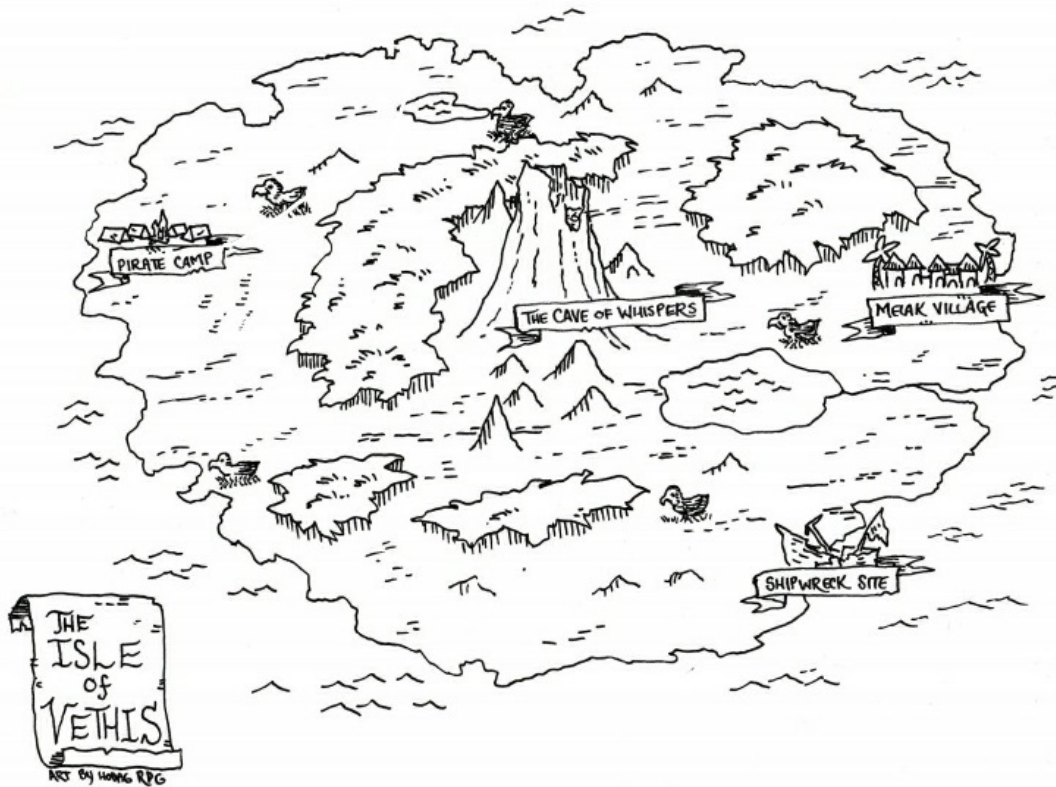


"The Pirates of Vethis"

by Dominic Moore

An Introductory adventure for 1st level characters



This is an introductory module for 3-5 1st level characters using the Worlds Without Number ruleset. The module is intended for two purposes: first, to bring a group of PCs together to start a campaign and second, to introduce the player and the GM to the mechanics of the Worlds Without Number game. To that end, this short introductory adventure will most likely feature combat, skill checks, and opportunities for both roleplaying and clever problem-solving. This will help players get a feel for the game.

It can also be played as a one-shot to "test the waters" of the WWN rules.

The Pirates of Vethis: An Introductory Adventure for Worlds Without Number

The purpose of this adventure, much like “Free Rain: An Introductory Adventure for Stars Without Number,” is to teach the basic systems of the game and create an interesting starting point for a future campaign. Unlike that adventure, this one is intended to be played over several sessions, and can serve as the first arc of an ongoing series of adventures.

While this is called an “Introductory Adventure” and deliberately attempts to teach the game’s systems, priority is given to systems that are new to this game or relatively uncommon in other Old School Revival (OSR) games and/or other popular RPGs that players may be familiar with. It is assumed that the Gamemaster (GM) has some knowledge of how basic combat in a classic table-top RPG is performed. The module will not walk you through every attack roll with a twenty-sided die, but will address the initiative system, skill checks, morale and instinct checks, etc.

At the end of this module, the players will likely have access to a small sailing ship that will give the party some mobility and allow them to set their own course (both literally and metaphorically) for future adventures of their own choosing. But every campaign starts somewhere, and it often helps to have some material pre-built in order to get things off the ground quickly. This adventure provides that start, teaches the systems of the game as you play, and attempts to provide a fully-rounded experience to introduce the Worlds Without Number system, either as a campaign start, a one-shot, or a palette cleanser between other games.

A Note on Italicized Text: In some cases, italicized text is provided to read aloud to the players. This is for the convenience of the gamemaster. It is never required to be used as is, and can be summarized, re-stated, or completely rewritten, as you see fit.

A Note on Difficulty: While the encounters contained herein are not overwhelming, in the spirit of OSR games there has been no attempt to “balance” them either. Encounters simply are what they are and it is assumed that the creatures that may react with hostility to the players are part of the natural environment. Dangerous encounters in “old-school” games are mitigated in three ways:



- 1) with reaction rolls that do not assume all encounters, even with dangerous foes, are immediately hostile,
- 2) with morale checks, which often cause antagonists to flee in the face of death and
- 3) with common sense on the part of the GM.

The third item is paramount in all things, and it is assumed that the GM will guide the narrative proactively. This does not mean that the GM should create *deus ex machina* escapes from danger, but that, if a weary and bedraggled party is eager to arrive at safety, a random encounter with a dozen hellish fiends might be best left to another session.

Adventure Summary

The player characters begin as slaves aboard a small pirate galley. They briefly engage with the pirates before a storm destroys the ship. The following morning they salvage what they can before running to freedom. A chance encounter with a native Melak warrior leads them to encounter potential allies. The Melak chief asks them to help free a captive from the pirates; and in doing so, they learn that the pirates are desecrating a sacred burial site in search of a magical artifact known as the Orb of Truth. The party has the opportunity to help the tribe, get revenge on their former captors, and leave the island by retrieving the Orb from the Cave of Whispers and stopping the pirates.

Bound by Chains: The Campaign Start

In the Pirates of Vethis, the player characters (PCs)

begin as captives. This is a classic way to start a campaign, and a very good one for introducing a new system. It offers certain advantages over other classic campaign starts (such as meeting in a tavern) for three reasons.

First, in this scenario any combination of class or character background is possible. The PCs might have been captured anywhere, or sold as slaves. They could hail from far away lands or the next village. Any sort of character background is on the table, limited only by the discretion of the Gamemaster. Second, it allows you, the GM, to control access to items and equipment, and severely limits the scope of the initial adventure. When learning a new system, starting small will make your life easier and reduce prep work. Finally, the initial party goal is an implicit and obvious one: escape. As captives, the PCs don't need to know or even necessarily trust one another in order to want to work together. They are all in captivity, they all want freedom, and they will most likely work together to achieve it and worry about the details later.

