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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Thrilling. Terrifying. Wonderful. Novel. All those words describe what it feels like to explore. It's a big part of why so many people travel when they take a vacation—to experience the magic of discovery. Heck, I get goosebumps whenever I try a new food, hike a new path, or discover a new book to read. To me, all of that is exploration.

Discovery is a big part of the reason we embrace role-playing games. Characters always want to know what's behind the next door, inside the next chest, over the next hill, across the ocean, or even beyond the stars. At levels both grand and minuscule, our RPG main characters are constantly making discoveries, so that we as players experience all the thrill of exploration and fighting monsters without any of the life-threatening risks.

Players aren't the only ones who savor this excitement, though. As GMs, we are also constantly making discoveries. Before a session even begins, we discover things about our NPCs, dungeons, and worlds as we prepare. But for many of us, the biggest surprises come as we play with others. A player asks a question about why, when, where, or how something in the campaign came to be, and suddenly a whole new story presents itself. Your players can also provide you with the thrill of discovery more directly, as when they do something you never expected that causes the story to change, or sprinkle in bits of backstory about their characters. That's all discovery, baby!

Even the dice are agents of exploration. They determine which random encounter gets inserted into the story, what treasure lies at the end of a dungeon, and if the ranger notices a secret door. Most roleplaying games have these tools for randomization because the chance to take action in the face of failure's risk and the uncertainty of adventures are what make these games a delight to play.

RPGs, then, are collaborative exploration. The players, the GM, and the randomizers all come together to surprise and delight everyone involved, in a way that

could never happen if one person or a small group were simply writing a story without the game.

This issue of *ARCADIA* helps a GM run exploration-focused encounters. First, “What Lies Beneath” from [Indrani Ganguly](#) brings you incredible deep-sea creatures inspired by South Asian mythologies. By its nature, underwater adventuring is focused on exploration because of how much there is to discover beneath the waves. But this article also brings you three amazing creatures with unique lore to help expand your understanding of the depths. Then you can set sail on a story that takes place on the water’s surface and in the sky above, with [Bianca Bickford](#)’s “A Spirit Across Seas and Stars.” This story outline presents the framework for a globe-trotting adventure in which characters must unravel a mystery to repair a sapient flying boat. Finally, [Chris Bissette](#)’s “Dungeon Invasions” taps into the horror side of exploration with three unique creatures who can serve as villains who pop up as the characters explore a ruin, cave, or other site. This article reminded me so much of the greatest villains in a *Resident Evil* or *Soulsborne* game.

We hope that this issue, like every issue of *ARCADIA*, takes you to places you didn’t know were there.

Also, you probably noticed that it’s me, James, writing this letter and not the incredibly talented Hannah Rose. Hannah no longer works full-time at MCDM, but while she was here, she commissioned and developed some of the best articles this publication has ever had, including this issue and the next. Hannah also put in a lot of time and expertise developing the MCDM Tabletop Safety Toolkit, creatures for *Flee, Mortals!* and the core rules of the upcoming MCDM RPG. I am so grateful for her hard work. Thank you for making our games and community fun.

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
MCDM Lead Game Designer

WHAT LIES BENEATH

AQUATIC LEGENDS—DIVINE AND MONSTROUS—
AWAIT YOU BENEATH THESE WATERS.

by Indrani Ganguly

Adventurers traverse countless realms, usually with feet planted firmly on the ground. But beyond the bounds of land lie crystalline ponds, murky swamps, tempestuous seas, and unending oceans—some tranquil, and some ... not so much. But what lies beneath?

Rich history can be found beneath these waters. What kinds of creatures might thrive in undersea cities (or the remains of one)? What legends do fishers speak of, and what spoils do pirates hope to find? To answer these questions and more, let us turn to South Asian mythologies—Buddhist, Hindu, and Newar stories—for inspiration, and bring three unique aquatic creatures to your game.

From loyal guardians (the mighty makara), to mythical providers (the prismatic Randhanu), all the way to a ferocious three-headed sea serpent (the draconic vritnaga), this article offers plenty to bring your seafaring adventures to life. These creatures are not just “enemies” for a party to fight (though they can try!), but are also tools useful for creating intricate aquatic worlds that feel lived in. Herein, you’ll find stat blocks, adventure hooks, and lore that can be inserted into any underwater adventures or campaigns.

Now, fellow sailor, the Deep beckons. Answer its call, but only if you dare.

MAKARA

The makara (mah-KAA-rah) is a guardian of the sea’s secrets. Mistrustful of outsiders, these muscular beasts have wide, murky-green, scaly bodies twice as long as a grown human is tall. However, makara are chimeric creatures, their features typically half terrestrial and half aquatic. Some might have long snouts that extend into a trunk offset with ivory tusks. Others might sport a serpentine body, stag horns, and feline claws. But the true beauty of all makara lies in their tails, which always have regional flora growing on them.

Although it can be challenging to gain the trust of a makara, it is not impossible. When domesticated, they make excellent guards for treasures, temples, and palaces. Once they choose to bond with a place or a person, they are protective and loyal till their last breath. However, attempting to force a makara into subservience is a surefire way of invoking their wrath.

Sturdy. The makara’s long, muscular physique allows them to carry goods and riders across large distances. In thriving underwater cities, domesticated makara often provide everyday transportation—even for outsiders who can hold their breaths for long enough.

Guardian of Treasures. Due to their loyal nature, makara are often tasked with guarding secrets and treasures. They make dangerous enemies to anyone seeking to take what belongs to the makara and their masters.

MAKARA

Large Beast, Typically Unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 114 (12d10 + 48)

Speed 30 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	4 (-3)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)

Skills Athletics +8, Perception +7

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, prone

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Amphibious. The makara can breathe air and water.

Beast of Burden. The makara is considered to be a Huge creature for the purpose of determining their carrying capacity.

Sturdy. The makara has advantage on saving throws against being moved against their will.

Watchful. The makara can't be surprised while they are conscious, and other creatures don't gain advantage on attack rolls against the makara as a result of being hidden or invisible.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The makara makes one Bite attack, then either one Claw attack or one Impale attack.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage, and if the target is Medium or smaller, they are knocked prone.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Impale. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage, and if the target is Large or smaller, they are impaled. While impaled, a target is restrained and the makara can't impale another target. When the makara moves, the target moves with them. An impaled creature takes 4 (1d8) piercing damage at the start of each of their turns. A creature can use their action to make a DC 15 Strength check, freeing themselves or another impaled creature within their reach on a success.

BONUS ACTIONS

Oathkeeper's Endurance (1/Day). The makara gains resistance to all damage until the end of their next turn.

REACTIONS

Defender. When a creature the makara can see attacks a creature other than the makara within 5 feet of the makara, the makara can impose disadvantage on the attack roll.



YOUNG MAKARA COMPANION

Medium Beast, Typically Unaligned

Armor Class 13 plus PB (natural armor)

Hit Points 7 + seven times caregiver's level (number of d8 Hit Dice equal to their caregiver's level)

Speed 30 ft., swim 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	8 (-3)

Saving Throws Str +3 plus PB, Wis +1 plus PB

Skills Perception +1 plus PB

Condition Immunities prone

Senses blindsight 10 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11 plus PB

Languages —

Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the caregiver's bonus

Amphibious. The makara can breathe air and water.

Beast of Burden. The makara is considered to be a Large creature for the purpose of determining their carrying capacity.

On Guard. Creatures don't gain advantage on attack rolls against the makara as a result of being hidden or invisible.

ACTIONS

Bite (Signature Attack). Melee Weapon Attack: +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1d6 plus PB piercing damage.

1st Level: Destabilizing Attack (2 Ferocity). The makara makes a signature attack. On a hit, the target has disadvantage on the next attack roll they make before the start of the makara's next turn.

MYSTIC CONNECTION: YOUNG MAKARA

If you're playing a beastheart and have a young makara companion, you gain the following benefit at 9th level when you gain the beastheart's Mystic Connection feature:

Oceanic Protector. You gain a swimming speed equal to your walking speed, and you can hold your breath for up to 15 minutes. Additionally, when you or an ally within 5 feet of you takes damage, you can use a reaction to cause the target to take half as much damage. Once you use this reaction, you can't do so again until you finish a short or long rest.

3rd Level: Impaling Attack (5 Ferocity). The makara moves up to their speed and makes a signature attack. On a hit, the target is impaled by the makara's tusks if they are Large or smaller. While impaled, the target is restrained and the makara can't use Impaling Attack. When the makara moves, the target moves with them. A creature can use their action to make a DC 15 Strength check, freeing themselves or another impaled creature within their reach on a success.

