Each wagon has a lantern on the front, which illuminates a 4" radius. See the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* for further information on lighting.

Monsters: The teamsters won't fight to protect the cargo, but they will fight for their lives, believing the characters to be bandits or pirates. Once half their number is slain, the remainder must make a Group Spirit roll. With success, they keep fighting. On a failure they drop their weapons and surrender. Should three-quarters be slain, make an individual Spirit roll at -2 for the survivors. A lone survivor rolls at -4.

🛡️ **Teamsters (2 per hero):** Treat as city watch (see page 25) but with leather armor (+1) and short swords (Str+d6). This gives them Parry 5 and Toughness 6 (1).

Treasure: The contents of the crates are varied but mundane—pottery, fruit, vegetables, low quality beer, and so on. Nothing is of any great value. Each of the crates on the island has the same merchant mark—a raised hand with the middle and ring finger folded down.

Continuation: Should the teamsters be attacked and one captured, the information he passes on is exactly as detailed in the previous section.

ANOTHER STAKE OUT?

Should the party wish to stake out the island, they endure 1d4+4 days of deprivation, leeches, snakes, and gnat swarms before anything happens. Roll in advance but don't tell the party how long they must wait. Instead, tell them a day has passed and asked what they are doing. Repeat as often as necessary. For each day spent in the marsh the heroes must make a Vigor roll. With failure, they gain a level of Fatigue from various bites, minor infections, and deprivations. This can lead to Exhaustion, but never Incapacitation or Death.

Eventually, one misty dawn, something interesting occurs. A small group of bufom warriors leading two giant toads (to which are strapped several crates) arrives from the direction of the deeper Gnatmarsh.

Left alone, they smash up the old crates (assuming they're still here and have not been used for firewood) and unload the ones the toads are carrying. They then quickly depart into the marsh. Attempts to follow them prove futile—the party quickly loses them in the mire thanks to the creatures' ability to hop over quicksand and other obstacles that slow the heroes.

Terrain: If a fight occurs on the island, the terrain is as the previous section. The mist is thin. It counts as Dim (-1) lighting only at distances over 12". Otherwise, visibility is unimpaired.

🛡️ **Bufomi Warriors (2 per hero):** See page 24.

🛡️ **Giant Toad (1 per 2 heroes):** See page 25.

Tactics: The giant toads advance no closer than 3". They use their sticky tongues to grapple and engulf prey. Half the warriors begin by each hopping to within range and letting loose their Croak special ability. The remainder engages in combat after their comrades' croaking, leaping into the fray on the first round if circumstances allow.

The croakers use their leaping to reposition themselves so as to keep using their Croak while avoiding stunning their compatriots or the toads. Remember, they can't move and croak, so it's likely they croak every other round. For each warrior in melee who falls, a croaking bufom takes his place.

Continuation: Any prisoners taken after an attack can be interrogated only if the party speaks Lesardetongue (the obscure language of bufomi, lizardmen, and gatormen) or has access to *Speak Language*. The captive knows only a few basic facts and has little comprehension of what is actually going on.

"We rob floating trees. Swim out and climb onto them. We take sacrifices and those," he says, pointing to the crates. "We bring them here and leave. We get stabbing sticks and thick hides in return for some sacrifices. Swap them with human."

Asked who they work for, the prisoner replies, "Kraakroa, the shaman." The warriors don't know Oswald's name and all "humans" look alike to them (that is, ugly).

🌐 THE MEETING 🌐

No matter how quickly the heroes set off, they reach the meeting place after dark. Whether they came by land or river depends on the individual party's travel arrangements. Regardless, they begin 24" from the nearest NPC.

Moored against the east bank is a barge bearing Oswald's merchant mark. Flickering lanterns on the barge and the shore highlight a number of armed guards. The outlines of at least two carts are visible in the shadows. Faint slapping can be heard on the water, but the heavy cloud has con-

PIRATES OF THE CRYSTALFLOW

cealed the stars and moon, making it too dark to see the cause.

Oswald and the bufomi's leader, Kraakroa, are on the barge. Oswald's men are guarding the shore, while the bufom warriors are on the river. Neither group of warriors enjoys the company of the other, and this arrangement keeps them a good distance apart.

SOFTLY, SOFTLY

Violence is not the only option open to the characters. Although the guards and bufomi are active sentries, their cordon is not without gaps. A stealthy character could slip between the guards or quietly swim past the bufomi and eavesdrop on what is occurring in the barge. More experienced parties might have access to *invisibility* or *teleport*, though there are more guards present and few gaps in the perimeter.

If a hero peers through a porthole, read aloud the text below. Text within quotation marks is only understandable if the hero speaks Lesardetongue or is subject to a *speak language* spell. (Note that it is not possible to eavesdrop once the alarm is raised.)

Seated within the cramped cabin are two figures. The first is a male engro dressed in fine apparel. His hair is showing signs of graying, but he appears hale and hearty. The second creature is similar size, but most definitely not engro. Its pale, mottled green skin, bulbous eyes, flicking tongue, and wide, toothless grin are characteristic of an amphibian.

"Everything is going to plan," the engro assures his guest. "Soon your tribe will be rich beyond imagination."

The toad man's tongue flicks up and licks on of its eyeballs. "Excellent news, Master Oswald," it drawls. "When can I expect my next delivery of arms and armor? My power is growing, and other tribes are seeking alliances now."

Oswald nods. "That is good news, indeed." You're not sure he sounds entirely convinced. "It's waiting outside in the crates. I have included a special gift for your best warriors—steel long swords of the finest quality."

The toad creature bounces up and down excitedly. "Yes, yes," it croaks excitedly. "You do us proud. You have kept your end of the bargain and more. And what of the slaves we gave you?"

"They are sold, as promised. Due to my need to see you, the agent I have arranged has not

yet made final contact. I expect him to attend me on my return."

"Good," grins the toad being. "You please me, Master Oswald. Come, let us drink to our success." A webbed hand snatches a crystal goblet from a nearby table.

CHARGE!

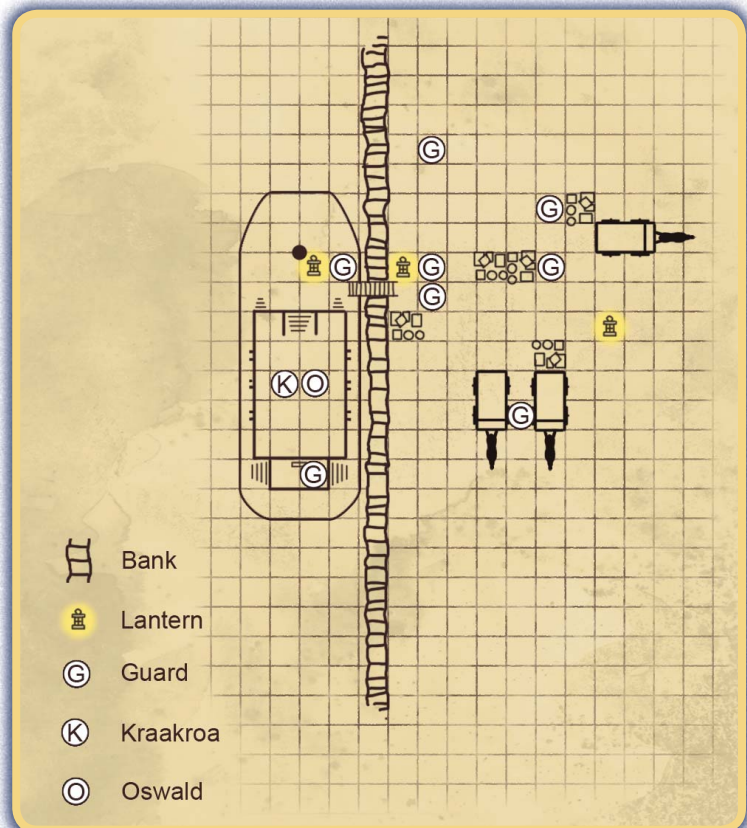
Terrain: The actual riverbank (highlighted as a slope on the map) is steep and slippery. Movement along it is treated as difficult ground. Any hero running along the bank who rolls a 1 on his running die slips and falls prone. Unless he makes an Agility roll at -2 (a free action), he slides into the cold, dark water, whereupon he is immediately Shaken by the chill. Heroes in the water must make a Climbing roll to clamber up the bank. The other option is to board the barge.