It is recommended that you start with a "Session 0" where you walk your players through the process of character creation and the PCs can roll up their characters together, following the rules on PP**. This allows the players to ask questions about character creation, understand any ground rules that the GM might set, and develop some potential ties with other members of the party. You might ask them to consider how they were captured or what ties they might have to their old life. These can become plot hooks for further adventures.

Whether you choose to have a "Session 0" or not, make sure that the players omit any equipment from their character sheets. They will start with nothing but rags and earn their way to greatness (or an untimely end).

The adventure takes place on a small island located nor far from the mainland. If you are using the default setting from Worlds Without Number, you might consider placing this island within the archipelago called "The Sisters," but it can be located just offshore of any landmass, so long as the characters have the potential for escape.

The Scourge Wind

The PCs begin the campaign as galley slaves, captured by, or sold to, a band of pirates from the

island of Vethis. The pirates are eager to return to their haven on the island, divide the spoils of their thievery and take stock of their captives, who will be sold as slaves, used for hard labor, or otherwise exploited for profit. The end will not be a good one for the PCs unless they can find a means of escape!

The players find themselves aboard a small galley: a coastal raider known as The Scourge Wind. The galley is crewed by twenty prisoners, each manning a long oar, of which there are ten on each side. There are five pirates keeping guard over them and encouraging compliance with whips and beatings. The Scourge Wind is not a large ship; it is designed for short raids, not long-voyages on the open ocean -- think of it more like a Viking Longship than a Renaissance-era galleon.

It is the third day since their last landfall, and the PCs are working their fingers to the bone pulling the oars of the small galley. There is very little to do to pass the time, although the party does hear the occasional drinking song and snatches of conversation about an "Orb," some treasure for which the pirates are searching, but the name means little without context.

Eventually the pirates grow bored and restless in the heat of the midday sun and their leader, a squat, powerful man known as White-Eye Bannock (so named because of an old battle injury) stands up near the prow and addresses the occupants of the galley:

"Listen here, bilge-scum! I'm bored of looking at your miserable faces. I know one of you pathetic fools must have a little fight left in you! I'll give a draught of ale to the one that can tangle with my mate Razz here and live to tell the tale. What do you say?"

At this, the other pirates cheer. The one known as Razz stands up. He's a burley, muscular fellow with a scar across his rough face. He grins at the thought of violence. The other pirates animatedly place bets among each other.

Ask the PCs if anyone wishes to challenge Razz. If one rises to the challenge, this is an opportunity to teach a few simple game systems. Either way, the pirates clear some space in the bow of the galley.

(If no PC accepts the challenge, White-Eye Bannock will choose a hapless weakling from among the captives. Razz will make short work of

the man, beating him senseless and eventually tossing him overboard. The pirates cheer at this cruel sport before setting back down as before.)

If one or more of the PCs chooses to challenge the pirate this can become a brief interlude for roleplay and for giving examples of the skill check system.

Describe the following scene:

The pirates have cleared a small space at the bow of the galley, giving just enough room for two people to maneuver around one another. You notice a pile of coiled rope to one side and a lantern on top of a barrel on the other. Razz smacks his fist into his hand. "Ready for a beating?" he says, smirking. The other pirates cheer and Razz begins to circle you, looking for an opening to strike.

For simplicity's sake, this challenge can be handled as three opposed skill checks, and is a good opportunity to teach the basic system. The rules are found on page 41 of the WWN Core Rulebook. To make a skill check, a player rolls 2d6 and adds both their relevant skill level and their most pertinent attribute modifier. A total equal to or higher than the difficulty is successful. Because this is an opposed check, the difficulty will be set by Razz's own checks!

First, ask the PC how they plan to defeat Razz and then decide what skill check to call for. For example, if the PC says "I grab the rope and try to grapple him." You might call for a Dex/Exert check opposed by Razz's own skill check. (As a relatively run-of-the-mill pirate, Razz gets a simple +1 bonus, so all of his checks are 2d6+1) Or, if the PC says "I punch Razz in the gut," you can call for a Str/Punch check opposed by Razz's 2d6+1 roll. Again, totals equal to, or higher, than Razz's rolls are successful. Encourage your players to roleplay and be creative with the environment!

Whoever wins two of the three skills checks is the winner of this bout. If the PC loses the fight, he or she will be returned to the oars, bruised and beaten but with no permanent damage done. The pirates respect courage, even in defeat. If the PC wins, the pirates will mercilessly tease Razz for his failure and Bannock will offer a toast to the winner, and the promised skin of ale.

After the fight, the pirates settle back into their routines while the slaves continue pulling on the oars. Near sunset, one of the pirates sees their destination on the horizon: the Island of Vethis.



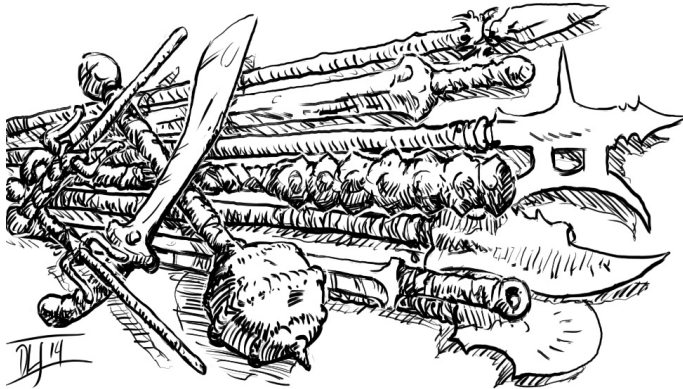
The Storm

During the night, the wind begins to pick up, and the pirates become increasingly nervous. A storm moves in rapidly, bringing torrential rain and howling wind. The pirates do the best they can to navigate the dangerous seas but this storm is beyond their ability to handle.

You may read or summarize the following:

It is all that you can do to remain aboard the ship as The Scourge Wind is battered by wave after wave, each one threatening to capsize the vessel. You watch in horror as water breaks over the side of the vessel, tossing several of the pirates, and some of the other captives, into the dark, turbulent, ocean. You shield your eyes against the stinging rain and the salt of the ocean water and see your captor, White-Eye Bannock, clinging to the gunwale near the bow. The last wave nearly threw him into the tempestuous sea.

This is another opportunity to teach the basics of skill checks and savings throws; and the PCs actions in this moment may have repercussions later. To reach Bannock, the PCs will need to navigate the heaving deck in the middle of a storm, which requires an Evasion Save. A failed save means they are thrown to the deck and take 1d3 damage. If a PC fails two Evasion saves during this scene, they are thrown overboard by a rogue



wave. (Don't worry, they're not dead! But the GM might allow them to think that for awhile...)