3rd Level: Shake Tusks (5 Ferocity). The makara shakes an impaled target off their tusks. The target takes PB bludgeoning damage and lands prone in a space within 5 feet of the makara.

5th Level: Devoted Frenzy (8 Ferocity). The makara moves up to their speed in a straight line without provoking opportunity attacks. During this movement, they can move through the spaces of other creatures. Each creature whose space the makara moves through must make a DC 10 plus PB Strength saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes PBd6 bludgeoning damage and falls prone. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone.

REACTIONS

Defend. When an ally within 5 feet of the makara takes damage from a weapon attack, the makara can halve the attack's damage against that ally, taking the remaining damage themselves.

MAKARA ENCOUNTERS

Use the following plot hooks to introduce makara in your game.

Misguided Choices. The family of a young, misguided pirate send the characters to look for the teenager. The young pirate was last seen entering the Shrine of Randhanu (see below), which ferocious makara have guarded for decades.

Turning Tides. A seafaring merchant, ragged and out of breath, claims their domesticated makara have started attacking them, having turned against the merchant overnight. The characters must retrieve the merchant's haul from the makara through force, or find a way to end their rage. (As it turns out, a rival has hired the services of a powerful hag to control the makara and sabotage the merchant.)

The Birth of a Revolution. A revolutionary asks the characters to rid an ancient palace of its guardian makara. Rumors suggest the palace contains a vast cache of gems, gold, and magical relics of great power. The rebels wish to steal the treasures to fuel their revolution against a tyrannical ruler, and to redistribute the remaining wealth among the common folk. Conversely, the party might be approached by the ruler's retinue to defend the palace against conspiring looters. Whether those looters are greedy criminals or noble rebels is up to you.

RANDHANU

There is nary a seafarer who hasn't heard the stories of Randhanu (raan-DHAN-oo). Known as the Cornucopia of the Seas, the Rainbow Fish, and the Great Matsya, this legendary creature has avoided contact with people for centuries. Tales of Randhanu have long since blended between fact and fiction, and there have been no confirmed sightings of her in many, many years.

In coastal settlements, Randhanu is worshiped as a deity of good fortune, luck, and abundance by the families of sailors, fishers, and dockworkers. Through a few verifiable sightings from millennia ago, she is described as a gargantuan fish with scales composed of the elements. Iridescent icy-blue shards, bright-red licks of flame, lush green tufts of grass and kelp, and golden crackling bolts of lightning line her gargantuan figure, creating a sight so divine that mortal souls simply cannot turn away.

Whale Eater. Although the legends of Randhanu vary along different coasts, one thing that remains constant across most stories is that her great size allows her to

swallow whales whole. Despite that size, Randhanu is extremely agile, leaping out of the water in a flash of rainbow scales, or diving into the ocean depths before sailors can catch more than a glimpse of her shining fins.

Divine Troublemaker. Wise yet mischievous. Generous yet haughty. Kind yet petty. Staunch yet fickle. As a larger-than-life, all-encompassing deity, Randhanu has a chaotic but ultimately benevolent nature. When her impulses are stymied by external forces, she is easily upset, but her wrath most often translates into harmless pranks and stinging verbal jabs. Still, a deity's definition of "harmless" might not match a mere mortal's. To please Randhanu, adventurers must showcase a strong sense of compassion toward others. Selfish motives, unkind behavior, and a lack of humor are all surefire ways of losing Randhanu's fancy—or landing on her bad side.

A Divine Blessing. It is said that Randhanu can restore any creature from the brink of death, cure any illness, and end any curse. Legend also says that those who survive an encounter with her carry a small portion of her divinity with them.

The Cornucopia. When Randhanu is slain or chooses to sacrifice herself, her divinity can bless a single location up to city size with life and abundance for one hundred years. Fertile soil, plentiful crops, and restored health can reward those who best (or impress) the Cornucopia of the Seas.

DIVINE BOONS

Randhanu can grant powerful blessings to those lucky and clever enough to earn her favor through acts of great generosity, selflessness, or benevolent mischief. As an action, she can bestow one of the following boons:

Boon of Purity (1/Day). Each creature of Randhanu's choice (other than herself) within 120 feet of her is cured of all diseases and poisons, and regains hit points equal to their hit point maximum. In addition, all conditions (including exhaustion) and curses on the target end, as do any effects reducing a target's ability scores or hit point maximum.

Boon of Divinity (1/Day). Each creature of Randhanu's choice (other than herself) within 120 feet of her has advantage on ability checks and attack rolls for the next 24 hours.



RANDHANU

Gargantuan Celestial, Chaotic Good

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 231 (14d20 + 84)

Speed 0 ft., swim 90 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	17 (+3)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	22 (+6)	25 (+7)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +11, Cha +12

Skills Perception +11, Persuasion +12

Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning, radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from mundane attacks¹

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses truesight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 21

Languages Common, Aquan, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 16 (15,000 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +5

Water Breathing. Randhanu can breathe only underwater.

Unusual Nature. Randhanu doesn't require food, drink, or sleep.

Deific Determination (3/Day). If Randhanu fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead. When she does so, she regurgitates any swallowed creatures and she can't use her Swallow bonus action until the end of her next turn.

Godly Size. Randhanu normally occupies a space that is 40 feet on a side. She can spend 1 minute to grow up to a maximum of 500 feet on a side, or return to her normal size. When Randhanu occupies a space at least 60 feet on a side, she can Swallow a Gargantuan creature who is smaller than her, or any combination of creatures and objects of the same size.

Boon of Abundance. Upon her death, Randhanu's divinity spreads over a location, no larger than a city, of her slayer's choosing. Her divinity provides the location with fertile soil for the next one hundred years, causing plants in the area to yield twice the normal amount of food when harvested. Additionally, when the boon is used, it cures each creature at the location of all poison and disease, and restores any wounded creatures to their hit point maximum. Randhanu can choose to sacrifice herself to provide this boon.

Reincarnation. When Randhanu is slain or chooses to sacrifice herself, she is reborn in a different body of water after one hundred years.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. Randhanu makes two Bite attacks and uses Disorient.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (3d10 + 6) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 19). While grappled, the target is restrained and Randhanu can't make a Bite attack against another target.

Disorient. Randhanu targets one creature who can see her within 30 feet of her, overwhelming them with her sheer size and divinity. The

target must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or take 21 (6d6) psychic damage and be dazed² until the end of their next turn.

Freeze (Recharge 5–6). Randhanu creates a burst of freezing energy in a 60-foot-radius sphere centered on a point she can see within 120 feet of her. Each creature in that area must make a DC 19 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 42 (12d6) cold damage and is restrained until the start of Randhanu's next turn. On a success, they take half as much damage and aren't restrained.

Teleport (1/Day). Randhanu can teleport herself, along with all creatures and objects touching her that she chooses, to a body of water on the same plane as her.

BONUS ACTIONS

Swallow. Randhanu swallows a Huge or smaller creature who she has grappled. While swallowed, a creature is blinded and restrained, and they have total cover against attacks and other effects outside Randhanu. If Randhanu chooses, a creature she has swallowed takes 21 (6d6) acid damage at the start of each of her turns.

If Randhanu takes 30 damage or more on a single turn from a creature inside her, she must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate all swallowed creatures, who fall prone in a space within 10 feet of Randhanu. If Randhanu dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by her and can escape from her corpse by using 15 feet of movement, exiting prone.

DEITY (VILLAIN) ACTIONS

Randhanu has three deity (villain) actions. She can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy's turn. She can take these actions in any order, but can use only one per round.

Action 1: Best Friends Forever. Randhanu chooses up to three creatures within 60 feet of her who can see her, each of whom must succeed on a DC 20 Charisma saving throw or be charmed by her. A charmed creature treats Randhanu as their closest friend and ally, and becomes hostile toward anyone who they perceive as a threat to Randhanu. A charmed creature can repeat the saving throw if they take damage or at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themselves on a success.

Action 2: Double Trouble. Randhanu becomes invisible at the same time that an illusory double of her appears in a space within 60 feet of her. This invisibility ends and the double disappears if Randhanu makes an attack or uses a deity (villain) action. While she is invisible, Randhanu can use her action to move her illusory double up to twice her speed and make it gesture, speak, and behave in whatever way she chooses.

Action 3: Psyche-jellic. Randhanu summons a swarm of illusory, iridescent jellyfish that can cause creatures to be momentarily overwhelmed by darkest despair. Three creatures of her choice within 60 feet of her must make a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 44 (8d10) psychic damage and is frightened of Randhanu until the end of their next turn. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't frightened.