Squares containing crates can be traversed as difficult ground, as can those occupied by carts.

The squares marked "L" each contain a lantern attached to a short pole. These shed light in a 4" radius. See the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* for details. The ambient lighting is Pitch Black (-4).

The Barge: Movement across a space fully occupied by the gangplank is difficult ground.

The barge comprises the forward deck, the cabin, and



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an elevated wheelhouse. The mast provides Light Cover (–1, +4 Armor) where appropriate, but does not impede movement. Moving past the cabin involves a character having to shuffle sideways and is difficult ground. The cabin protrudes just three feet above the deck (the other half is below decks). The wheelhouse floor is level with the cabin roof.

Monsters: The guards on the river bank are Oswald's men. Positions are shown for eight guards. For larger parties, do not position extra troops further out from the barge than those already indicated. The bufom warriors begin in the water, 8" from the shore and out of range of the light sources. All count as active sentries.

Ⓜ **Oswald:** See page 23.

Ⓜ **Kraakroa:** See page 23.

Ⓜ **Guards (2 per hero):** See page 25.

Ⓜ **Bufom Warriors (2 per hero):** See page 24.

Tactics: If a fight breaks out on the shore, the barge's occupants automatically hear the ruckus. On the second round, Kraakroa leaps off the barge and into the river, whereupon he swims to the west bank. Fearful the good times could come to an end unless he does something, he orders his warriors to aid Oswald's men. Kraakroa then dives beneath the water until he needs air.

The bufomi are in coracles (small, round boats). Two warriors occupy each boat. The craft moves 2" per round if one warrior paddles and 4" if both paddle. Once they reach the shore, they leap out (using their Leaping ability). If there are characters within range, they immediately try to engage them in melee. Otherwise, half the bufomi spend the next round Croaking, while the remainder leap into melee.

Oswald's guards react with lethal force. Those with crossbows have their spears stuck in the ground beside them. On the first round, they fire their crossbows at the nearest enemy. In the second round they drop their crossbows and snatch up their spears (an action). They then rush into melee.

Oswald joins in the fighting, but he makes no damaging attacks. He remains in the barge on the first round and downs his potion of *quickness*. On the next round, he moves to the deck, crouches behind the barge's railing (gaining Heavy Cover; –4) and casts *bladebreaker* at the closest hero within range of the spell. Unless threatened directly, he remains here, casting *confusion* on any enemy spellcasters in range and *bladebreaker* against warriors.

In melee, he sticks to the Defend maneuver and shouts at his attackers, in Trader, that he is on their side. Once wounded, he quaffs his *healing* potion.

Should the bufom warriors be slain, Oswald (if still alive) immediately calls for his remaining men to drop their weapons. See **Oswald's Lies** for what occurs next.

Treasure: Oswald carries four alchemical devices—a potion of *healing* (heals one wound), a potion of *quickness* (cast with a raise), and two potions of *speaking language*.

OSWALD'S LIES

Whether he's taken alive or orders his men to surrender, Oswald has a contingency plan designed to rid him of the bufomi and have him cast as an innocent pawn. Naturally, he can reveal nothing if slain unless *grave speak* is cast on his remains.

The engro smiles triumphantly. "Sirs, a thousand thanks for your assistance in ridding me of these toad men. I am Oswald, a merchant of Bridgewater, and my tale is one of forced compliance in a terrible plot."

"Several months ago my nephew was kidnapped from his barge. At first I thought it was pirates, but then I received a letter asking me to come to Gnatmarsh. My nephew, you see, had convinced his captors, these foul creatures, that I was rich. Keeping him alive would be of great benefit to their tribe."

"Alas, that proved only too true. The creature's leader demanded I supply them with knowledge of which barges would have the most crew, for it seems they practice human sacrifice. He also insisted I gift them with weapons and armor. If I complied, my nephew would be kept safe, albeit as their prisoner. Should I fail them, he would be offered to their dark god. I kept my end of the bargain, though I never gave away the details of valuable cargoes or issued more than leather vests and spears."

"Your brave and noble deeds have saved me but, I fear, endangered my nephew, for the leader of the toad men was on this barge. He leapt overboard, cowardly creature that he is. I know where their lair is located, for they took me there to witness their barbaric rituals. I will pay you 3,000 gold scields for the safe rescue of my nephew and a further 2,000 gold scields if you enact due punishment on those terrible creatures."

Oswald is serious about the money, although he doesn't have a kidnapped nephew to rescue. Whether or not the characters believe him is up to them—the evidence could be viewed in favor or against his story. Should the party start quoting evidence against Oswald, the GM should turn it around in any logical way to incriminate the bufomi as the main villains. For instance, if Kraakroa is overheard to say, "Let us drink to our success," Oswald claims that meant the success of the bufomi's plans. Similarly, he insists that giving the bufomi long swords was part of a ploy to try and buy his nephew's freedom.

If pressed about the slaver, Oswald admits that was another part of the bufomi's demand. He used the money to purchase the arms and armaments they requested.

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He is, naturally, extremely remorseful about his part in recent affairs.

Questioned about the ledgers in his shrine, he says that as a priest he is expected to record every business transaction, whether it is made willingly or not. To back up his claim of being a victim not an instigator, he makes mentions that his dealings are not recorded in his company accounts. This could just as easily be construed as trying to hide something, of course, but that's for the heroes to deduce.

INTO GNATMARSH

Two methods of reaching the bufomi lair, an ancient temple deep in Gnatmarsh, are presented above—through rescuing the captives held by the slaver or by questioning Oswald. In the event the party fails to acquire the information, their only option is blind luck.

The lair lies three days' journey into the mire, a treacherous morass of quicksand, thick reeds, and slimy water. Without exact directions the journey takes 1d4+2 days.

For each day, draw a card from the action deck. A black face card indicates an encounter with one of the denizens. Consult the table below. Shuffle the deck after each draw. No maps are provided for the random encounters. The GM should assume dry land is at a premium and that most of the terrain is difficult ground.

| Card | Encounter |
|-------|---|
| Jack | Giant Toad (page 25). The toad is hidden in dense undergrowth. The characters must roll to avoid Surprise. <i>Alternate: If the party is more experienced and you have the Hellfrost Bestiary, swap this for a marsh troll or marsh dragon.</i> |
| Queen | Bufomi Patrol. The party stumbles across a squad of 1d4+2 bufom warriors. If the card is a Club, the bufomi ambush the party—the heroes must roll to avoid Surprise. On a Spade, the characters spot the patrol far enough ahead to either avoid them or conduct an ambush. In the latter case, the heroes must succeed in a Stealth roll (can be made Cooperatively) to position themselves where they cannot be seen. With success, the bufomi stumble into the trap and must roll for Surprise. On a failure, the bufomi are allowed a Group Notice roll to spot the characters at a distance of 10". |
| King | Quicksand. See below. If the card is a Club, a bufomi patrol (see above) arrives at the start of the second round. They begin 12+2d6" from the nearest hero. Since this is a tactical encounter, assume the quicksand fills a Large Burst Template. |
| Ace | Hostile Life. Leeches, mosquitoes, or gnats plague the party. Every hero must make a |

Vigor roll or gain a level of Fatigue (maximum Exhausted). This is removed after 24 hours.