Once a character arrives at Bannock's location, they must make an Str/Exert or Dex/Exert skill check at difficulty 8 to haul Bannock back aboard. Another player may aid this skill check, following the rules on page 41 of the core rulebook. A successful attempt at aiding the skill check gives it a +1 bonus. This bonus can only be received once. If the PC drags the Pirate Captain aboard, he expresses his gratitude. If it fails, Bannock is washed into the ocean as the next wave strikes the boat. Either way, the GM should remember if the PCs successfully helped Bannock, attempted to help, or left him to his fate. White-Eye Bannock will remember if his captives showed him mercy.

Regardless of the outcome of this scene, the storm is too great for The Scourge Wind to bear and the ship eventually succumbs to the wind and waves. The PCs fall into the churning sea and all fades to darkness...

The Shipwreck

The PCs awaken thirsty, tired, hungry, and shaken -- but alive -- on the beach of an unknown island. This is the case regardless of whether they were blown overboard during or after the rescue scene. All around them is strewn the wreckage of the ill-fated galley. There are a few bodies of other captives and pirates scattered on the shore, but all appear to have drowned. Only the PCs are alive.

The players may immediately wish to salvage the wreckage. This is a good idea, because the detritus on the beach represents their only source of equipment. However, the longer they spend at the site, the more likely they are to run into a pirate search party.

For every 10 minutes the PCs spend searching the wreckage, roll 1d4 on the salvage table for each character searching. If a player gives particular care to searching, or role playing this situation, you may have them make a relatively easy Wis/Notice check at difficulty 7. A success means you may roll on the table twice.

Salvage Table

1. A War Shirt, Mail Shirt or Mail Hauberk (WWN Pg. 35)
2. A weapon of the gamemaster's choice (WWN Pg. 37)
3. Any one item of Adventuring gear (WWN Pg. 33)
4. 1d10 Silver Pieces

After twenty minutes (and 2-4 items have been salvaged per character) the PCs spot a small boat on the horizon. It appears that the pirates have come to investigate the wreck site! The PCs have only moments to flee before they're spotted. (The GM may wish to advise the players that discretion is the better part of valor.)

If the PCs leave with their salvage, continue to the "Encounter with Yajna" below.

If the PCs continue salvaging and do not leave, they are spotted by the pirates and will face an encounter with 5 armed and dangerous pirate scouts. You may use the stats in the encounter table below. If you are new to this game and its combat system, see the explanation of combat in the "Encounter with Yajna" section on the following page. If the pirates win the encounter, the PCs will not be killed, but will be bound and gagged and taken to the pirate's camp on the West side of the island to face slavery once more (Or future daring escapes!). If the players win, they will get a day of reprieve before another pirate scouting expedition arrives, with twice the manpower as the first. In such a case, the GM should use common sense in limiting the amount of salvage available.

If the PCs leave the area but remain hidden, they see the pirates leave their boat, make camp on the beach near the wreck, and remain to guard it from further plunder. If the PCs try to sneak around the wreck site they must make a Dex/Sneak check opposed by the pirate lookout's Wis/Notice check (which receives a +1 bonus) to avoid detection.

Encounter with Yajna

As the PCs leave the wreck site behind, they venture into the center of the island, passing through waist high grass and clumps of small, strange trees. About an hour after leaving the beach behind, they hear a commotion coming from a clearing up ahead, where a solitary, Salamander-like humanoid with dramatic yellow stripes across the skin of his face is trying to hold off four large, viscous Red Rats.

The solitary figure is a Melak warrior named Yajna. It appears that he is injured in one leg and is having difficulty walking. He notices the PCs and calls out in the common tongue for aid.

If the PCs choose to help, this will be the first combat they have experienced, and is a perfect opportunity to teach the system. The full rules are found beginning on page 42 of the rulebook. It is beyond the scope of this module to teach the entirety of the combat system, and so the GM should be familiar with the basics before beginning this encounter, especially the concept of Shock Damage (Page 43) and Common Combat Actions (Page 44)

First, each side roles 1d8, adding the highest dex modifier in the group. Roll once for the PCs and Yajna, and once more for the rats. Whoever has the highest roll will act first. The PCs win all ties. The winning side may take any actions it deems necessary. Yajna will likely defend himself with his spear and the GM should control Yajna as if he is defensive and hoping to survive. Yajna has 6 hit points remaining.

When combat begins, three of the rats will turn to attack the PCs at the first opportunity while the fourth continues to harry the downed Melak warrior. Use the following stats to resolve the encounter:

Red Rat: HD 1-1 (HP 3), AC 12, Att +1/1d4, SHK 1/13, MV 40 ft, ML 7, INS 6, SK +1, SV 15+

During combat, a successful hit from one Red Rat causes others immediately adjacent to enter a blood frenzy, giving them an additional +1 to attack.

These tally boxes represent the pre-generated hit points of the rats for the convenience of the gamemaster running this scenario. As with all other things, you may generate your own hit points if you prefer or ignore this completely.

Rat 1:

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Rat 2:

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Rat 3:

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Rat 4:

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Play out the remainder of the combat following the rules given on page 42 of the rulebook, with each side taking turns in initiative order. Remember that missed melee attacks can still deal Shock Damage. If a melee attack misses its target, consult the “SHK” statistic for the creature, which in the case of a Red Rat is “1/13.” This means that 1 point of damage is done, even on a miss, to targets with an armor class of 13 or less.