¹ See the Glossary at the end of this issue for the definition of mundane.

² See the Glossary at the end of this issue for more information on the dazed condition.

Content Warning: Starvation

One of the plot hooks in this section includes a theme of starvation and malnourishment. We recommend using the [MCDM Safety Toolkit and Checklist](#) and adjusting this material as needed to ensure everyone at your table is comfortable.

RANDHANU ENCOUNTERS

Use the following plot hooks to introduce Randhanu in your game.

Glory Beckons. At the first annual Festival of the Drowned, coastal settlements have come together to preserve food for the coming year, share stories of the sea, and compete in swimming and other athletic events. Adventurers from across many lands are called upon to slay the Great Matsya, who local sailors (truthfully) claim to have sighted on their last voyage. The characters may either hunt Randhanu for glory and luck, or warn her of the imminent danger and win her favor.

The Desolation. A vritnaga (see the following section) has wreaked havoc in a coastal town, causing local leaders to abandon their people. Now, a lack of water and ruined fields mean that families are starving to death. The townspeople ask the characters to locate Randhanu and restore the land's fertility.

Lost in the Deep. The characters hear reports that an underwater settlement has disappeared. When they investigate, they learn that Randhanu swallowed the settlement when its people tried to slay her. Randhanu has not yet decided whether to destroy the settlement and its people where they remain trapped within her, giving the characters a chance to convince her to free those folk, or battle her for the settlement's freedom.

VRITNAGA

Drought. Desolation. Death. These are the words most often used to describe vritnaga (vreet-naga), the Stealers of the Sea. These legendary sea dragons are driven by their unending need to consume and rule all bodies of water, even if that leads to the destruction of settlements or whole civilizations.

Smelling of brine, a vritnaga has a lithe serpentine body, a jagged tail, and three heads.

Their beaked snout vents scalding hot steam, and their murderous eyes contain jagged irises whose pale yellow is reminiscent of the light of a thunderstorm. A vritnaga has a row of scaled, leafy fins on each side of their body, which double as wings when they take flight. As a vritnaga wyrmling matures, their glossy teal scales darken to blue-black, and become peppered with barnacles and seashells.

Three Minds. Each of the vritnaga's three heads has a distinct personality. The left head is the prideful, greedy, and power-hungry Dreamer. Lost in glorious daydreams of their own power, the Dreamer serves to further the ambition of the vritnaga. The right head is the cunning, scheming, and manipulative Planner. Fueled by the ambition and caution of their fellow heads, they plot to extend their dominion. The middle head is the caustic, intellectual, and jeering Critic. Though they often feud with the Dreamer and the Planner, the Critic ensures their shared survival.



Cruel Tyrants. The vritnaga are cunning, cruel tyrants, and wherever they rule, they take joy in the misery of others. They grow enraged when their dominion over an area is challenged, and if multiple vritnaga ever claim the same territory, bloodshed inevitably ensues.

So strong is a vritnaga's arrogance that their three heads often plot and scheme individually, with each head trying to gain dominance and control over the others. However, when faced with an external foe, all heads work together to deal with the threat.

Hoarder of Remains. A vritnaga does not maintain a traditional dragon hoard, as their only obsession lies in conquering one body of water after another. However, they take immense joy in causing ships to founder and drown, and often collect valuables from the debris as a token of their strength.

Unseen and Deadly. While underwater, the vritnaga can camouflage themselves to blend in with the environment around them. To the untrained eye, a distant vritnaga might look like a drifting, unassuming mass of seaweed and debris.

A VRTNAGA'S LAIR

Vritnaga dwell in the deepest reaches of the watery domains they claim, finding rest in ancient caves and muddy fissures along the seafloors and lakebeds they despoil. Their underwater lairs are complex to navigate, with twists and turns galore. The entrance to a vritnaga's lair is often littered with skulls and the debris of sunken ships or boats, a sign of the sinister monster who rests within.

Once a vritnaga claims a body of water, it drains that water over time. This process can take from a few months to a few centuries, depending on the age of the vritnaga and the vastness of the lake or sea. As this process continues, the vritnaga's powers grow, and the ecosystem within the water begins to choke to death.

Any lands around a vritnaga's watery domain stop producing precipitation, drying out along with the body of water they lie alongside. When there is no moisture left to consume, the vritnaga departs to find their next conquest, leaving a ruined landscape behind.

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the vritnaga can take a lair action to cause one of the following magical effects; the vritnaga can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- A deep rumble disrupts the lair in a 60-foot radius around the vritnaga. Each creature in the area other than the vritnaga must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone and have their speed reduced to 0 until the end of their next turn.

FORMIDABLE YET FALLABLE

Tales of vritnaga laying waste to civilizations, leaving tens of thousands of people parched to the point of craving death, terrorize children everywhere—especially ones who leave water faucets running. Still, for every scary story of despair, a tale is told somewhere of hope and heroism. Adventurers might come across the following folk tale while traveling through any coastal settlement.

"Long, long ago, an ancient vritnaga had all but doomed our ancestral homelands. The kingdom's strongest generals and their massive armies fought futilely against the monstrous creature. As a last resort, the kingdom issued a call for adventurers. Those strong enough—and foolish enough, some might have said—to attempt to slay the beast would be honored as saviors of the kingdom if they succeeded, and showered with riches.

"Four mighty adventurers answered the call. Their formidable reputation preceded them, and they were deemed the kingdom's best chance at survival. But dragging the vritnaga to the deepest pits of a volcano couldn't scorch the monstrosity, nor could they be frozen by mighty spells. An entire ocean sacrificed to turn its waters to poison couldn't slay the mighty creature. Try as they might, the adventurers found that nothing worked. But they wouldn't give up. It is not in the nature of heroes to do so.

"Impressed by the adventurers' relentless pursuit of the vritnaga, a god who watched from above, ruler of vast skies and storms and thunder, reached down and blessed them. For the vritnaga might rule the oceans, but even waves bend to the whims of the sky. Empowered by the raw fury of thunder and lightning, the adventurers were able to strike down the ancient vritnaga once and for all, freeing the land from the drought.

"The moral of the story? No matter how strong we think we are, the gods are stronger! Or some bogus stuff like that. Gah, it's a bedtime story you tell children so they don't end up with their heads up their ... you know."

- A 30-foot-deep, 30-foot-long, 5-foot-wide fissure opens on an unoccupied solid surface within 90 feet of the vritnaga. Mutated vines sprout from the fissure, forcing each creature within 30 feet of the fissure to succeed on a DC 19 Strength saving throw or be grappled (escape DC 18) by a vine, then pulled 20 feet toward the fissure. A creature pulled to the edge of the fissure is dropped into it and restrained. Each vine has AC 10, 10 hit points, and immunity to psychic damage. Destroying a vine frees the creature it grapples.

- Crystalline stalactites on the ceiling of the lair crack and fall. Each creature within 60 feet of the vritnaga must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

REGIONAL EFFECTS

The region containing a vritnaga's lair is warped by their magic, which creates one or more of the following magical effects:

- Strange mutated vines grow from rocky fissures around the vritnaga's lair.
- Small tsunamis are common within six miles of the vritnaga's lair.
- The body of water in which the vritnaga resides produces a noxious effluent that irritates the lungs of breathing creatures (even those breathing underwater with the aid of magic). Each creature in a vritnaga's lair must make a DC 18 Constitution saving throw at the end of every hour they spend in the lair. On a failed save, a creature suffers from an incessant retching until they finish a short or long rest outside the lair. Whenever a creature makes an attack roll or saving throw while afflicted in this way, they must roll a d4 and subtract the number rolled from the d20 roll. In addition, an afflicted creature has disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks that rely on maintaining silence. This affliction is treated as a natural disease, and any effect that removes a disease cures an afflicted creature.

If the vritnaga dies, these effects fade over the course of 1d10 days.

Content Warning: Dyspnea, Dizziness, Fainting

One of the plot hooks in this section includes a theme of sickness. We recommend using the [MCDM Safety Toolkit and Checklist](#) and adjusting this material as needed to ensure everyone at your table is comfortable.

VRITNAGA ENCOUNTERS

Use the following plot hooks to introduce a vritnaga in your game.

A Plea for Salvation. A sea that harbors a cache of precious metals has caught a migrating vritnaga's fancy. Not for the wealth, but for the sheer vastness of the watery realm. Unfortunately for the aquatic miners who reside in these waters, the coming of the vritnaga means two choices: complete submission or certain death. Unless, of course, the characters are up for a challenge. The reward? Gold beyond their wildest dreams.