QUICKSAND

Allow the lead character a Notice roll at -2 to detect the hidden danger. Failure means he plunges in to his waist (neck for Small characters) and begins sinking.

Those stuck in the hazard sink completely in three rounds (one round for Small characters) unless extracted. They can make a Strength roll (-4) to pull themselves out. A success stops them sinking any further, and a raise pulls them out. On a critical failure, the character is sucked under and immediately begins drowning. Heroes aiding a sinking comrade need to make a Strength roll to drag the unfortunate being from the quicksand. On a critical failure they are pulled in and begin sinking, as well.

Once a character is under the surface he cannot extricate himself and must be dragged out by allies on the surface. In order to find the character, those searching for him must first make a Notice (-2) roll. Extricating a submerged character requires a Strength (-2) roll.

TEMPLE OF THE TOAD GOD

In the current era, the bufomi are a technologically backward race on par with man's cave-dwelling ancestors. But they were not always this way. Like the gator-men, the bufomi were once an advanced civilization. Never as progressive or dominant as the gator-men, they nonetheless left their mark on the ancient world in the form of great temples and cities carved of stone. Many of these have crumbled to dust, but here and there the remnants are largely intact.

One such site is a temple to K'kroakaa, the sole deity of the bufomi. It stands deep within Gnatmarsh, on a small island in a sea of black water and floating detritus. Fallen into ruin long before even the elves developed civilization, the temple nevertheless remains an important part of the local bufomi's religious observances.

REINFORCEMENTS

Although the bufomi aren't elite warriors by anyone's standards, they have strength of numbers on their side, not to mention three giant toads and a champion. As such, the party may be forced to retreat, heal up, and then launch another raid.

Once the intruders have "been repelled," Kraakroa sends word to neighboring tribes that he needs additional warriors for a large raid. When the reinforcements arrive, he promptly puts them to service guarding the lair. For each four days after an attack (the time it takes for a natural healing roll), the bufomi recoup 25% of their warrior losses (rounded up). They replace only one shaman every eight days. Their numbers never exceed those in the text.

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THE UPPER TEMPLE

Standing atop a small island amid the brackish, stinking water and clinging reeds is a long, stone structure. Age has taken its toll on the stones, for several sections of wall have collapsed. Giant carvings, well-weathered, faded, and heavily stained, are carved into the brickwork. They represent toad men in various heroic poses. To the south stand three smaller buildings, each with pitched roof. In the west, flanking a cobbled pathway, which leads into the mire, stand five pairs of plinths. A bloated stone toad, its mouth open wide and tongue hanging to its feet, stands atop each one.

Terrain: The terrain surrounding the island is marsh. It counts as difficult ground.

The front half of the temple (everything west of the solid stone block in the center) has no roof—it was built as an open-air structure. The rear half has a flat, stone roof. External buildings have a pitched roof of cracked and missing slate tiles. The temple walls are 24' high, while those of the outer buildings are 12' tall.

Treat areas of rubble or reeds on the island as difficult ground. The plinths along the western approach are impassable terrain. Squares indicated as muddy terrain are difficult ground. In addition, anyone who runs through these areas and rolls a 1 on his running die slips and falls. This applies even to Devotees of Freo.

Monsters: Wary of marsh trolls, crocodiles, lizardmen, and just about every other predator in the marsh, the bufomi maintain a constant watch in and around the temple. At any one time there are three patrols, each led by a shaman. Divide the bufomi into three equal groups. One patrol is assigned to protect the inner precinct, another the southern end of the island, and the third the approach along the old ceremonial pathway.

☞ **Bufom Shaman (1 per 4 warriors):** See page 24.

☞ **Bufom Warriors (3 per hero):** See page 24.

Tactics: Each patrol follows similar tactics. Unless caught by Surprise and quickly silenced, one of the warriors begins by Croaking. This not only has a chance of stunning intruders, but also summons the other patrols. The other warriors leap into combat. Depending on the range to the enemy, shamans cast either *entangle* or *knockdown* repeatedly. They always try to avoid the warriors, but won't take a multi action penalty in order to move to a more favorable position.



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If other shamans have been alerted to the skirmish, the first casts *summon beast* once he sees the intruders. He summons the swarm as close to the characters as his position allows. The second invokes *summon herald*, which, despite its power, only brings forth a regular giant toad (K'kroakaa is an ancient but feeble deity, and has no true heralds).

1) AVENUE OF TOADS

Flanking the cracked remains of a paved road are two rows of plinths. Time and weather have taken their toll, for many of the plinths are missing large chunks of masonry. Atop each is the damaged image of a monstrous toad. At some point in history the water level of Gnatmarsh must have risen, for of the five pairs of statues, the two furthest from the temple are now partly submerged.

The statues represent K'kroakaa. It requires a Knowledge (Religion) roll at -6 to know this, however. Weathered pictograms on each plinth bare the same inscription in Lesardetongue—"The weak are food for the Bloated One."

2) GIANT TOAD STABLES

Each of these three chambers contains piles of dung. Some of it appears to be quite old, but there is fresher spoor scattered around.

Bufomi make use of giant toads both as guardians and as mounts. This particular tribe is no different, except it does not maintain a permanent stable. When giant toads are required for service, the bufomi summon them with horns. While they are being used, they are stabled in this building.

A Survival roll at -2 is required to identify the spoor. Characters whose background indicates knowledge of the marshes of Rassilon suffer no modifier. Success allows the investigator to correctly name the species. With a raise, he knows the last spoor was dropped only a few days ago.

3) TRAPDOOR

Faded pictograms are barely visible through the moss clinging to the walls. A section of the northeast corner has collapsed in antiquity, allowing thoroughfare to the outside. In the opposite corner, weeds and creepers are spreading across the floor. In the northwest floor is a wooden trapdoor.

The trapdoor is not locked or trapped. Opening it grants entrance to the lower level.

4) OFFERING PLACE

At the far end of this long, narrow chamber is a raised dais. A set of stone steps leads up into the gaping maw of a monstrous, bloated toad with a distended belly.

The statue serves as both altar and sacrificial area. Inside the maw is a slick, curving chute. The end of the chute is in the ceiling of area 4 on the lower level. Sacrifices are thrown into the maw (still alive) in a ceremonial feeding of K'kroakaa. Those who survive the impact don't last long.

While the chute is wide enough for any except an Obese hero to crawl into without much difficulty, it requires an Agility roll at -2 to avoid sliding to the bottom. With success, the hero braces himself against the walls. He can shimmy down the chute in a single round, but this consumes his entire Pace (and he cannot run). Being attached to an anchored rope prevents a curious hero from falling.

LOWER LEVEL

Although the bufomi make use of the temple in their alien rites, the tribe actually lives in a network of tunnels and chambers excavated in the dank soil below the stone edifice. Constant seepage means the headquarters is permanently damp and reeks of mold and decay.

COMMON FEATURES

Doors, except where noted, are wooden and have Toughness 10. Unless otherwise stated all doors are unlocked. Locked doors are barred, and thus Lockpicking is of no use. Doors barred on the same side as the heroes require two actions to open—one to remove the bar and one to open the door.

Corridors are crudely excavated and are supported by wooden beams placed every inch to prevent collapse. Each support beam has Toughness 10. Destroying a support beam causes a cave in. The collapse affects the square containing the support beam and all adjacent squares. Those trapped beneath suffer 3d6 damage. Clearing a 1" square takes an hour and requires a minimum of two people (one digging and one shoring the roof and walls). Chambers are lined in wood to prevent their collapse.