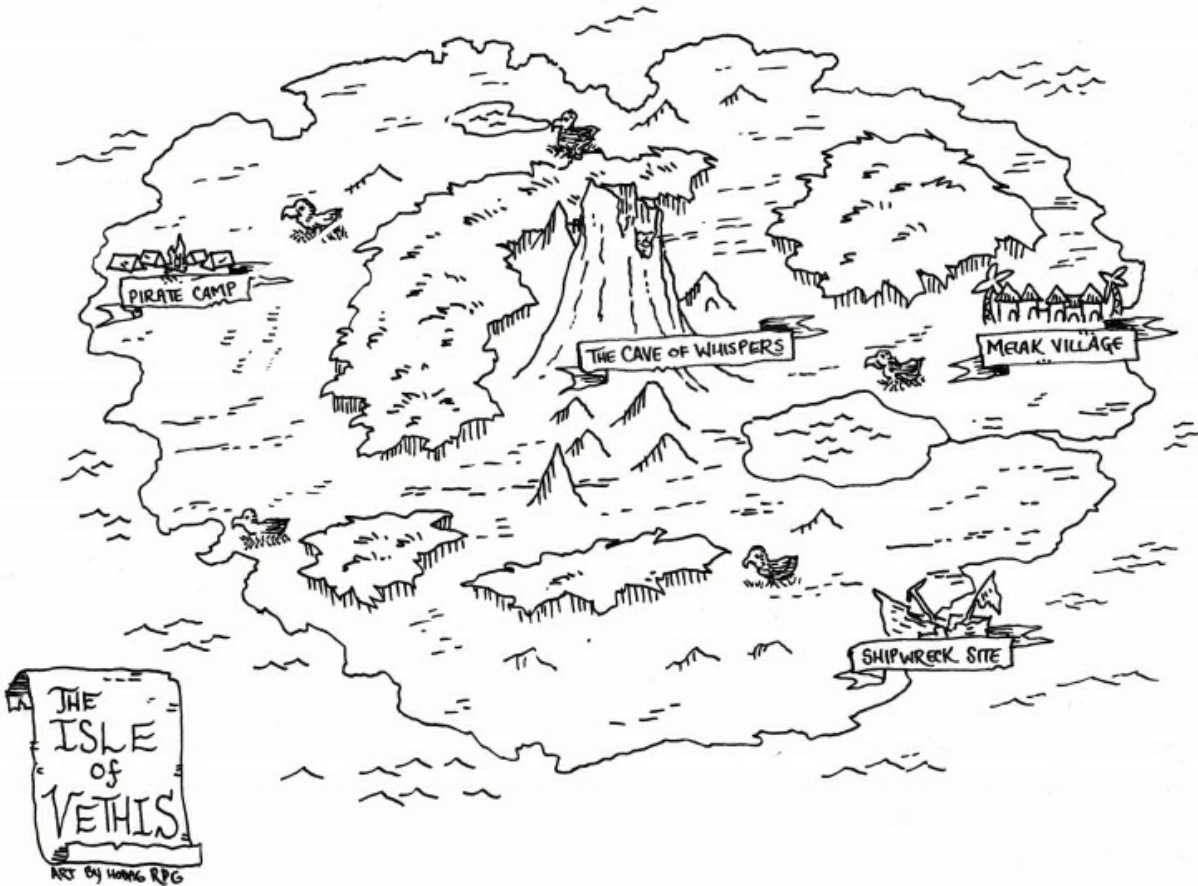
When the first Red Rat is killed, the rats will make a *morale check*. To do this, the GM should roll 2d6. If the result is greater than the rats morale score of 7, the rats will flee into the underbrush. If the result is 7 or less, the rats will continue the fight. However, they will also be forced to make an Instinct check to show that they are wary and behaving sub-optimally.

The rules of Instinct checks are on page 298 of the rulebook. For each surviving rat, the GM should roll 1d10 and compare it to the instinct score of 6. A result of 6 or less means that the rat will do something impulsive or instinctual. If you wish, you may use the chart on page 299 of the rulebook to help you adjudicate these instincts, such as the instinct table for “Ordinary Predatory Beasts.” That said, the rats are simple creatures and will likely continue to attack with wild abandon so long as their morale holds.

The death of a second rat will likely trigger a second morale check, but if they pass this check as well the rats will continue to fight to the death.

If combat concludes and Yajna survives, he will thank the PCs and offer to guide them to the Melak village on the East coast of the island. So long as Yajna remains with the party, the PCs may make Dex/Sneak checks with a +2 bonus when attempting to surprise any future creatures encountered on the way to the village.

If Yajna was killed by the rats, the PCs may take his spear and the medallion he wore around his neck. He carries no other items of value or note. Anyone in Melak village will recognize the medallion as belonging to Yajna and will welcome the party, although warily, if they return it with a



plausible story of the warrior's heroic death.

At this point the PCs are free to explore the island of Vethis, although Yajna is wounded, slow-moving and will insist on returning to the Melak Village as soon as possible. If the party heads directly there, the GM should make one more encounter checks along the way following the procedure in the next section. Once that encounter is resolved, continue with the Melak Village section later in this module.

The Island of Vethis

Vethis is a small, volcanic island just off the coast of the mainland, part of a large archipelago. The flora and fauna of the islands are highly varied due to eons of influence from Outsiders. In general, Vethis is dominated by the central volcano and is home to a mixture of tall grasses, occasional clearings, and stands of small trees. The only permanent settlement is the Melak Village on the East coast. The Pirates have made a small, temporary camp on

the other side of the island.

Rather than track time or distance in a granular way, for ease of play it is recommended that travel be abstracted. Any time the party travels from one point of interest to another, the GM may roll 1d6 on the table below. Then, to add some interest to the encounter, the GM may also roll 1d4 on the "Encounter Flavor" table for that entry.

Finally, it is recommended that every encounter with creatures, especially intelligent ones, also begin with a reaction roll as described on page 296 of the rulebook. This reaction roll ensures that each encounter feels unique and leads to interesting roleplaying situations. Not every run-in with pirates, for example, needs to lead to immediate bloodshed. Perhaps the pirates mistake the party for their fellows, or are uninterested in combat, or take a diplomatic approach first. Likewise, a poor reaction roll from otherwise friendly Melak warriors might mean that the warriors mistake the party for a pirate band! An unexpected reaction roll leaves

room for the GM to improvise and create unanticipated outcomes.

In summary, every time the party moves from one place on the island to another, the GM should:

- 1) Roll on the encounter table if he or she deems it appropriate
- 2) Roll on the Encounter Flavor table for that encounter
- 3) Determine if surprise is possible. If so, an opposed Wis/Notice vs. Dex/Sneak check should be called for.
- 4) Perform a reaction roll to determine how the creatures will respond to the appearance of the party. If either group turns hostile, the two sides roll for initiative and continue as per a normal combat encounter.

Encounter Table

1. Sanga Birds
2. Red Rats
3. Melaka
4. Pirates
5. Insects
6. Weather or Environmental Change

Sanga Birds

These mostly flightless birds are plentiful on the island, but are constantly harried by a combination of Melak hunting parties, the predations of Red Rats, and the occasional pirate forager. Sanga Birds are generally docile, but will defend their nests with a flurry of beak and claws. They can only fly short distances, and their large eggs must be laid on the ground. They can sometimes be found roosting in trees when not guarding their nests.

Sanga Bird: HD 2 (HP 8), AC 11, Att +1/1d4, SHK none, MV 20 ft, ML 8, INS 5, SK +1, SV 15+

Encounter Flavor:

1. A large Sanga Bird nest with 2d8 eggs, defended by 1d6 adult birds.
2. A small flock of 1d8 Sanga Birds roosting in a tree.
3. A large sanga bird nest as #1, but with 1d4 Red Rats preparing to attack.
4. 1d6 Sanga Birds pecking at insects in the tall grass.

Red Rats

A non-native and invasive species, the Red Rats are large, cat-sized rodents with dull, reddish coats and a ravenous appetite. They are often aggressive but flee easily from combat. They prefer to ambush their prey. They are the arch-nemesis of Sanga birds, but will attack anything if hungry enough.

Red Rat: HD 1-1 (HP 3), AC 12, Att +1/1d4, SHK 1/13, MV 40 ft, ML 7, INS 6, SK +1, SV 15+

During combat, a successful hit from one Red Rat causes others immediately adjacent to enter a blood frenzy, giving them an additional +1 to attack.