A Noxious Journey. Stories of ships vanishing in a specific area of the ocean are heard in a local port. Seafaring characters who venture into the area find themselves struggling for air, each labored breath feeling like a dagger to the chest. With the characters made vulnerable by this unnatural effect, the vritnaga strikes.

The Oceaneater's Treasure. An old, kindly, but off-kilter sailor in a busy seaport offers a tale to whoever will listen, speaking of long-forgotten treasure from an unfortunate shipwreck, buried on an uncharted island. Legend has it that buried with this sunken treasure is a shard of divinity—a single piece of a deity, which has the power to reshape reality one time as the creature wielding the shard wills it. Though the sailor failed to reach the treasure in her lifetime, she entrusts the characters with a map. Characters who choose to salvage the treasure from the shipwreck find themselves facing the Oceaneater—an enraged vritnaga ready to destroy any who invade their realm.

VRITNAGA

Gargantuan Dragon, Typically Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 462 (25d20 + 200)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft., fly 30 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	18 (+4)	26 (+8)	22 (+6)	20 (+5)	24 (+7)

Saving Throws Dex +10, Con +14, Wis +11, Cha +13

Skills Deception +13, Intimidation +13, Perception +17, Stealth +16

Damage Vulnerabilities lightning, thunder

Damage Immunities cold, force, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 27

Languages Common, Aquan, Draconic

Challenge 20 (25,000 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +6

Amphibious. The vritnaga can breathe air and water.

Headstrong Resistance (3/Day). If the vritnaga fails a saving throw, they can choose to succeed instead. When they do so, a remaining head of their choice takes 20 psychic damage.

Multiple Heads. While the vritnaga has at least two heads, they have advantage on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, dazed, deafened, frightened, stunned, or knocked unconscious.

Three by Three. The vritnaga's heads can be attacked individually. Each head has AC 20, 150 hit points, and the vritnaga's damage immunities. Destroying a head deals 150 necrotic damage to the vritnaga. If a head is slain, the vritnaga can't use the villain action corresponding to that head. If all their heads are slain, the vritnaga dies.

Wakeful. While the vritnaga has at least two heads and is asleep, at least one of their heads is awake.

ACTIONS

Multiaction. The vritnaga makes a Claw attack and one different Bite attack for each head they have.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) slashing damage.

Bite (Dreamer Head). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (2d10 + 8) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) force damage.

Bite (Critic Head). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (2d10 + 8) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) cold damage.

Bite (Planner Head). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +14 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (2d10 + 8) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) poison damage.

Constrict. The vritnaga makes a sweeping attack with their tail that can constrict their enemies. Each creature within 15 feet of the vritnaga must make a DC 22 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 17 (2d8 + 8) bludgeoning damage, is grappled (escape DC 18), and is pulled up to 15 feet toward the vritnaga. On a success, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't grappled. While grappled in this way, a creature is restrained. The vritnaga can't use Constrict again while they have any creature grappled.

BONUS ACTIONS

Slippery. The vritnaga takes the Disengage action.

REACTIONS

Infection. Whenever the vritnaga is hit by a melee attack, the wound oozes with noxious fumes and the attacking creature must make a DC 22 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the attacker takes 16 (3d10) poison damage and is poisoned until the end of their next turn. On a success, the attacker takes half as much damage and is not poisoned.

VILLAIN ACTIONS

A vritnaga has three villain actions. They can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy's turn. They can take these actions in any order, but can use only one per round.

Action 1: Dreamer Head. The vritnaga exhales a wave of scalding steam in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 19 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 18 (4d8) fire damage plus 18 (4d8) force damage and is dazed until the end of their next turn. On a success, the creature takes half as much damage of each type and isn't dazed.

Action 2: Critic Head. The vritnaga exhales a bursting wave of icicles in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 18 (4d8) piercing damage plus 18 (4d8) cold damage, and is pushed 30 feet away from the vritnaga and knocked prone. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't pushed or knocked prone.

Action 3: Planner Head. The vritnaga spews a wave of slimy polluted water in a 90-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 19 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 54 (12d8) poison damage and is poisoned. On a success, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't poisoned. A poisoned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themselves on a success. A creature who fails the saving throw three times makes no more saving throws and is poisoned until they finish a long rest.

DUNGEON INVASIONS

SOMETIMES YOU JUST NEED A HORRIBLE BOSS MONSTER
TO RUIN YOUR PLAYERS' DAY!

by Chris Bissette

Content Warning: The monsters in this article include graphic descriptions of blood and body horror. We recommend using the [MCDM Safety Toolkit and Checklist](#) and adjusting this material as needed to ensure everyone at your table is comfortable.

You planned your session and sat down to play ... but the players blasted through all your encounters and you still have an hour left to fill. Luckily, somebody just dropped in on top of them, intent on taking their stuff. Roll initiative!

“Dungeon Invasions” presents three surprise boss enemies who GMs can drop into their games at a moment’s notice. Each of these enemies is intelligent, and each is hunting the party for a specific reason. In one-shot adventures, these foes can anchor a memorable set-piece combat to end the session. In longer campaigns, they can tie in to ongoing plots, acting as agents of established villains, or even becoming an ongoing threat for a new campaign arc. For best results, play them smart, since it’s much more fun to have a boss flee and return another day than to have them fight to the death for no reason.

This article presents all the tools you need as a GM to run these enemies—reasons for them to pursue the characters, dramatic entrances into the dungeon or other adventuring location, tactics they might use in combat, and their means of escape when things start to go bad. The only thing you need to add is a personalized name for the boss if desired.

USING THE INVADERS

Once you’ve picked which invader you want to use and you’re ready to unleash them on your unsuspecting players, what’s next? The first step is to pick a reason that the invader is hunting the party. You might have something in mind already, or you can pick an option from “Reasons for Hunting” below.

Each invader entry has a section called “Omens of Approach”—a series of four events that signal the coming chaos, and which you can use to lay the groundwork for the invader’s entrance. Think of these events as regional effects you can trigger over a short period leading up to the encounter. The events occur in sequence, starting at the first entry on the list and escalating.

When an invader appears, their “Grand Entrance” section provides text that you can read aloud or paraphrase to reveal them to the party. Lean into this moment, really selling how strange and unsettling these foes are, and enjoy watching your players have no idea what’s about to happen.

Each invader also has a “Tactics” section that describes how to effectively and evocatively use them in combat. The “Escape Plan” section then describes how the creature makes their getaway.

REASONS FOR HUNTING

These boss monsters can be played as just unlucky random encounters, but it's more interesting if they have a specific reason to come after the characters. You can use any of the following options to set up an invader encounter, or as inspiration for setups of your own:

- The characters have stumbled into a place that the invader holds sacred, and the invader vows to punish them for their transgression.
- A character meddled in something they shouldn't have, maybe without even knowing it. As a result, someone put a bounty on their head, and the invader is here to collect it.
- An enemy from the characters' past has hired the invader to find them and destroy them.
- The party is carrying something the invader has long been searching for.
- The invader is on business of their own—which they want kept secret. Unfortunately, the characters witnessed the invader's arrival, and can't be allowed to leave with that knowledge.

THE BLEEDER

How far does a person have to sink to become this ... thing? A relentless hunter, twisted by magic and the touch of the thousand devils it has served for centuries, the Bleeder had a name once. A family. A home. A soul. But now it's a machine, a vessel for vengeance and pain that stalks prey across years and planes until it inevitably gets its way.

OMENS OF APPROACH

The following events warn of the appearance of the Bleeder:

- One character's heart begins to race, settling into an urgent and irregular rhythm.
- The air around the characters grows humid and hot.
- The hot, cloying smell of an open wound rises.
- One or more characters feels a sharp pain behind their eyes.

GRAND ENTRANCE

When you're ready for the Bleeder to appear, read or paraphrase the following:

A jagged gash appears in midair, a sudden wind pulsing and rippling around it. A mist fills the air—then takes the form of hot blood erupting from the widening portal as a figure steps through it.

A lithe humanoid is dressed head to toe in layered gowns the color of old blood, and dripping with fresh viscera. What little skin is exposed is pale and shiny, a mass of scars and ill-healed wounds. The horrid creature rolls its shoulders, lazily swings two long, curving blades in crescents through the air, then fixes you with a pair of dark, cat-like eyes.

"Oh, good," it says, grinning. "Fresh meat."

TACTICS

In the Bleeder's ideal fight, the first rounds of combat play out as follows:

Round 1: The Bleeder uses its Multiattack, striking twice with its Shotel attack and then using Blood Bond against the most likely target.