Ceilings are 12 feet high. Although bufomi are small creatures, they need the height for their leaps and to allow the giant toads they use as guardians to move around comfortably.

Only chambers containing sentient beings are illuminated. They are lit by reed torches. Assume each room holds one torch per 4" of wall. If between one-third and one-half the total number of torches are extinguished, the lighting in the room drops to Dim (-1). Removing between a half and all but one makes the lighting condi-

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tions Dark (-2). Extinguishing all the torches leaves the room Pitch Black (-4).

Obstacles that fill part of a square, such as a table or small piles of rubble, impede movement. Treat movement through these squares as difficult ground. Where applicable, obstacles provide Cover.

1) SLIPPERY STAIRS

A flight of crudely worked wooden steps descend into the darkness below. A constant trickle of water, mud, and slime seeps down the steps.

The stairs are very slippery. They do not count as difficult ground, but any hero moving at faster than half Pace (rounded down) must make an Agility roll (-2 if running) or slip and tumble to the bottom, whereupon he is Shaken.

2) GUARD ROOM

If the bufomi hear non-bufomi voices, they quietly move into the eastern corridor, so as to ambush any intruders. Similarly, they plan an ambush if they see artificial lights above—the guards keep a mental track

of whether any of their raiding or hunting parties have left the headquarters. Otherwise they are not particularly alert, there having been no trouble in recent weeks. Heroes who sneak down the stairs (requires a Stealth roll) can catch the guards by Surprise.

Terrain: During daylight hours this chamber is not lit.

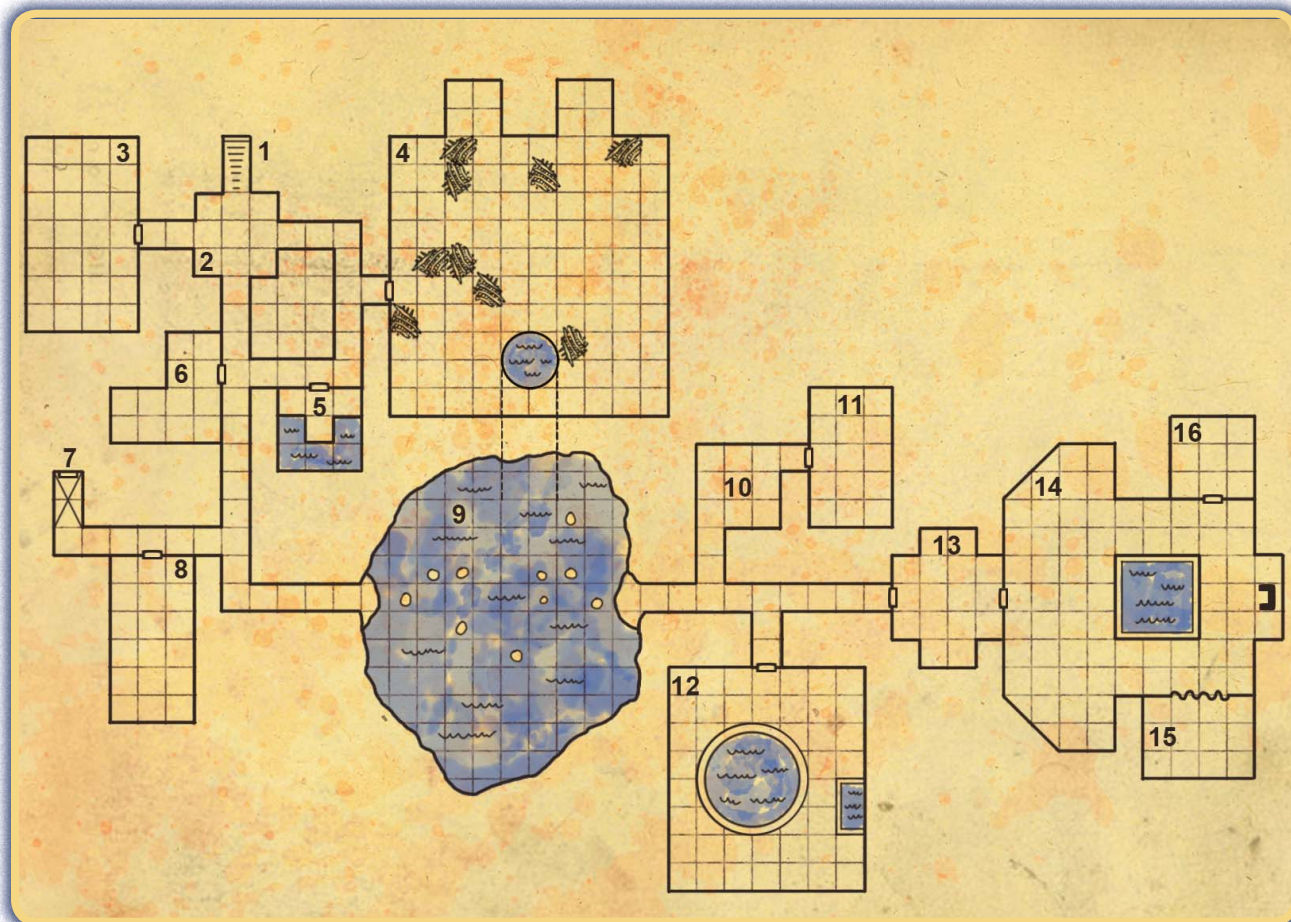
Monsters: Four warriors are on duty here at all times. The guards change every four hours, but the room is never left undefended.

Ⓜ **Bufom Warriors (1 per hero):** See page 24.

Tactics: Once combat begins, the nearest warrior to the party uses his Croak special ability to try and disorient as many intruders as possible. His comrades then leap over his head brandishing their spears. If hard pressed by competent aggressors, one tries to withdraw down the southern corridor (using the Defend maneuver if necessary) to the barracks in area 6 and summon reinforcements.

3) TREASURY

The stench of rotting vegetables and fruits which wafts from the room makes you gag. Stacked against the north walls are a dozen crates, while against the south stand five large barrels.



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Not being entirely trustful of Oswald initially, Kraak-roa kept back a small amount from each shipment his warriors plundered. Since bufomi don't eat vegetables and fruit, and because the latest shipments have all been sent straight to the apparently trustworthy Oswald, no one has been in here for several weeks. The soft fruits and vegetables have gone rotten. Four of the barrels contain ale brewed in neighboring Midmark, while the fifth is expensive Magocracy brandy. The barrel weighs 50 pounds but is worth 1,000 gold scields.

4) CHAMBER OF SACRIFICES

The door to this room is reinforced and barred from the outside. It has Toughness 16.

Piles of bones and partially digested scraps of clothing litter the floor. A round pool, maybe a dozen feet across, is the only feature. Set into the north wall are two large alcoves.

Victims fed to the statue of K'kroakraa end up here. Sometimes they are devoured by the occupants immediately. Other times they may have several hours in which to pound futilely on the door and contemplate their fate.

Terrain: Hatched areas on the maps are piles of bones. Treat them as difficult ground. The pool is 12' deep. At the bottom is a passage leading to area 9. The toads use this to reach the water, in which they bathe regularly to avoid their skin drying. The chute entrance is in the ceiling, 12 feet above the ground.

Monsters: Two giant toads live in this room. However, they are not always present, as they spend an equal amount of time in area 9. When the characters enter this room, draw two cards from the action deck, one for each toad. A red card indicates a toad is present in this chamber. If the room is empty, draw cards every hour to see if the toads make an appearance. Of course, if the party has already encountered the toads and killed them, then you should adjust the card count appropriately.