Encounter Flavor:

1. 1d6 Red Rats hiding in bushes. The PCs must make a WIS/Notice check at difficulty 8 to see them before the rats ambush the party.
2. 1d6 Red Rats stalking 1d8 Sanga Birds through the tall grass.
3. A Red Rat burrow, home to 2d8 of the creatures who are frequently found mating with one another. They will defend the burrow to the death but will not chase antagonists far.
4. 1d8 Red Rats gnawing on the bones of a dead pirate or Melak warrior. They will ignore the PCs unless interrupted.

Melak

The Melak are a race of Salamander-like amphibians native to these islands. An average Melak stands 4 feet tall and can have coloration ranging from dark black or brown to green, yellow, or even orange. Some have spots, stripes, or other identifying marks. They are an intelligent and largely peaceful tribe of fishers and hunter-gatherers. They often carry spears and clubs as weapons and wear armor made of fish bones and scales. They resent the presence of the Pirates on the island and often ambush their foraging parties.

Melak Gatherer: HD 1 (HP 4), AC 10, Att +0/1d4, SHK none, MV 30 ft, ML 7, INS 5, SK +1, SV 15+

Melak Warrior: HD 1 (HP 4), AC 14, Att +1/1d6, SHK 2/13, MV 30 ft, ML 10, INS 4, SK +1, SV 15+

Encounter Flavor:

1. Melak hunting party with 1d8 armed warriors, they are carrying trussed Sanga Birds.
2. 1d10 Melak gatherers picking berries. They are armed with clubs.
3. Melak hunting party with 1d8 warriors attacking a nest of 1d8 red rats.
4. 1d6 Melak spear-fishermen (warriors) looking into a pond or river.

Pirates

These islands have been home to freebooters and cutthroats for as long as anyone can remember. These pirates have made a small camp on Vethis while looking for a valuable artifact and conducting opportunistic raids on the mainland.

Pirate: HD 1 (HP 4), AC 13, Att +1/1d6, SHK 2/15, MV 30 ft, ML 8, INS 4, SK +1, SV 15+

There is a 25% chance that a pirate will have a net instead of a typical weapon. This can be used to receive a +1 bonus on both the unarmed and opposed skill check portions of a grapple attack. See the note below.

Most pirates carry shortswords; some may have more exotic gear at the GM's discretion.

Encounter Flavor:

1. 1d6 pirates searching for a magical artifact.
2. A foraging party of 1d6 pirates looking for berries or Sanga birds.
3. 1d8 pirates have found a quiet place to drink away their problems. They are making lots of noise and can be ambushed or avoided easily.
4. 1d6 pirates lie hidden in ambush, covered with tall grass. The PCs must make a Wis/Notice check at difficulty 8 or be surprised.

A Note on Grappling: As slavers, pirates may try to grapple and subdue the PCs instead of kill them outright. The complete rules for grappling are on page 43 of the core rulebook. First, the attacker must hit with an unarmed attack which deals no damage. Then, both parties make opposed Str/Punch skill checks. If the attacker wins this check, the defender is unable to move and remains grappled until they use a main action to succeed on a new opposed Str/Punch skill check. A grappled target also automatically takes damage as if they



are hit with an unarmed strike from the grappler every round.

Insects

On this warm, subtropical island there are many insects present. Some of these insects are treated as swarms and may need to be defeated in combat; others are mere annoyances.

Swarm of Centipedes: HD 2 (HP 8), AC 12, Att Special, MV 20 ft, ML 10, INS 8, SK +1, SV 15+

The Swarm doesn't roll for attacks or damage. Instead, all PCs inside the radius of the swarm (10 feet) automatically take 2 points of damage every round. This damage continues unless the PCs take a round to drop and roll, submerge themselves in water, or another act that might reasonably disperse the swarm.

The Swarm takes no damage from sharp weapons and only half from blunt weapons. It takes double damage from fire. An attack with a torch or other burning object will trigger a morale check.

Encounter Flavor:

1. A large ant mound rises out of the grass.
2. A swarm of centipedes, see stats above.
3. A massive swarm of flies annoys the PCs and makes it impossible for them to do anything but swat the bugs away.
4. A swarm of mosquitoes bites the party. Every PC makes a Physical save or takes 1d3 damage.



Weather or Environmental Change

Bring the island to life by describing a change in the weather or environment.

Encounter Flavor:

1. A strong gust of wind blows. You can smell the sea.
2. The PCs can see a thunderstorm on the horizon.
3. The skies open up. A tropical rain pours for the remainder of the day. Dex/Sneak checks are made with a +2 bonus.
4. The day becomes very hot. The PCs must make a physical save or be at a -1 penalty to attack roles for the rest of the day or until they take time to cool down.

The Melak Village

The village of the Melak peoples is composed of about thirty structures of varying sizes, built from a mixture of wood, reeds and coral scavenged from the local environment. It is clear that the creatures are amphibious, because some have opted for homes on land, others have been built directly on the beach and a few have even set up homesteads in the shallows of the ocean itself.

As the party approaches the village they see several dozen Melak going about the regular business of everyday life -- cooking fish over a campfire, speaking to one another in their strange language, and playfully cavorting in the surf.

There are half-a-dozen guards watching the perimeter for activity, and as soon as the village guards see strangers coming they grab their spears and approach the party. At the same time, a Melak woman, wearing a headdress of fishbones and coral raises the flap of a large structure and steps into the sunlight. This is Zi'chak, the chieftain. Her pigmentation is striking, with streaks of red and yellow across her face. She quietly joins the guards and approaches the party.

If the PCs are accompanied by Yajna they will receive a very favorable welcome and will immediately be offered abundant hospitality. They will also receive a warm welcome if they show Yajna's amulet and offer a plausible story about his death. If neither is true, the GM may assume they react neutrally. The Melak are not warlike, although they will defend their territory with fervor. They are eager to seek allies against the pirates, from whom they have suffered many indignities.

Assuming the initial pleasantries proceed without incident, Zi'chak welcomes the party to the village and ushers them into her spacious hut, which is made of bundles of reeds wrapped together in elaborate patterns, with coral for both decoration and structural support.

The Melak chieftain ushers you into her hut, which is positioned near the center of the village on the beach. You notice the intricate weavings of the reeds that make up the walls and the beautiful coral ornamentation. Zi'chak sits by her cookfire, which sends up sweet-smelling smoke through a hole in the roof and speaks to you in a halting dialect of the common tongue, her necklaces of

coral and bone clinkling softly with each movement.

"Outsiders, we are loath to ask for the help of others, but perhaps we can assist one another. Earlier today one of our hunting parties was ambushed by these sea-raiders you name as pirates. Several of our warriors were killed, and one -- my brood-brother Zi'chan -- was taken as a captive. He is held at their camp even now. You must steal him back! This is a matter of great importance to our village. If you can return Zi'chan to us, I have much assistance to offer you. I know the location of a sea-worthy boat, captured from the pirates and now kept in a hidden location. If you wish to leave this place, surely we can come to an arrangement?"