Round 2: Assuming the target of Blood Bond failed their save, the Bleeder drops back to a safe distance to engage the other characters with Fan of Daggers, using Siphon Strength against the bonded character.

Round 3: The Bleeder continues to fight, using Siphon Strength every round as it taunts the bonded character telepathically, reveling in their distress.

Given the way the Bleeder initially arrives, it's unlikely that characters will be surprised by it. This means that the creature's Surprise Strike trait might not be as effective as possible. This initial contact encounter is intended for the Bleeder to assess its enemies and form a new blood bond, and it flees using Arterial Escape before it is in danger of being killed.

The Bleeder can be much more stealthy if it returns to take on the party again—especially if a character remains under the effect of Blood Bond. The creature might taunt its bonded foe telepathically, but it always tries to instigate follow-up combat from a position of stealth and surprise.

ESCAPE PLAN

If the Bleeder is unable to form a blood bond within the first three rounds of combat, or if it drops to fewer than 50 hit points, it uses its Arterial Escape action and flees.

MULTIPLE BLEEDERS

The Bleeder might be a unique creature or one of many. If the latter, bleeders might work together in packs to corral and separate their targets, making them effective threats against higher-level characters.

THE BLEEDER

Medium Humanoid, Neutral Evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 142 (15d8 + 75)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +8

Skills Acrobatics +6, Stealth +9

Senses truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Predator. The Bleeder has advantage on and a +9 bonus to initiative rolls.

Surprise Strike. During its first turn, the Bleeder has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. Any hit the bleeder scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Bleeder makes two Shotel attacks.

Shotel. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an Undead or a Construct, they must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be wounded. A wounded target loses 4 (1d8) hit points at the start of each of their turns. Each time the Bleeder hits a wounded target with this attack, the number of hit points lost by the target increases by 4 (1d8). A creature can use an action to negate the wound on themselves or another creature within 5 feet of them with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Medicine) check. The wound is also negated if the target receives magical healing.

Fan of Daggers. The Bleeder targets up to six creatures it can see within 30 feet of it. Each target must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or take 10 (3d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Bond Sense. The Bleeder detects the precise location of a creature who bears a blood bond with it (see "Blood Bond"). This detection functions across planes and is not affected by distance.

Arterial Escape (1/Day). The Bleeder unleashes a fine mist of blood in a 10-foot-radius sphere centered on itself. Each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns, ending the effect on themselves on a success. The Bleeder then teleports to a destination it selects. The destination must be one the Bleeder has visited before, and must be on the same plane of existence as the Bleeder.

Hunt (1/Day). The Bleeder teleports to a creature who bears a blood bond with them and is on the same plane of existence. The Bleeder appears in an unoccupied space of its choice within 500 feet of the bonded creature.

BONUS ACTIONS

Blood Bond. The Bleeder targets a creature within 30 feet of it that it can see and that it hit with a Shotel attack in the past minute. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (1d10) psychic damage and become the bearer of a blood bond with the Bleeder. The bond can be broken with a *greater restoration* spell, and is broken automatically if the bearer dies or the Bleeder creates a blood bond with another creature. If the bearer of a blood bond dies, the Bleeder can sense the bearer's death. If the dead creature is returned to life before the Bleeder forms a new blood bond with another creature, the original blood bond is reinstated.

Siphon Strength. The Bleeder targets a creature within 40 feet of it that it can see and that bears a blood bond with it. Blood-red energy arcs toward the Bleeder from the target, who takes 5 (2d4) necrotic damage. The Bleeder then regains hit points equal to the damage taken.



THE TERRAFORMER

It's clear that they were humanoid once, but whether that's true now is a matter for debate. They've spent too long subsumed within the earth, trekking through the deep underneath and soaking up the fell energy exuded by the stones. In quiet moments, they talk to those stones, whispering sweet nothings and listening to replies that only they can hear. And when they call out for aid, the earth provides.

The Terraformer is most often encountered in subterranean places, the deepest parts of the world where stone and earth smother everything. On occasion, they do venture to the surface world. And when they do, the Terraformer makes full use of their ability to reshape the landscape into something more befitting their sensibilities.

OMENS OF APPROACH

The following events warn of the appearance of the Terraformer:

- A slowly rising rumble threads through the earth, more sensation than sound. Characters might wonder how long it's been growing before they noticed it.
- For a brief second, stone beneath the characters' feet feels like mud.
- Stone walls in the area ripple, masonry seemingly turning to liquid to the characters' senses.



- A grinding of stone and a shuddering of earth marks pillars of rock sprouting from the ground, potentially blocking doors and passageways.

GRAND ENTRANCE

When you're ready for the Terraformer to appear, read or paraphrase the following:

The stone beside you makes a wet sucking noise, and the air shifts as it's displaced, pushed aside by a hulking form that slides out of solid rock as though rising from water. Though vaguely humanoid in shape, their body is sheer bulk, muscle stacked atop muscle like heaps of fallen rocks. Their head is protected by an iron miner's helmet, their calloused hands grasping an enormous rotating drill.

"Knock, knock," the figure says in a voice like grinding gravel. "I thought I heard something."

TACTICS

In the Terraformer's ideal fight, the first rounds of combat play out as follows:

Round 1: If the Terraformer doesn't go first in the initiative order, they use their Fling villain action when the creature who acts immediately before them ends their turn. If both cylinders created by Unearth as part of Fling are still in effect when the Terraformer starts their turn, they use their Skipping Stones bonus action. If both have been destroyed, they create two new cylinders with Unearth. They then use Multiattack. If the Terraformer goes first in the initiative order, they save their Fling villain action until the end of round 1, starting their turn by using their Unearth bonus action.

Round 2: As the creature who acts immediately before the Terraformer ends their turn, the Terraformer uses their Mudslide villain action against the enemy they deem the most dangerous, then moves up to their speed toward the most vulnerable enemy. They then use their Multiattack and bonus actions as in the first round of combat.

When the Terraformer uses Multiattack, they aim their Ripple attack at the most dangerous-looking enemy. They use their Drill attacks on the nearest foes, prioritizing those who are prone after Ripple.

The Terraformer uses their bonus action every round, using Skipping Stones to control the battlefield and deal damage, or using Unearth to replenish destroyed cylinders or create a third cylinder if they are badly threatened.

Whatever attacks they use, the Terraformer's priority when selecting targets is to neutralize spellcasters and ranged attackers first.

THE TERRAFORMER

Medium Elemental, Lawful Neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 227 (35d8 + 70)

Speed 20 ft., burrow 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +7

Skills Perception +11, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances fire; bludgeoning from mundane¹ attacks

Senses tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 21

Languages Common, Terran

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +4

Earth Glide. The Terraformer can burrow through non-magical, unworked earth and stone. While doing so, the Terraformer doesn't disturb the material they move through.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Terraformer uses Ripple and makes two Drill attacks.

Drill. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage. If the Terraformer has advantage against the target, they deal an extra 4 (1d8) piercing damage.

Ripple. The Terraformer chooses a 5-foot-square area of unoccupied stone or dirt within 60 feet of them that they can see. Compacted soil and stone rises from the area in a wave, extending toward a creature the Terraformer can see in a 15-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or take 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone.

BONUS ACTIONS

Unearth. The Terraformer causes up to two 5-foot-diameter, 10-foot-high stone cylinders to burst from unoccupied spaces of dirt or stone that they can see within 60 feet of them, leaving a 5-foot diameter, 10-foot-deep pit behind. Each cylinder rises up to 15 feet above the ground when created and continues to float at the Terraformer's command. If a creature is on the ground where a cylinder appears, that creature must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is caught and lifted by the cylinder. On a success, the creature can move to the nearest unoccupied space that isn't on a cylinder or in the pit beneath it.

The Terraformer can control up to three cylinders at a time. Creating additional cylinders causes the older cylinders to crumble into dirt. Each cylinder has AC 17, 50 hit points, and immunity to all damage types except bludgeoning, piercing, force, and thunder damage.

Skipping Stones. The Terraformer can cause each cylinder created by their Unearth bonus action that they can see to move up to 20 feet in a straight line in any direction. Each creature on a cylinder when it moves must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or fall from the cylinder, taking falling damage as normal and landing prone. If the cylinder is brought into contact with a ceiling or other obstacle during this move, each creature on the cylinder takes 13 (3d8) bludgeoning damage.