Ⓜ **Giant Toads (varies):** See page 25.

Tactics: The toads' preferred tactic is to stay away from their screaming meal and use their tongues to grapple it. Prey that moves adjacent is bitten, instead. If a toad is Shaken, it must make a Spirit roll. On a failure, it tries to flee through the pool. It stays submerged until it recovers from being Shaken.

Treasure: Some of the bones can be identified as belonging to engros. Several sets are new—definitely victims within the last few weeks.

5) SNACK POOL

An irregularly shaped pool of water dominates the southern half of this small room. The surface is continually in motion, and broken by small splashes and ripples.

Bufomi prefer their food live and they're not fussy eaters. Lacking teeth, they just swallow whatever fits in the mouth whole. The pool is filled with small lizards, frogs, and toads, and serves as a snack bar. Despite the similarities between the race and mundane amphibians, bufomi have the same approach to eating frogs and toads as humans do to other animals.

6) BARRACKS

Bundles of black reeds, many of them coated with thin slime, lie across the entire floor. Small bones are scattered among the matting. A number of toad men are crammed into the room. Some are asleep, but the others are already reaching for their weapons.

Except for the leader of a tribe, personal space is not a bufom trait. When the warriors in the two guardrooms finish their shift, those in here take their place. Those relieved of duty sleep on the matting their comrades just vacated.

Terrain: Filthy, mucus-covered reed matting lines the floor. Although rather icky, it does not impede movement. The bones are those of small lizards and amphibians.

Monsters: Half the guards are awake and alert, with their armor donned and weapons close to hand (but not in their hands). The remainder is either asleep or dozing. They still wear their armor, though.

Ⓜ **Bufomi Warriors (2 per hero):** See page 24.

Tactics: If the warriors have been alerted to an attack they are ready for action the second round after the alarm. Half their number head straight to the guardroom, while the others take the passage past the snack pool and sacrificial chamber, so as to attack the enemy on two fronts.

Otherwise, the active guards grab their weapons on the first round (an action) and engage in melee. Those who were slumbering must spend the first round waking. Depending on the situation, they then Croak or reach for their weapons.

7) TRAP

The door is a fake door and activates a trap if pushed. Despite being constructed millennia ago, the mechanism works as well today as it did when it was new. Part of this is because the bufomi regularly test it by using it as a garbage chute (with the proper safety precautions to avoid unnecessary deaths).

Trap: The mechanism is completely concealed behind the door, and thus cannot be detected. When the door is pushed, it activates a rod, which in turn sets a flywheel in motion. This causes the floor to swing down from the right, dropping any unfortunate victims into a 40' deep pit (4d6 damage). A character in the trapped space furthest from the door is allowed an Agility roll at -2 to leap back and avoid the fall. The one nearest the door has no

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hope of avoiding his fate. The trapdoor closes after two rounds. Ingenious players should be able to come up with a way to rescue trapped comrades.

The pit is a natural cavern fed by a small stream. At the GM's discretion, this could lead to a series of subterranean caverns and tunnels in which lies further adventure. There is no way to reach the ceiling under the trapdoor short of using *fly* or *wall walker*.

8) EMPTY BARRACKS

Aside from being larger, this chamber is similar to area 6.

The bufomi who share this room were all on guard duty upstairs. Rather than grant the shamans their own quarters, an act of generosity which might tempt them to want more, Kraakroa has ordered they share sleeping space with the warriors. Should his power ever wane, he would be quick to disperse them to prevent them from fomenting open rebellion.

9) STEPPING STONES

The walls of this roughly circular chamber have never been worked. Dark water flecked with clumps of weeds laps at the narrow ledge on which you stand. The far side is nearly 60 feet away. A series of small, flat stones protrudes from the still surface. While they appear stable enough, the slime covering the surface looks slippery.

This natural pool is fed by a subterranean stream. The channel is only a few inches wide and the water is slow moving, both of which result in an exceptionally weak current and no surface disturbance. As well as serving as a source of drinking water, the bufomi regularly bathe here to keep their skin moist.

Terrain: The water is 6' deep. Characters wading through it (assuming they can still breathe) move at one-quarter their Pace (round down) and cannot run. Disturbing the water automatically alerts the giant toads and toad swarm in the depths.

The stepping-stones, which the bufomi use to cross the water, are two feet across and covered in slime. Any character standing on one who is Shaken or injured must make an Agility roll or fall into the water. Characters cannot get a run up once on the stones. Hence, heroes who wish to leap 2" between stones must make a Strength roll. Failure means the adventurer lands in the water.

Monsters: Two giant toads frequently visit this room. However, they are not always present, as they spend an equal amount of time in area 4. When the characters enter this room, draw two cards from the action deck, one for each toad. A red card indicates a toad is present in this chamber. If the room is empty, draw cards every hour to see if the toads make an appearance. Of course, if the party have already encountered the toads

and killed them, then you should adjust the card count appropriately.

The giant toads, if present, are seated with only their eyes poking out. One sits above the tunnel through to area 4, while the other sits to the south of the easternmost stepping-stone. Detecting them requires a Notice roll at -2 as an action.

Lurking within the water is a toad swarm—the young of the giant toads. Though only the size of regular amphibians at this stage in their life, they are no less vicious than their parents. The swarm begins in the southern end of the chamber.

Ⓜ **Giant Toads (varies):** See page 25.

Ⓜ **Toad Swarm (varies):** See page 25.

Tactics: The toad swarm remains inactive until someone enters the water, at which point they move to attack. Note that the swarm can run while in the water. Area effect attacks cast from the surface cause half damage (round down) against the submerged swarm.

Unlike the swarm, the giant toads can target intruders on the stepping-stones. The toads wait until a hero reaches the halfway point before attacking with their long tongues. Against heroes in the water they can only use their bite attack.

10) GUARDROOM

Any shouts or splashes in area 9 echo through to this chamber, immediately warning the guards that someone is approaching. Since bufomi don't generally speak any language other than their own, the sentries quickly work out whether the noises are made by a clumsy warrior falling in the water or intruders.

Monsters: The warriors are stationed here to protect the valuable females in area 11. Knowing that failure to perform their duty would result in their being sacrificed to their deity, they are prepared to sell their lives dearly.

Ⓜ **Bufom Warriors (1 per hero):** See page 24.

Tactics: If alerted, the soldiers file into the corridor. When the party draws level, the characters must roll to avoid Surprise. The closest warrior Croaks at intruders once they are detected, but only once. The guards quickly form a defensive line. Warriors in the front rank use the Defend maneuver to prevent their line being overrun, while those behind them use Wild Attacks with their long spears.

11) HAREM

Fresh, brown reeds are neatly scattered on the floor, and small piles of bones are stacked carefully in one corner. A group of unarmed bufomi sit on the reeds, staring wide-mouthed as you enter.

Genetic mutations are extremely uncommon in bufomi, and hence a tribe doesn't require many females. However, possession of females not only increases the potential number of tadpoles each mating season, but it

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is also a sign of status. Right now, Kraakroa's tribe only has a few females left. However, neighboring tribes, keen to appease the high priest and his armored warriors, have made approaches at supplying more breeding stock.

Monsters: Female bufomi are less aggressive than the males, and fight only in self-defense. The tribe treats its females extremely well, supplying them with fresh reeds each day and regular, fresh meals.

📄 **Bufom Females (1 per hero):** Treat as warriors (see page 24) but with Fighting d4 (Parry 4), no gear, and without the Croak special ability. Their only attack is to slap foes, which inflicts Strength damage.

Tactics: Unless attacked, the females merely huddle in a corner and stare at intruders. Once assaulted, they react fiercely, slapping at their foes with reckless abandon (they use Wild Attacks).