At this, Zi'chak produces a gourd filled with a pale, white liquid. "For your healing," she says. Drinking it will restore 1d8 hit points to each character.

Zi'chak tells the party that the pirates are a constant nuisance to the Melak and that she believes they are searching for something on the island, but what that is, she does not know. She is able to answer basic questions about the island and to provide provisions if needed. There are also simple armaments available, at the GM's discretion, such as bone-tipped spears, should the party still need basic gear.

Zi'chak can also give general directions to the pirate camp. If the PCs are still wounded or in need of rest after drinking the potion from the gourd, Zi'chak is able to provide a place for them to spend the night, rest and recuperate. If you wish to introduce other plot hooks for your campaign world, you may have Zi'chak mention other islands, places on the mainland, etc.

Assuming the party accepts her quest, they may cross the island when they are prepared, rolling an encounter in each direction.

The Pirate Camp

Little more than a half-dozen canvas tents clustered around a campfire, the pirate camp is a temporary base as they search for plunder on the island. At any point the party approaches the camp, there are five pirates here recuperating in between scouting and hunting missions around the island.

Three of the pirates will be sitting around the campfire. One lookout is positioned in a small boat

pulled up onto the beach, which is mounted with a long hurlant. The final pirate keeps a bored and sleepy watch over a bamboo stockade, set 50 feet apart from the camp, closer to the jungle, where Zi'chan is currently kept captive. All the pirates are armed with short swords. Statistics are given here:

Pirate: HD 1 (HP 4), AC 13, Att +1/1d6, SHK 2/15, MV 30 ft, ML 8, INS 4, SK +1, SV 15+

Stockade Guard: □□□□

Resting Pirate 1: □□□□

Resting Pirate 2: □□□□

Resting Pirate 3: □□□□□□

Pirate Lookout: □□□□

The Pirate Lookout is manning a long hurlant mounted in a beached sailboat. The weapon does 2d8 damage but requires a long reload time. If combat ensues, the lookout will fire the hurlant at the closest target and then jump down from the boat to engage in melee.

If the party approaches in broad daylight, they will instantly be noticed and will face a band of four angry pirates on land and a hurlant gunner at the ready. Hostilities are inevitable unless the party can quickly talk them down.

It may be possible, with a silver-tongued negotiator, to talk the pirates into releasing Zi'chan, either for a bribe, or for some well-articulated lie. Doing so would not be easy, and the pirates are skeptical of any outsiders, and thus would require a Cha/Convince check at difficulty 10 at the minimum. The GM should modify this depending on how convincing or credible the PCs can be.

The party may also attempt to free Zi'chan with stealth. Just as in other circumstances the PCs must make a Dex/Sneak check opposed by the pirate stockade guard's Wis/Notice check (which receives a +1 bonus) to approach the stockade. However, if attempted under the cover of darkness, or with appropriate distractions, the check may receive a bonus of +1 or even +2, at the discretion of the GM.

Stealthy PCs might attempt to knock out or quietly assassinate the guard, which will avoid notice of the other pirates if attempted under darkness. To do so, follow the rules of "Execution Attacks" on page 44 of the core rulebook. A full minute of preparation is required, at which point a ranged execution attack requires a Dex/Shoot skill check at difficulty 6 for point-black attacks or at difficulty 8

for normal range. Melee attacks always hit. If the attack hits, the pirate guard must make a physical save at a penalty equal to the attacker's skill level (The pirate's saving throw is 15) or else be either mortally wounded or knocked out. It goes without saying that a failed execution attack would lead to shouts for aid from the guard and a pitched battle with the pirates.

Zi'chan is easily freed with a dagger or sword to cut the ties that bind his hands and feet and that keep the stockade's makeshift gate closed.

Zi'chan is a Melak warrior who looks much like his sister, the chieftain, and has similar pigmentation. He has been abused by the pirates and will move slowly on the return journey, requiring two encounter checks on the way back. A successful Int/Heal check at difficulty 6 will patch him up enough to move at normal speed.

The Grave Robbers

As soon as he is able, Zi'chan tells the party that he was interrogated by the pirates. From what he can piece together from the questioning, it appears that they are searching for a legendary artifact of great value called the "Orb of Truth." Zi'chan knew nothing of an object by this name but did know of a silver orb spoken of in Melak legends -- an orb of power that was buried with the honored dead in a place called The Cave of Whispers. He now worries that the pirates will desecrate the cave, because their leader, a man the party should recognize as White-Eye Bannock, left with a party of treasure-hunters mere hours earlier. It appears that the pirate leader was rescued from the wreck of the galley by his compatriots and has made good on his desire to plunder the treasure of the island. The pirates do not know the exact location of the cave, and it will take them some time to find it, but they will inevitably discover it if unimpeded.

Rewards: For successfully navigating the initial hazards of the island and freeing Zi'chan from the pirates' clutches, the party can gain 2-3 XP each, depending on how fast you, the GM, would like progression to happen. A reward of 3 XP at this point will bring the party to level 2, making the following dungeon encounters significantly easier, while limiting progression will increase the challenge.

When the party returns to the Melak village they may rest and recuperate, but Zi'chak will insist that

they stop the pirates from desecrating the dead buried in the Cave of Whispers. Although she tells the PCs that the Melak no longer use the site, it is a place of ritual importance to them and should not be wantonly destroyed by outsiders. Zi'chak warns the party that the cave has ancient defenders, relics of generations past who wove ancient magic into the very walls with arcane pigments. However, if the party retrieves and carries a holy oil lantern from the shrine (location #3 on the Cave of Whispers map) the guardians will not bother them and they can pass in safety.