The first time a cylinder enters a space occupied by a creature, that creature must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or be struck by the cylinder. The creature takes 9 (2d8) bludgeoning damage and is pushed 10 feet away from the cylinder, ending their movement in an unoccupied space. If there is no unoccupied space to move into, the creature isn't pushed and instead falls prone and takes an additional 9 (2d8) bludgeoning damage.

VILLAIN ACTIONS

The Terraformer has three villain actions. They can take each action once during an encounter after an enemy's turn. They can take these actions in any order but can use only one per round.

Action 1: Fling. The Terraformer uses their Unearth bonus action. They then use their Skipping Stones bonus action twice.

Action 2: Mudslide. A 20-foot-square area of stone or dirt within 60 feet of the Terraformer that they can see becomes thick mud that lasts for 1 minute. The mud is difficult terrain, and each creature in the area when it appears or who enters the area for the first time on a turn must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or become restrained. A creature who succeeds on a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check as an action can end the restrained condition on themselves or another creature they can reach. The Terraformer can then move up to their speed.

Action 3: Downfall. Each cylinder created by the Terraformer's Unearth action explodes. Each creature within 15 feet of a cylinder must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A creature on a cylinder has disadvantage on the save. After the cylinders explode, any creature on a cylinder falls to the ground, taking falling damage as normal and landing prone.

¹ See the Glossary at the end of this issue for the definition of mundane.

ESCAPE PLAN

If the Terraformer is reduced to half their hit point maximum and no enemies are prone, on floating cylinders, or restrained by difficult terrain, they make their escape. They use their Downfall villain action at the end of an enemy's turn to cause their cylinders to explode, then move toward the nearest earthen or stone surface and escape using Earth Glide. If engaged in melee with an enemy, they first use their Unearth bonus action to create a cylinder immediately underneath themself, rising up out of melee reach.

THE MUTATOR

Many creatures in the world can shift their forms, from mimics to doppelgangers, all of them driving home the fact that reality can't be trusted to remain as it first appears. Those who study such creatures often become obsessed with their abilities, consumed with a desire to harness the power to shift and change, to remake themselves in a more ideal image. The Mutator has experimented with such desires for decades, twisting their own form and learning how to weaponize the flesh of their enemies, just wanting to see the world churn.

OMENS OF APPROACH

The following events warn of the appearance of the Mutator:

- The world around the characters appears to shimmer and slide, with solid objects briefly turning to murky glass before transmuting back to their original forms.
- The characters' flesh becomes suddenly dry, flaking away in response to any touch.
- The ground puckers and bubbles like burning flesh.
- Wounded characters feel those wounds ache and grow warm, turning to open sores that threaten to burst and fester.

GRAND ENTRANCE

When you're ready for the Mutator to appear, read or paraphrase the following:

A thick haze suddenly surrounds you, and from that darkness steps a creature who seems to have no form. Their body shifts and pulses, pale flesh moving of its own accord, and rippling like a blanket thrown over a nest of serpents. The creature's skin bubbles and boils, flowing like wet clay as they take a step in your direction.

Silently, they raise a hand that shifts from fingers to claws and back again. Then with a curl of their digits, they beckon you forward.

MULTIPLE FORMS

The Mutator is one creature who can shift between two different forms. To make running the Mutator as easy as possible, these distinct forms are presented as two different stat blocks. Use the initial form stat block first, then switch to the mutated form stat block when the initial form is reduced to 0 hit points.

TACTICS

In the Mutator's ideal fight, the first rounds of combat play out as follows:

Round 1: The Mutator uses Multiattack, closing to melee with an enemy who appears less dangerous, and directing their Warping Spit toward likely spellcasters. They use the time between their first and second turns (courtesy of the Mutated Actions trait) to assess the threat of individual enemies. If they have underestimated the enemy they are in melee with, they use their Relocate bonus action to relocate to a safer part of the battlefield on their second turn.

Round 2: Having identified the most likely threats, the Mutator closes to melee with spellcasters and uses both their turns to attempt to put those characters down.

Round 3: The Mutator continues to move around the battlefield, closing with weaker foes and using their Warping Spit to grow attacking pseudopods on enemies they can't reach.

When the Mutator's initial form reaches 0 hit points, they shift into their mutated form. They make full use of their flying speed in this form to stay out of melee range, using their Petrifying Sting to neutralize enemies. With only one turn per round, they use Relocate or fly out of melee reach rather than staying put to take a beating.

ESCAPE PLAN

When a fight becomes too dangerous, the Mutator uses Relocate to disengage, then flies out of melee. They then use the Dash action to fly away as fast as possible, living to fight another day.



MUTATOR (INITIAL FORM)

Medium Humanoid (Any), Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +7

Skills Acrobatics +5, Perception +5, Stealth +5

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Deep Speech

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +3

Master of Mutation. The Mutator has advantage on saving throws against spells and effects that would alter their form.

Mutated Rejuvenation. When their initial form drops to 0 hit points, the Mutator transforms into their mutated form, and the Mutator regains hit points equal to their hit point maximum. Any conditions affecting the initial form end immediately.

Mutated Actions. The initial form takes two complete turns each round—a first turn at their normal initiative, and a second turn at their initiative minus 10. Effects that trigger at the start or end of the Mutator's turn trigger at the start or end of the round instead. The Mutator can also take up to two reactions each round. When the Mutator's initial form dies and they shift into their mutated form, they lose access to this trait and can take only one turn and use one reaction thereafter, as normal. The mutated form's new initiative becomes that of whichever of the initial form's initiatives comes next after the initial form is reduced to 0 hit points.

THE MUTATION

When the Mutator transforms, read or paraphrase the following:

With a ripple of flesh and the loud crack of breaking bones, the creature begins to shift and twist. Their skin stretches and pulls, drawing tight over newly formed muscle as they grow to monstrous size. Long, leathery wings sprout from their shoulder blades, fluttering as they catch the air. With a snarl, they drop to all fours, their armor subsumed into their flesh as thick scales. In addition to their razor-sharp claws, a long, whip-like tail coils high over their back, black venom seeping from the tip of a wicked stinger.

The transformation takes only a few seconds, after which the Mutator attacks once more.

ACTIONS

Multattack. The Mutator makes two Claw attacks and uses Warping Spit.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.

Warping Spit. The Mutator spits black ichor in a 60-foot line that is 5 feet wide. Each creature in that line must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be suffused by the liquid. At the start of each target's next turn, they sprout a flailing pseudopod from somewhere on their body, which attacks the target at the end of each of their turns until removed. The pseudopod has a +6 bonus to attack rolls and deals 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage on a hit. It has AC 14 and 18 (4d8) hit points, and doesn't have any of the target's resistances or immunities. Attacks targeting the pseudopod that miss instead strike the creature the pseudopod is attached to.

BONUS ACTIONS

Relocate. The Mutator takes the Disengage action.

REACTIONS

Infected Wound. When a creature within 30 feet of the Mutator who the Mutator can see casts a spell that causes one or more creatures to regain hit points, the Mutator can attempt to corrupt that magic. The caster must make a DC 15 ability check using their spellcasting ability. On a failure, the spell functions normally, but a creature within 30 feet of the Mutator who they can see takes 4 (1d8) necrotic damage.

MUTATOR (MUTATED FORM)

Large Humanoid (Any), Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 133 (14d10 + 56)

Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +7

Skills Acrobatics +8, Perception +5, Stealth +5

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Deep Speech

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +3

Master of Mutation. The Mutator has advantage on saving throws against spells and effects that would alter their form.

Regeneration. The mutated form regains 10 hit points at the start of each of their turns. If the Mutator takes acid or fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the Mutator's next turn. The mutated form dies only if they start their turn with 0 hit points and don't regenerate.

Reversion. The Mutator can revert to their initial form with full hit points after a period of rest, at least 10 minutes long, in which they do nothing more strenuous than eating, drinking, and tending to their wounds.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Mutator makes two Claw attacks and one Petrifying Sting attack.

Claw. Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.

Petrifying Sting (Recharge 5–6). Melee Weapon Attack: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 14 (2d10 + 3) piercing damage plus 17 (5d6) poison damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target begins to turn to stone and is restrained. The restrained target must repeat the saving throw at the end of their next turn. On a success, the effect ends on the target. At the end of a creature's third consecutive turn being restrained this way, the target is petrified until freed by the *greater restoration* spell or similar magic.

BONUS ACTIONS

Relocate. The Mutator takes the Disengage action.

REACTIONS

Mutagenic Feedback. When a creature within 30 feet of the Mutator who the Mutator can see casts a spell that causes one or more creatures to regain hit points, the Mutator can attempt to corrupt that magic. The caster must make an ability check using their spellcasting ability, with a DC of either 15 or 10 + the spell's level, whichever is higher. On a failure, the spell restores no hit points, and each target of the spell takes necrotic damage equal to half the hit points they would have regained.