12) SPAWNING POOL

In the center of this dank chamber is a circular pool. A low stone wall, only a foot high, runs around the edge. Crude runic symbols are carved into the limestone blocks. Toward the rear of the chamber is a smaller, square pool with a similar lip. A number of bufomi, all armed with long spears, are present. As one, their bulging eyes swivel toward you.

The symbols are Lesardespeech pictograms, the written language of bufomi, gatomen, and lizardmen. They represent phrases such as "sacred waters," "place of creation," and "future hope."

Bufomi lack all concept of familial ties. Their loyalty lies not with blood relatives, but with the shamans who rule their culture. Whereas male bufomi are divided into two castes—shamans and warriors—females are outside the caste system. Their sole purpose is the procreation of their race, and because of this they are deeply respected (though granted no authority over males).

During mating season, female bufomi lay hundreds of eggs in special spawning pools. The males of the tribe then do their bit to fertilize them. The eggs develop into tadpoles, which hatch in the same pool. Around 95% of the tadpoles hatched each year are devoured by their kin. The bufomi see this as natural selection and make no attempts to interfere in the process. Those who survive to grow into immature bufomi are carefully studied by the shamans of the tribe. Depending on the traits they exhibit, the infants are caste as shamans or warriors, and receive appropriate training. Bufomi society is harsh—infants who fail to make the grade are not demoted to a lower caste, but are instead sacrificed.

The second, smaller pool contains live frogs and toads. Bufomi feed these to their growing young.

Terrain: The two pools are four feet deep. Wading through them is difficult ground. They are also extremely slimy. Any hero who runs through a pool and rolls a 1 on his running die slips and falls.

Only area effect weapons are effective should the heroes wish to cleanse the spawning pool of its tadpoles. Collectively, the contents of each pool have Toughness 7. A single pint of oil poured into a pool inflicts 1d6 damage. Should multiple pints be poured at the same time, add the damage together (so two pints causes 2d6 damage, and so on).

Monsters: The spawning pools are the home of the next generation of tribe members and are well guarded. At any one time there will be one or two shamans and a cluster of warriors. The warriors are spaced around the edge of the chamber, while the shamans are adjacent to one of the pools. Viewing their duty as sacred, the warriors are prepared to lay down their lives to protect the current clutch of tadpoles.

📄 **Bufom Shaman (1 per 2 heroes):** See page 24. These shamans have no *summon herald* spell.

📄 **Bufom Warrior (2 per hero):** See page 24.

Tactics: The warriors share the same action card. The shamans should receive separate cards.

The first shaman begins by casting *entangle* on the heroes, aiming to affect as many as possible without endangering any warriors already in melee. He then leaps into melee.

The second uses *knockdown* with the same restriction. Once this is cast, he casts *beast friend* on the larder pool. He has a -1 penalty, as he is trying to call forth a Medium Burst Template-sized toad swarm. Only one swarm can be summoned from the pool.

The two warriors nearest the party use their Croak special ability, taking no other actions in the first round. Those further away leap into combat with their crude spears. Bufomi know they aren't the strongest or most martial race, and so prefer to Gang Up on opponents, targeting those they consider the greatest threat first. Typically this is whoever wears the heaviest armor, but they know spellcasters can wield destructive powers. Any mage or cleric casting a destructive spell, such as *blast* or *bolt*, is considered a serious threat and is duly pounced upon.

13) CHAMPION OF THE TRIBE

Shamans in bufomi society are, in theory, the top of the social ladder. While no warrior would deign to overthrow one of his own volition, every junior shaman is looking to increase his personal power. Coups are typically instigated with K'kroakraa's "blessing." The would-be usurper need only highlight a tribe's misfortune and point to the current ruler to begin a rapid cascade toward violence.

Although Kraakroa is currently very popular, he knows it wouldn't take much for his rivals to turn on him. To that end, the high priest has a fanatically loyal bodyguard in his service. Thoroughly indoctrinated, the champion would fall on his spear without hesitation if ordered.

Monsters: A lone bufomi, Kraakroa's bodyguard and the tribe's champion, sits in the western corner of the southern alcove. He can't be seen from the western door. He alone decides who gets to see the high priest. Day or

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night, the champion is on duty—he's a very light sleeper, and counts as an active sentry even when dozing. He places the coin by the door to alert him to intruders.

Ⓜ **Bufom Champion:** See page 24.

Tactics: Given chance, the champion begins by Croaking. This not only has a chance of halting the attackers' advance, but it also alerts the occupants of room 14 that trouble is coming. The warriors in the throne room then move to aid him at the start of the next round.

If his opponents have already closed to melee by the time he reacts, he forgoes Croaking in favor of inflicting damage. Against a single foe he makes just a single attack. When faced with multiple opponents he uses Frenzy, dividing his attacks in a bid to cripple as many intruders as possible. No matter how many wounds he takes he will not flee—the longer he can hold up intruders, the more prepared his master will be to deal with them should he fall.

14) THE THRONE ROOM

The door swings open into a large, stone-lined chamber. Once it must have been a grand place, with crisp pictograms and finely detailed carvings of shamans lording it over the warriors. Time, however, cares little for artistic value, and the glory days are now long since distant memories. A square pool, the water level with the floor, sits in the center of the room. At the far end of the hall is a stone throne, carved to resemble a giant toad.

This chamber has been the seat of the tribe's power since time immemorial. Countless shamans have sat on the throne over the millennia, but until recently all ruled over a dwindling tribe. For the first time in centuries, other tribes are now visiting to pay homage and seek alliances. As well as being his audience chamber, the throne room is the last line of defense against intruders.

Terrain: The pool, which is used for bathing, is three feet deep. The water is flush with the floor. Wading through the water is treated as difficult ground.

The throne is made of stone and can be used as Cover (Armor +8). Moving through the square it occupies is difficult terrain. Carved to resemble the god K'kroakraa, the ruler actually sits inside the mouth. This is a constant reminder that not only does he serve because his deity allows, but also of his fate should he fail his people.

Monsters: Kraakroa is seated on the throne. The warriors stationed here are not part of the standard pool. Rather, they are kept separated at all times in order to ensure they are not swayed to act against the high priest. They sleep in the throne room. Half their number flanks the door, while the remainder stands beside the throne. The high priest's pet, a giant toad, begins in area 15. A small number of females are frolicking in the pool.

Ⓜ **Kraakroa:** See page 23.

Ⓜ **Giant Toad (1):** See page 25.

Ⓜ **Bufomi Warriors (1 per hero):** See page 24.

Ⓜ **Bufomi Females (1 per 2 heroes):** See page 24.

Tactics: If alerted to danger by his champion's Croaking, or the sounds of battle in the antechamber, the occupants have time to prepare. The warriors rush toward area 13 to aid the champion. The females rush to Kraakroa's private chambers.

Kraakroa spends the first round calling his pet giant toad and moving to hide behind his throne. Lacking any defensive spells, such as *armor*, the high priest waits until any attackers enter the room. He then invokes *stun* while simultaneously ordering his toad to attack. Next round he launches *entangle* in a Medium Burst Template. Given the giant toad's Strength, he isn't worried about catching it in the area of effect as it can quickly escape. On subsequent rounds he fires off three 2d6 damage *bolts* from his position of relative safety.

If given no time to react, the high priest calls to his toad, casts *entangle*, and moves behind the throne on the first round. His tactics are then as above. The warriors nearest the door immediately engage in melee. Those nearer the throne leap into combat.