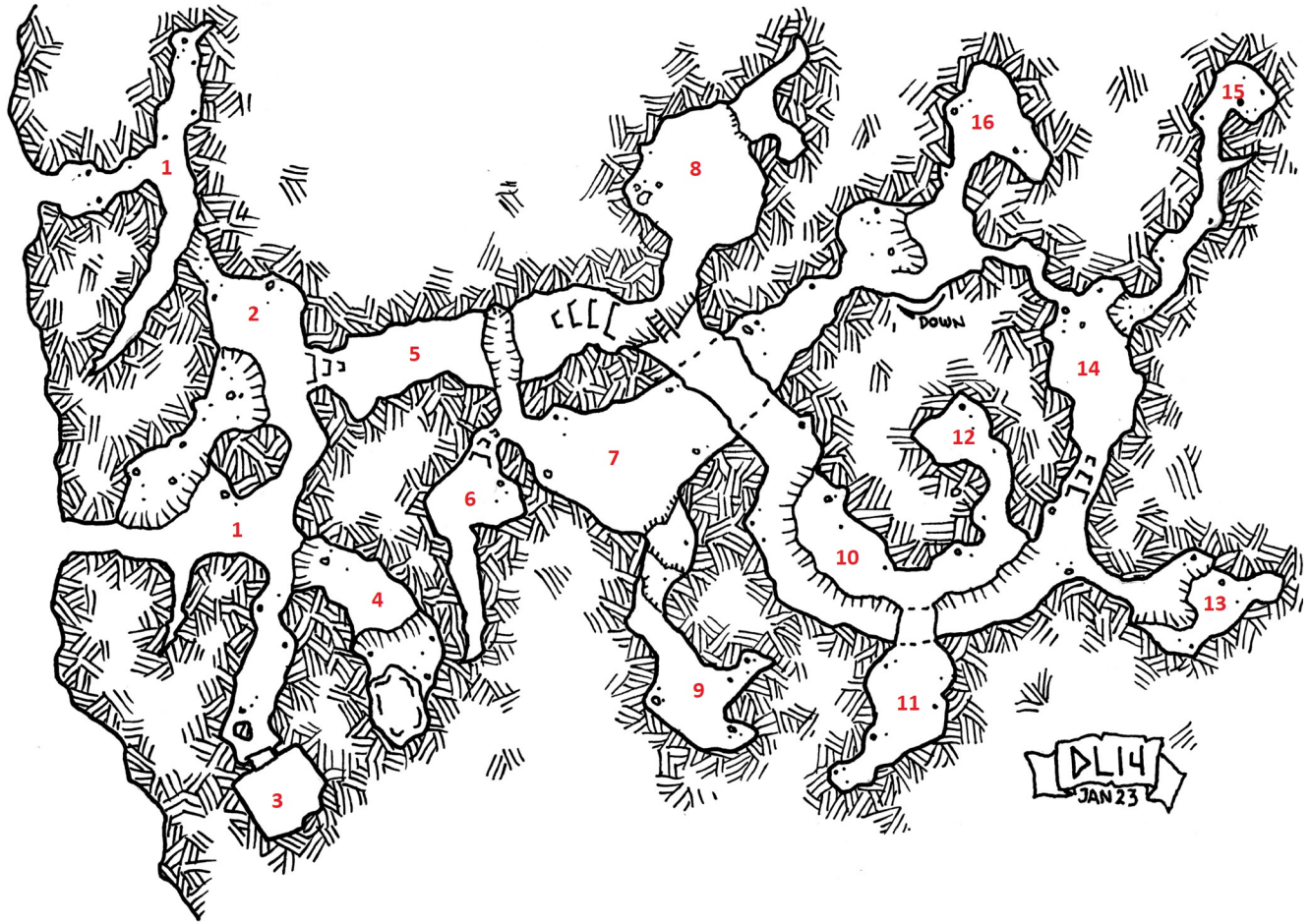
Just in case, Zi'chak also offers them another gourd filled with healing liquid. It is enough for three doses that heal 1d8 HP each. The potency of the healing mixture vanishes after 48 hours.

In addition, Zi'chak asks the party to retrieve the orb and return it to the village in order to remove the temptation from future grave-robbers. If pushed about their prior agreement, she will keep her word and provide them with the boat now as promised, but she mentions a substantial additional reward if the party can help put an end to the pirate threat. Armed with precise directions, the PCs may be able to stop the pirates from looting and destroying the cave before it is too late!

If the PCs decide to flee the island in the boat without further aid to the Melak, they may do so as described at the end of the module. However, the Melak will be bothered by their lack of assistance and may become hostile in the future. Leaving now gives a -2 penalty to all future reaction rolls with the Melak. In addition, the pirates will discover a powerful item that may have long-lasting implications on the campaign. See the "Orb of Truth" section below to see ways of handling the artifact in your game.

The Cave of Whispers

The Cave of Whispers is an ancient and sacred burial ground of the Melak chiefs. It has not been used in many generations, but it is still a pilgrimage site and place of ritual importance. The magic of the cave is unusual, tied to some Outsider influence in the ancient past, or the incantations of a long-forgotten shaman of considerable power. Whatever the original cause, the Cave is filled with barely audible whispers. Melak tradition states that these whispers are the names of the honored dead being spoken in a litany of remembrance.



On their arrival, the party will find two small cave mouths, largely covered in thick vegetation. Both entrances lead to the same cavern complex.

1 - The cave entrance is filled with the sound of whispers, just beyond the range of perceptive hearing. It is unnerving, but entirely harmless. An Int/Know or Wis/Pray check at difficulty 8 might reveal something about the origin of this cave, such as the information above, or something that gives color and flavor to your campaign world.

2 - A small cavern. Colorful pictographs cover the walls and ancient Melak runes are inscribed in ritual configurations. Nearly two dozen totems, bearing the stylized images of animals, are stuck into the ground. A Wis/Pray check at difficulty 7 reveals that these totems represent the guardian spirits within the cave.

3 - This small shrine has been looted. The sacred oil lamp is gone. (Stolen by the pirates!) Only dust and broken crockery remain. Footprints cover the floor. A Wis/Survive check at difficulty 8 will tell the party that a small company of four pirates came through very recently.

4 - A burial cavern. Many Melak dead are laid on stone slabs in the upper area where they have been ritually embalmed. Two of them are wearing gold rings worth 50 SP each.

5 - The stone stairs descend to a long cavern punctuated by a sizable crevasse. Characters may jump across with a Str/Exert check at difficulty 7. Failure means falling into the lower crevasse and taking 1d6 damage from the tumble. Rope or other equipment may allow the party to pass in safety without a check.

6 - This burial cavern contains several embalmed Melak warriors and a small shrine where ancient mourners left a gift of glittering gemstones worth 400 SP.

7 - This large cavern is covered from the walls to the ceiling with vibrantly colored pictographs. As the party enters, two of the images emerge from the walls themselves, taking on three dimensional form as strange, almost story-book quality, living illustrations! One of them looks like a Sanga Bird and the other like a great fish. The magical guardians move to attack. (Statistics are below.)

Living pictograph (Sanga Bird): □□□□□□□□

Living pictograph (Fish) □□□□□□□□□□

8 - This cavern contains many dozens of burials on stone slabs. There is an ancient offering sack filled with 550 SP in the embalmed hand of a desiccated Melak warrior. The walls writhe with living pictographs and three of them emerge to attack!

Living Pictograph (Red Rat): □□□□□□

Living Pictograph (Horse) □□□□□□□□□□

Living Pictograph (Cat): □□□□□□□□□□

9 - Many of the burial slabs here are empty. An ancient, locked chest against one wall contains a spell scroll with "The Coruscating Coffin." A Dex/Sneak check at difficulty 7 is required to open the lock, assuming that some kind of suitable tool. A Str/Exert check of difficulty 9 could also pry the lock off.