A SPIRIT ACROSS SEAS AND STARS

A SENTIENT SHIP EVOLVES AS SHE BONDS WITH HER CREW

by Bianca Bickford

Voyaging on the high seas or soaring through the clouds is an ideal backdrop for epic adventures. This article presents a narrative path for an adventuring party to bond with a sentient ship who can sail not only oceans and horizons, but also the Sea of Stars—after a few upgrades, that is.

Three stat blocks at the end of the article capture the ship's growth through enchanting mechanics, with additional stat blocks for the crew. The story can begin as early as 1st level and soars past 10th level; recommended character levels are listed for each ship upgrade to help structure a campaign around her growth, but you can adjust to your party.

While she is a worthy vessel for any adventurer, surprises await those who choose to explore her story and unlock her full potential. Welcome aboard the *Marcuria*.

BACKGROUND

Long ago, a ship crewed by the Opal Trading Company inadvertently sailed through a rift between planes into the Feywild. Fey sea creatures battered the ship, so the crew fled to a calm inlet to make repairs. There, a wandering archfey named Marcuria grew curious about the ship and befriended the crew. The repairs took weeks. In that time, Marcuria and the crew became so fond of each other that when it was time for them to leave, the archfey imbued the ship with three enchanted discs that fit into indentations around the ship's main mast. The discs empower the vessel to sail through the air and in the Sea of Stars—the astral space between worlds.

When the crew returned to the Material Plane, they found that only minutes had passed. Not only that,

Marcuria gave part of her essence to the ship—her form appeared as a carving in the mast so she could interact with and explore the world with the crew.

Years passed, and the crew retired one by one. As they left, Marcuria's influence diminished and the ship became mundane. At Marcuria's request, two of the original sailors hid the flight and Sea of Stars discs until she could bond with a new beloved crew. The seaworthy ship was passed down through a dozen generations. Memory of air and astral travel faded over the years. The last descendant retired, took the remaining disc, docked the *Marcuria* in a large city, and prepaid the fees, hoping the right crew would someday discover and awaken her.

A LOST SOUL

The characters can be any level when they start their adventures on the *Marcuria*. They hear about the docked ship when they need to travel by sea, such as in the adventure “The Ballad of Captain Shivershank” in [ARCADIA 27](#), or from a job posting searching for adventurers to investigate a haunted ship in exchange for free passage. Either way, they are instructed to meet the ship’s crew at the local docks.

THE MARCURIA

At first glance, the *Marcuria* doesn’t inspire confidence. The hull is painted a faded, chipped blue with “Marcuria” written in cursive on the side. The ship has two masts and three decks, with a forecastle and quarterdeck—the equivalent of a double-masted caravel ship. The *Marcuria* map depicts the ship's layout, though when the characters find it, it has no ballistae or cannons aboard.



THE CREW

When the characters arrive at the docks, they meet a group of four sailors that make up the *Marcuria*'s crew. See "Crew Statistics" at the end of the article for their stat blocks.

Tristan Sunsail (Captain). Tristan is a human man with tan skin, long blond hair, and a swashbuckler look about him. Dashing and charming, he is popular with gentlemen and ladies and openly has lovers at most stops.

Gemma Bimpnottin (Navigator). Gemma is a gnome woman with dark hair and skin and a frequent bright smile. Brilliant and witty, she often trades chores for a good pun.

Ati Trevedi (Medic). Ati is a tiefling man with dark hair and crimson skin. Once an assassin, he has turned his devotion to healing (and to carpentering, when the ship needs it). His demeanor is polite but reserved.

Zar'less (Boatswain). Zar'less is a drow woman with purple skin and white hair. She is an inspiring leader and manages extra crew when they're hired on. While she's honest and forthright, she is never deliberately mean.

HAUNTED OR NOT?

The crew has claimed the *Marcuria* for cargo transportation, but they've run into a problem. They offer free passage to the party's destination in exchange for investigating strange happenings aboard the ship. They believe a ghost is preventing their ship from moving; even though the anchor is up, the ship won't budge. Additionally, the furniture rearranges itself, doors open and close on their own, and faint whispers can be heard in the vessel at night.

INVESTIGATING THE SHIP

There's no cargo currently on the ship, but the quarters, sails, and rope are surprisingly intact and no vermin infest the hold.

Clues. A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check or spends 30 minutes inspecting the ship finds a 1-foot-diameter round indentation in the deck next to the center mast. A *detect magic* spell shows faint traces of transmutation magic throughout the ship; the Divine Sense feature and similar effects don't detect any Undead.

Ghostly Phenomena. When the characters board the *Marcuria*, roll on or choose from the Ghostly Phenomena table below to determine what eerie event the characters encounter. As they continue to explore, you can roll for additional encounters, but don't repeat a result.

GHOSTLY PHENOMENA

d6	ENCOUNTER
1	A character hears the anchor suddenly crash into the water with a loud splash, but the anchor is still stowed.
2	Characters with a passive Perception of 13 or higher notice a lack of footprints in the dust around furniture or doors, indicating that no one is physically faking a haunting.
3	One of the booms swings wildly at a character on deck. The target must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the character falls over and a woman's giggling rings through the ship.
4	A vision sweeps through the characters' minds of a lush green field alongside a sandy beach, leaving them with a sense of calm and safety.
5	The door to the captain's quarters creaks open invitingly. The bed is made and candles are lit, casting warm light throughout the room.
6	A feminine chuckle echoes through the hold.

HER CHOSEN CREW

After a character finds the round indentation, a piercing voice calls for help from the bottom deck. The sailors come aboard to investigate, as they've never heard clear words in any of the hauntings. If the characters join them, the *Marcuria* senses that the sailors and characters are her next crew. She telepathically speaks to them in a bright, playful voice. She shares that she is bound to the harbor and needs a disc to sail, but she struggles to recall details. Before she can leave the docks, they must "find her soul," the disc, which she says is with a member of her first crew.

Tristan is intrigued by the *Marcuria* and senses her value. However, he and his crew are more sailors than adventurers, so they're willing to partner with the characters for a chance to unlock the ship's secrets. If the characters can find the disc, they can join his crew as equal owners of the *Marcuria*. If the characters agree with this plan, Tristan suggests that they visit the harbormaster, who should have information about the ship's former owners.

FINDING THE OLD CREW

The harbormaster's office is a short walk from the docks, and the harbormaster is present during daylight hours.

HARBORMASTER'S OFFICE

The harbormaster is a silver dragonborn who takes great pride in their appearance. They manage the docks,

including the ships in storage, and while they tend to be short when speaking due to years of dealing with the bureaucracy of a city position, they aren't rude.

A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check or pays 20 gp as a bribe convinces the harbormaster to reveal that the ship was prepaid for five years to stay docked. The payment expires in a few days and the ship appears abandoned, so the harbormaster will allow Tristan and his crew to formally and legally claim possession of the *Marcuria* unless the owner steps forward. The owner is registered as the Opal Trading Company.

The characters can explore the city to find information about the Opal Trading Company. Cityfolk suggest that the best place to learn about trading companies is to talk to locals at an upscale dockside tavern called the Golden Mermaid. Pub patrons recall hearing the company name mentioned by a regular, a minotaur who owns a cartographer's shop called Rose of the Winds.

ROSE OF THE WINDS

Samuel Tai is an elderly minotaur with graying brown fur. He is a charismatic cartographer, former navigator of the *Marcuria*, and the last surviving member of the Opal Trading Company. Hopeful that she has found her next crew, Samuel eagerly asks why the characters are looking for him and why they're interested in the ship.

If the characters admit they heard a voice aboard the ship and she requested they find her soul, Samuel lights up, as this means the *Marcuria* has chosen her next crew. While he doesn't know her full history, he explains that ownership transferred from her original crew down over generations and that he is the last remaining descendant. Stories passed with the disc tell tales of a living ship with the ability to use magic—the disc restores a part of that magic. After sailing with her for many years, Samuel took the disc when he retired to keep *Marcuria* safe from those who would abuse her potential.

He proudly passes on the circular disc, which is made from a large opal and shimmers in the light. An *identify* spell reveals the disc is a powerful object with traces of transmutation magic created by an archfey.

Samuel runs a full shop that sells basic adventuring gear, including rations made for long voyages at sea, cartographer's tools, navigator's tools, and sea charts (ranging from 10 gp to 500 gp depending on the map's size and level of detail). With the disc acquired, the characters can return to the ship to discover her secrets.