When the high priest takes two wounds, he runs to his private chamber. Once inside he bars the door (Toughness 14) and heads to his potions (see area 16). He quaffs the potion of *healing* first. Next round, he invokes *wall walking* and climbs onto the ceiling. He then drops the *obscure* potion near the door. Should his foes enter, he knocks back his *speed* device and tries to flee to the marsh.

15) TOAD'S LAIR

Kraakroa's pet has been with him since it was a tadpole. One prisoner from each barge raided is reserved for the creature as a special treat. The high priest also feeds it warriors or shamans who fail him. Several small piles of bones dot the floor, but none impede movement.

16) KRAAKROA'S CHAMBER

A makeshift wooden cot lined with thick, clean reeds stands in the northeast corner. At the foot of the bed is a small, wooden chest. A rickety table formed from two logs and a moldy plank act as a table, while a shorter, wider log serves as a stool. A stack of dried frogs lies on the tables, along with two dozen clay jars.

As ruler of the tribe, Kraakroa is entitled to a private chamber. The jars contain berries which along with the frogs provide emergency rations (and a handy snack) should the temple be assaulted.

Treasure: In a small, unlocked chest is a potion of *healing* (cures one wound), a flask of green gas (*obscure*), and a mushroom which is a *speed* alchemical device. Also inside the chest is the priest's private fortune—827 gold scields in assorted small gems.

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AFTERMATH

If the party accepted Oswald's commission to rescue his non-existent nephew, they obviously haven't found him. However, if they return any of the engro bones from the temple, Oswald, being the quick thinker, reacts with remorse over his "nephew's remains," identifying them by some small detail, such as the shape of the skull or an old fracture. He pays half the reward as token thanks and the full amount he owes them for defeating the bufomi.

To further prove his innocence, he hands over *all* the stolen cargo still in his warehouse. It amounts to 15,000 gs worth. He won't reimburse the merchants for the other cargo, claiming again that he had no choice and that all the proceeds went into equipping the bufomi with armor and weapons.

If handed over to the authorities, Oswald pleads the same case he put before the heroes. He is not charged with any crime and is in fact pitied for being forced into acting so dishonorably. Naturally, the crafty merchant puts on a public display of mourning, and makes several large donations as an act of contrition for his part in the whole affair.

Whether his story is believed or not, Oswald promptly abandons his piratical scheme. It quickly becomes apparent the threat to shipping is over. The heroes' patron duly pays them on their return to Scathmoor.

As for Oswald, parties who believed his fictitious tale will come to regret their charitable act. Oswald is extremely vengeful and blames the characters for foiling his plan. Although the party doesn't know it, each member now has the Major Enemy (Oswald of Bridgwater) Hindrance. The engro never acts in person against them, of course. He uses assassins hired through a chain of middlemen and untraceable, dead letter drops.

BESTIARY



OSWALD

Oswald (engros don't use surnames) was born and raised in Bridgwater, but he wasn't always a rich merchant. His father ran a small market stall, but Oswald had bigger ideas. He arranged for several competitors to go out of business, which in turn profited his father. Similar schemes saw the engro's wealth increase, as well as Oswald's reputation for hard-nosed business. Success followed success, and acquisition of competition followed hostile takeover. When his father died of disease, Oswald inherited a thriving mercantile empire.

Thoroughly greedy and ruthless, Oswald jumped at the chance to join the Gray League, a shadowy organization of merchants seeking complete trade domination of Rassilon (he made an ideal candidate). Since then his

fortunes have waxed considerably. His latest scheme isn't about money, but about expansion of his empire and the accumulation of personal power—wealth will follow in due course. Oswald is also a priest of Var.

Oswald's Noble Edge represents his power and position within society, not a noble title. Within the confines of Bridgwater Oswald is widely known and greatly respected—he does not suffer Outsider penalties. Beyond the city limits he has zero Charisma.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Boating d6, Faith d8, Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d8, Persuasion d10, Riding d8, Stealth d6, Streetwise d10, Taunt d8

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7 (2)

Hindrances: Cautious, Greedy (Major), Mean, Outsider, Small, Vengeful (Major)

Edges: Alchemy, Arcane Background (Miracles), Charismatic, Concentration, Command, Connections (Gray League, merchants), Focus, Luck, Noble, Sneaky, Spirited, Very Rich

Gear: Chain vest (+2; torso only; weighs 10 lbs), short sword (Str+d6)

Alchemical Devices: Four alchemical devices (see page 14)

Powers: *Bladebreaker* (weapon snaps), *charismatic aura*, *confusion* (target acts drunk), *detect/conceal* (hears whispered voices), *lock/unlock* (conjures a magical key), *speak language*



SLAVER

A cruel and violent man, the burly Saxa slave trader goes by many names. Currently his alias is Harald Arisunu. He lacks compassion toward those he buys and sells, treating his wares little better than animals. In his eyes, the strong rule the weak. That goes for personal interactions as well as governmental systems. His slaves were weak, and thus deserve everything they get in life.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Stealth d8, Streetwise d8

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (1)

Hindrances: Greedy (Minor), Mean, Vengeful (Minor)

Edges: Brawny, Combat Reflexes, Sweep

Gear: Leather vest (+1), mace (Str+d6), whip (Str+d4, Reach 1, can Disarm and grapple at Reach)



KRAAKROA

Self-appointed high priest of his tribe, Kraakroa has hailed his bargain with the engro merchant as a way to advance the tribe. Sentient sacrifices are regularly offered to his god, and the warriors are armed with proper weapons, not the usual crude spears the bufomi manufacture. Although highly intelligent, he has no idea the tribe has been set up for a fall. Perhaps the deal is too good to be

HELLFROST ADVENTURE: #04

true, but Kraakroa has been temporarily blinded by the rewards and his subsequent rise in popularity.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d8, Faith d10, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Stealth d8, Swimming d10

Pace: 5; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (1)

Hindrances: Arrogant, Obese, Vengeful (Major)

Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Combat Reflexes, Command, Concentration, Level Headed, Tough as Nails

Gear: Leather armor (+1), small shield (+1 Parry), spiked mace (Str+d6+1)

Special Abilities:

- * **Croak:** If a bufom takes no other actions in a round, including moving, it can emit a deafening croak. Place the thin end of a Cone Template in front of the bufom. All creatures within the Template must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken.
- * **Powers:** Kraakroa knows the following spells: *beast friend* (amphibians only), *bolt* (small, biting frogs), *boost/lower trait* (Stealth and Swimming), *entangle* (long, sticky tongue), *knockdown* (croak), *leaping*, *stun* (victims are covered in slime), *summon beast* (amphibians only), *summon herald* (a giant toad), *wall walker* (sticky feet)
- * **Rotating Eyes:** The eyes of a bufom sit on top of their head, and can swivel to see behind them. They reduce Gang-Up bonuses against them by one.
- * **Semi-Aquatic:** Bufomi can hold their breath for 5 minutes.
- * **Size -1:** Bufomi stand 4' tall.

BUFOM



CHAMPION

Whereas most bufomi are small, the champion is a tall, muscled member of the species. His primary diet comprises young bufomi who fail to meet the grade for their chosen caste and the flesh of sacrifices.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (1)

Hindrances: Overconfident

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Command, Frenzy

Gear: Leather vest (+1; torso only), long spear (Str+d6, +1 Parry, Reach 1, 2 hands, see below)

Special Abilities:

- * **Bound:** A bufom can leap 1d6+2" in a straight line to attack with +2 to its Fighting roll and +2 to damage.
- * **Croak:** If a bufom takes no other actions in a round, including moving, it can emit a deafening croak. Place the thin end of a Cone Template in front of the bufom. All creatures within the Template must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken.

* **Rotating Eyes:** The eyes of a bufom sit on top of their head, and can swivel to see behind them. They reduce Gang-Up bonuses against them by one.