10 - This large cave is on two levels, with the upper areas containing burial slabs and the lower areas filled with pictographs. Two emerge from the walls and floors to defend the sacred burial site!

Living Pictograph (Pig): □□□□□□□□□□

Living Pictograph (Dolphin) □□□□□□□□□□□□

11 - Several high status burials have been made here. One Melak warrior in this cave appears to be dressed in fine leather armor -- clearly not of local production. It is a "War Robe +1." However, the body has also been trapped, and any attempt to remove the armor triggers a pressure plate and results in a burst of toxic gas from a chamber at the base of the slab. PCs within 5 feet must make a physical save or take 1d8 poison damage.

12 - This cave is filled with dried reeds that have been stuck into packed earth on the floor. An "island" of rocks and dirt is piled at the far end of the cave among the reeds. Although it is not immediately apparent, this island contains a hidden niche where an ancient wand has been buried. A Wis/Notice check of difficulty 8 is necessary to find the camouflaged hiding spot, which contains a gnarled, wooden wand capable of casting magic equivalent to "The Wind of the Final Repose" 1d6 times before the magic is spent. A character may also make a Wis/Pray or Int/Know check at difficulty 8 to realize that special items are often interred in rooms like these among the tribal cultures of this area.

13 - Aside from a few burial slabs, this cave is empty,.

14 - The pirate grave robbers have made it to this point. White-Eye Bannock stands in the center of this cavern with three accomplices. In one hand he holds the lamp that has allowed him safe passage, in the other he clutches a wicked-looking cutlass.

Bannock will parlay with the PCs before attempting to kill them, because, although he wishes to claim the orb for himself, he is intrigued by the appearance of his former slaves and wishes to pump them for information about his future treasure.

It is possible, although difficult, to get Bannock to abandon his search for the Orb, such as by lying about its power or telling him that it is cursed. This requires a Cha/Convince check of difficulty 10. However, if the PCs attempted to save Bannock's life during the storm, he is much more friendly to them, and the party will get a +1 bonus to the check. If they managed to successfully save Bannock before the wreck, they receive a +2 bonus in addition to any other bonuses.

Failure means that Bannock will attempt to kill the PCs before claiming the Orb for himself.

White-Eye Bannock: HD 2 (HP 15), AC 14, Att +2/1d6+1, SHK 2/15, MV 30 ft, ML 10, INS 5, SK +1, SV 15+

Pirate: HD 1 (HP 4), AC 13, Att +1/1d6, SHK 2/15, MV 30 ft, ML 8, INS 4, SK +1, SV 15+

White-Eye Bannock: □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Pirate Henchman 1: □□□□

Pirate Henchman 2: □□□□□□

Pirate Henchman 3: □□□□

The pirates are carrying 800 SP and 3 gemstones worth 100 SP each.

15 - In this upper chamber, the colorful pictographs swirl and move before your eyes. In a niche in the cavern wall, covered with an oil cloth, is the Orb of Truth, which appears to be a large metal sphere about 8-inches in diameter. Three Living pictographs will detach themselves from the wall and attack unless the PCs carry the lamp. If for some reason they are not carrying the lamp, you may use the stats from Room #8 for this encounter.

The Orb of Truth

The Orb is an ancient and powerful artifact known

to some of the sages of this region. Its origin is unknown, but it is thought to have been the creation of an alien race that used it for nefarious purposes. Once per day, if a hand is placed upon the Orb, the person doing so can be compelled to speak the truth as long as their hand remains. An unwilling or deceptive user may make a Mental Save to try and resist the power of the Orb, but a failure means that they must speak the truth against their will.

The GM may choose to reveal all, or part, of this information if a character makes a successful Int/Know check at difficulty 10. This represents the fact that the Orb is recorded in certain histories of the region and has long been sought by kings and chieftains.

Although interesting in its own right, the Orb is a potential “MacGuffin” for your campaign: a powerful object which many unscrupulous people may wish to obtain and that allows for numerous story hooks. If the party keeps the Orb, they will certainly attract unwanted attention, whether from nefarious sorcerers who scry to find its location and send their assassins to steal it, or from other powers with an interest in the object. Local potentates, both good and evil, will want to possess the Orb, and it can be a source of constant anxiety until some safe home is located for it. Perhaps more importantly, someone may have hired the pirates to find it in the first place, and when they find that their plans have been foiled, they will want revenge...

Or, if you'd prefer not to use this particular plot hook, the GM can simply let the party leave it in the hands of the Melak forever, or sell it for 1,200 SP to the first merchant they run across.

16 - A great Melak warrior lies on a stone burial slab in this room. His desiccated hands clutch what appears to be an axe, etched with runes of power. It is a Devoted Hand Axe +1 (See “Devoted” on page 268).

Living Pictograph

Ancient and forgotten magics have given strange life to the elaborate pictographs of animals within the Cave of Whispers. The magically-infused pigments and the ancient incantations of Melak shamans have made the images themselves guardians of the graves that they watch over. Only the light of a Sacred Lamp will allow interlopers to pass freely.

HD 2 (HP 8), AC 14, Att +2/1d8, SHK 2/13, MV 40 ft, ML 12, INS 5, SK +1, SV 14+

As a Move Action, the Living pictograph may pass through an enemy, although it uses all remaining movement to do so. An enemy passed through in this way must make an Evasion Save to avoid being splattered with magical pigment that marks it for death and reduces its Armor Class by 1. These reductions are cumulative unless the victim washes the pigment off, which takes several minutes.

Concluding the Adventure

When the party returns to the Melak village with the Orb, they are given a hero's welcome and feasting continues into the night. The old song-weavers gather to lift up the ancient verses and heroic epics under the light of the stars and the young gather around to listen. All the members of the village eat roasted fish and drink a heady brew from large gourds or smoke a sweet incense from fish-bone pipes.

The following morning, Zi'chak shows them the simple, but seaworthy, sailing vessel that the Melak have kept in hiding, and gives them ample provisions for a few days of journeying. Zi'chak has also studied the Orb over the night and found that the device is “not Melak” and therefore, does not need to remain with the tribe. Instead, she senses an omen that the Orb will only bring trouble. (See the Orb of Truth above, for more information about how to use the object in your campaign.) She asks the party to take it instead.

She also brings out a small bag of pearls farmed from the sea by the Melak. They are worth 1,000 SP to any trader. The GM may also give an experience award of 1-3 XP per character at this point, depending on how fast you would like progression to happen. At this juncture, the PCs should be either level 2 or 3.

The party is now free to leave the island and to venture to other areas of your sandbox game. A simple Dex/Sail check at difficulty 6 should allow safe passage out of the shallows and through the open sea without incident. Where the PCs go next is up to them, and to the world you have built around the Island of Vethis. Happy adventuring!

(Art for this module is taken from Kevin Crawford's free art packs. Vethis island map by HodaRPG.)