* **Semi-Aquatic:** Bufomi can hold their breath for 5 minutes.

* **Size +1:** The champion is a hulking brute.

SHAMAN

Shamans are the leaders of bufom society and worship K'kroakaa, the Bloated One, whose form is that of a monstrous toad with an immensely long tongue. The shamans' signature spell is *leaping*.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d6, Faith d8, Fighting d4, Guts d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5 (1)

Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles)

Gear: Leather vest (+1; torso only), long spear (Str+d6, +1 Parry, Reach 1, 2 hands, see below)

Special Abilities:

- * **Croak:** If a bufom takes no other actions in a round, including moving, it can emit a deafening croak. Place the thin end of a Cone Template in front of the bufom. All creatures within the Template must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken.
- * **Powers:** Shamans know the following spells: *beast friend* (amphibians only), *boost/lower trait* (Stealth and Swimming), *entangle* (long, sticky tongue), *knockdown* (croak), *leaping*, *summon herald* (a giant toad).
- * **Rotating Eyes:** The eyes of a bufom sit on top of their head, and can swivel to see behind them. They reduce Gang-Up bonuses against them by one.
- * **Semi-Aquatic:** Bufomi can hold their breath for 5 minutes.
- * **Size -1:** Bufomi stand 4' tall.

WARRIOR

The warriors aren't particularly skilled or resilient, but they do have long spears. They allow those in the second rank to make melee attacks, but don't count toward Gang Up bonuses. This is a standard part of the warriors' tactics, and is not repeated in individual encounters.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Guts d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5 (1)

Gear: Leather vest (+1; torso only), long spear (Str+d6, +1 Parry, Reach 1, 2 hands, see below)

Special Abilities:

- * **Bound:** A bufom can leap 1d6+2" in a straight line to attack with +2 to its Fighting roll and +2 to damage.
- * **Croak:** If a bufom takes no other actions in a round, including moving, it can emit a deafening croak. Place the thin end of a Cone Template in front of the bu-

PIRATES OF THE CRYSTALFLOW

fom. All creatures within the Template must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken.

- * **Rotating Eyes:** The eyes of a bufom sit on top of their head, and can swivel to see behind them. They reduce Gang-Up bonuses against them by one.
- * **Semi-Aquatic:** Bufomi can hold their breath for 5 minutes.
- * **Size -1:** Bufomi stand 4' tall.

GUARD DOG

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d10, Stealth d8, Tracking d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 4

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Str+d4.
- * **Fleet Footed:** Guard dogs roll a d10 when running instead of a d6.
- * **Go for the Throat:** Guard dogs are trained to go for an opponent's soft spots. With a raise on its attack roll, it hits the target's most weakly armored location.
- * **Size -1:** Guard dogs are relatively small.

TOAD, GIANT

These monstrous, bloated amphibians live in marshes, hibernating during the long winter months. Bufomi make use of them as guards in the same way other races use dogs.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d8, Stealth d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 10

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Str+d6.
- * **Engulf:** Giant toads can swallow prey as large as Size +1 whole. While engulfed, the target is at -4 to all Trait rolls and damage. He suffers 2d6 damage per round from powerful digestive juices. (Armor offers no protection, except through the *armor* spell.)
- * **Large:** Attackers get +2 to attack rolls against the toad, due to its size.
- * **Size +4:** Giant toads weigh over 2,000 pounds.
- * **Tongue:** Reach 3. The tongue is coated in sticky saliva. If the toad scores a success on its Fighting roll it has grappled its prey. Unless the foe can escape before the toad's next action, it draws him into its mouth and the victim is Engulfed. On a raise, the victim is grappled and Engulfed in the same action.

TOAD, SWARM

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d12, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Notice d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7

Special Abilities:

- * **Bite:** Swarms inflict hundreds of tiny bites every round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing 2d4 damage to everyone in the template. Damage is applied to the least armored location.
- * **Mindless:** Unaffected by Tests of Will, Tricks, or arcane powers like *puppet*.
- * **Swarm:** Parry +2. Because the swarm is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area-effect weapons work normally, and a character can stomp to inflict his damage in Strength each round. Jumping in water does not foil the swarm.

CITY WATCH

These are average city guardsmen. They are competent and brave, but not suicidal.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d4

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (2)

Hindrances: Loyal

Edges: —

Gear: Scale hauberk (+2), pot helm (+3), medium shield (+1 Parry), short spear (Str+d6, Reach 1). 50% are equipped with crossbows (Range: 15/30/60, Damage 2d6, AP 2)



WATCH CAPTAIN

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d10, Guts d8, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Riding d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d4

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 9; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Hindrances: Loyal

Edges: Block, Combat Reflexes, Command, Frenzy

Gear: Chain hauberk (+2), pot helm (+3), medium shield (+1 Parry), long sword (Str+d8), dagger (Str+d4)

CITIZEN

Individuals the GM wants to expand into more fleshed out characters can have higher Traits or a few Edges and Hindrances. Don't forget to roll on the Ally Personalities table as well.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Guts d4, Knowledge (one Craft) d6, Notice d6, Throwing d4

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5/6; **Toughness:** 5/6(1)

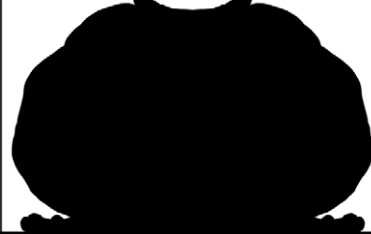
Hindrances: —

Edges: —

Languages: Anari, Saxa, Trader

Gear: Dagger (Str+d4)

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|-----------------------|---|---|---|------------------------|---|---|---|------------------------|
|  |  |  | Guard Dog |  |  |  | Bufom Spearman |  |  |  | Harald Arisunu, Slayer |
|  |  |  | Guard Dog |  |  |  | Oswald, Engro Merchant |  |  |  | Teamster |
|  |  |  | Bufom Female |  |  |  | Citizen |  |  |  | Teamster |
|  |  |  | Bufom Female |  |  |  | Citizen |  |  |  | Warehouse Guard |
|  |  |  | Bufom Shaman |  |  |  | Citizen |  |  |  | Warehouse Guard |
|  |  |  | Kraakos, Bufom Shaman |  |  |  | Citizen |  |  |  | City Watch Captain |
|  |  |  | Bufom Champion |  |  |  | Merchant Guard |  |  |  | City Watchman |
|  |  |  | Bufom Spearman |  |  |  | Merchant Guard |  |  |  | City Watchman |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|------------|
|  |  |  | Giant Toad |
|  |  |  | Giant Toad |
|  |  |  | Giant Toad |
|  |  |  | Giant Toad |
|  |  |  | Giant Toad |
|  |  |  | Giant Toad |

Giant Toad Swarm Template



Large Burst Template

Small Burst Templates



Medium Burst Template



PIRATES, PLUNDER & ADVENTURE IN THE ICY WATERS OF THE CRYSTALFLOW!

The Crystalflow River is the lifeblood of the Crystalflow Confederacy. Every day hundreds of ships and barges sail its turbulent waters, buying and selling cargoes along its length. But trade is slowing and the sailors are scared.

Several ships have been found devoid of crew and stripped bare of their valuable cargoes. Rumors are rife, but almost everyone points to pirates as the cause of the troubles.

The heroes are hired by a local merchant to investigate the situation. Their port of call is Bridgwater, a bustling merchant town at the northern end of the trade route. Only by careful investigation and strength of arms can the heroes hope to put an end to the pirates of the Crystalflow!

Pirates of the Crystalflow is the fourth adventure in the series of great exploits for the Hellfrost setting especially designed for the award winning *Savage Worlds* ruleset.



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