UNLOCKING THE MARCURIA

When a character places the disc, a wave of magic sweeps over the ship, turning the hull a brilliant cobalt blue. The *Marcuria* awakens, now able to sail freely. She

manifests as a faint shape of a woman in the center mast, and her voice speaks in their minds, where she shares her memories of seafaring with her former crews. Until she awakens further, her memory is spotty and she can't remember past that.

After the first disc is placed, an identical indentation appears in the deck next to the first. *Marcuria* can't recall any details about the second indentation or disc; if the characters ask Samuel, he says that his company never discovered any information about a second disc, but the stories he grew up with say that *Marcuria* could sail anywhere, from the stormiest seas to the starry night skies.

The harbormaster honors the claim from Captain Sunsail's crew, and they take ownership of the ship. The four sailors plus the characters are now considered members of the *Marcuria*'s crew.

SAILING ABOARD THE MARCURIA

The characters can now travel the ocean for free on the *Marcuria*. Marcuria, the fragment of the archfey who remains in the ship, repairs the ship's wear and tear with her Mindful Repairs trait. The crew handles working the sails and transferring cargo.

The sliver of Marcuria's soul generally treats the crew like siblings. Protective and playful, she's always willing to help—especially if they get rid of unattractive barnacles or add more flair to the ship. Her magic comes from the bond and love for her crew.

WHERE TO GO?

Marcuria can be consulted for navigation. However, she has gaps in her memory, and the world has changed since the last time she sailed. At your discretion, she might have a 10% chance of mistakenly leading the crew in the wrong direction until she's fully restored.

SHIP DOWNTIME

When the characters aren't using the ship, the rest of the crew runs legitimate cargo jobs, transporting goods and travelers. Tristan can share adventure hooks with the characters (see "Further Adventures with the *Marcuria*" later in the article). The sailors consider their agreement equitable, removing any need for bookkeeping. Tristan, Gemma, Ati, or Zar'less can teach the characters to sail as you see fit.

A MISSING HEART IN THE AIR

The characters should be 5th level or higher to start their next adventure on the *Marcuria*. The next time they come aboard, Marcuria gathers them around the mast and tells them, "Through our bond, I have remembered more! We must find my heart."

Now that she's bonded with her crew, Marcuria remembers more about the second indentation and disc. She can't recall what abilities she'll gain, but she knows placing the second disc will make her stronger. In addition, she has a rough memory of its location—a thriving metropolis called Valaize, host to a grand tower with a guardian who offered to protect the disc. Samuel and Gemma aren't familiar with Valaize, but Samuel has a map of the area; a character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check recalls the general location of the city—and knows that it vanished when the barren desert swallowed it (see "Buried Knowledge" below).

BURIED KNOWLEDGE

The characters travel to the arid expanse, only to find the vast desert has swallowed the ancient city. This once-thriving city is now a line of partially buried docks, a section of dilapidated streets and buildings, and a crumbling central tower that protects the second disc.

Roll on or choose from the Ancient City Encounters table below at least three times (without repeating a result) to determine what the characters discover while searching for the disc. After the second random encounter, any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher hears singing from the top of the tower. A character who speaks Celestial understands that the song is about a deep love for the stars in the sky.

All paths lead to the central tower, and the tower's front door swings open as the characters approach. Five flights of stairs lead up the tower, and all rooms aside from the last room at the top are sealed and inaccessible.

A **guardian naga** waits in the room, aware of the characters' presence. She was entrusted with the disc, which is made of lapis lazuli and gleams serenely in the light, by one of the original crew members and has guarded it ever since. She gives this riddle and awards the disc if it's answered correctly (the naga lets them try until they succeed):

"What can't be kept unless given, and if betrayed will break?"

The answer is “trust,” which can be outright solved, figured out by a character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence check, or found by asking Marcuria. If the characters are stumped, the guardian naga tells them to return when they’ve learned the answer.

Once the characters have earned the disc, the naga explains where it came from. The *Marcuria*’s crew was concerned that the ship would be used as a weapon in the wrong hands. Captain Brytak, the half-elf captain in charge of the second disc, brought it to the naga when he retired—they were old friends, and the naga was pleased to protect someone so important to him.

ANCIENT CITY ENCOUNTERS

d10	ENCOUNTER
1	Four gargoyles hiding in an alley wait for the characters to pass by and attack from behind.
2	A shop door is ajar, leading into an old clothing store. Inside is an intact green scarf with an owl emblem.
3	Part of the ground gives way when a character of the GM’s choice steps on it. They must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall into a 10-foot-deep pit and take 1d6 bludgeoning damage.
4	Two swarms of poisonous snakes slither into the road. They only observe the characters unless provoked.
5	A cloaker flies out of a dark corner and attacks the characters.
6	A broken shop door hangs loosely on its hinges. Everything inside has been pillaged except one chest. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves’ tools or a DC 18 Strength check finds ancient coins worth 200 gp (or 500 gp to a historian or collector).
7	A rat sitting calmly in the middle of the road looks at the characters with curiosity. He can be befriended with food.
8	This part of the road is blocked by rubble. A character who succeeds on a DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check can climb up the rubble to a rooftop and kick it over to clear a path down the road.
9	A shop door stands wide open. A shattered humanoid skeleton is scattered on the floor. The remains of its hand are curled around a few ancient coins (see row 6).
10	Two giant scorpions are fighting each other on the road. If the characters don’t intervene, one emerges the victor and limps to a cave to recover.

AWAKENING THE MARCURIA

Once the lapis lazuli disc is secured, the characters can return to the ship and place it in the second indentation. A third indentation appears, and the *awakened Marcuria* shimmers as a wave of magic flows through the ship (see “Marcuria Statistics” at the end of the article). Her form in the mast becomes more lifelike and living plants adorn the top deck. The *Marcuria* can now travel the skies!

The floor of the bottom deck turns clear, providing an incredible view below the ship. The faint outline of a doorway appears; the *Marcuria* can now provide a place to rest with her Home Base trait. The entrance appears on the port side of the bottom deck, and ornate vines and flowers decorate the arched door. While in the air, a bank of clouds forms under the ship that can conceal it from view below.

A PSYCHE COMPLETE IN THE STARS

The characters should be 10th level or higher to receive their final adventure for the *Marcuria*. They receive a message from Marcuria, who requests they “find her psyche.”

Marcuria is completely loyal to and protective of the crew; she’s remembered that the third indentation restores her full power and memories. Trusting the characters with that power—and herself—she directs them to the edge of a jungle. There, a minotaur named Miriam from her original crew stored the third disc within a temple dedicated to a goddess of the skies. A character who succeeds on a DC 17 Intelligence (History or Religion) check or spends three days researching in a library finds records of this temple.

TWISTED FATE

The characters discover an arid crater when they arrive in the jungle. The temple now stands on an island floating above the blasted landscape, warped by an Undead presence. Withered vines and fungus have overgrown the once-beautiful temple that worshipped a forgotten goddess. The ground on the island, including inside the temple, is difficult terrain.

Roll on or choose from the Undead Temple Encounters table below at least twice (without repeating a result) to determine what the characters find while searching for the disc.

UNDEAD TEMPLE ENCOUNTERS

d10	ENCOUNTER
1	The character at the front of the party steps on an invisible mushroom, expelling spores into the air. They must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or be poisoned for one hour.
2	Four wraiths rise from the ground and attack the characters.
3	Six mummies in rotting armor shuffle on patrol, using a well-worn and obvious path. The characters must succeed on a DC 17 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to sneak past them.
4	A character of your choice finds an old medallion bearing three stars surrounded by a vine wreath on the ground. It acts like an <i>amulet of health</i> .
5	A fully intact skeleton wearing the remains of a dress leans against a stone. If the characters use the <i>speak with dead</i> spell to question her, the skeleton struggles to explain that Lady Selete, the goddess of exploration and navigation, was worshipped at this temple until the head priest's lust for power turned him into a mummy lord.
6	An undead tree (which uses the treant stat block but the creature's type is Undead) shivers into animation and attacks.
7	The skull of a tyrannosaurus rex is lying among the trees, thickly covered in fungus. The area contains no other bones or clues about where the skull came from.
8	A crumbling statue of a high priest is surprisingly clear of vines and fungus. If touched, it releases a 30-foot-radius blast of fire and each creature in range must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
9	Four air elementals float 30 feet above a small clearing. They attack if provoked.
10	A ruined journal lies on the floor in the remains of an old room. In one legible section, the writer expresses concern over the head priest wanting to become a god himself.

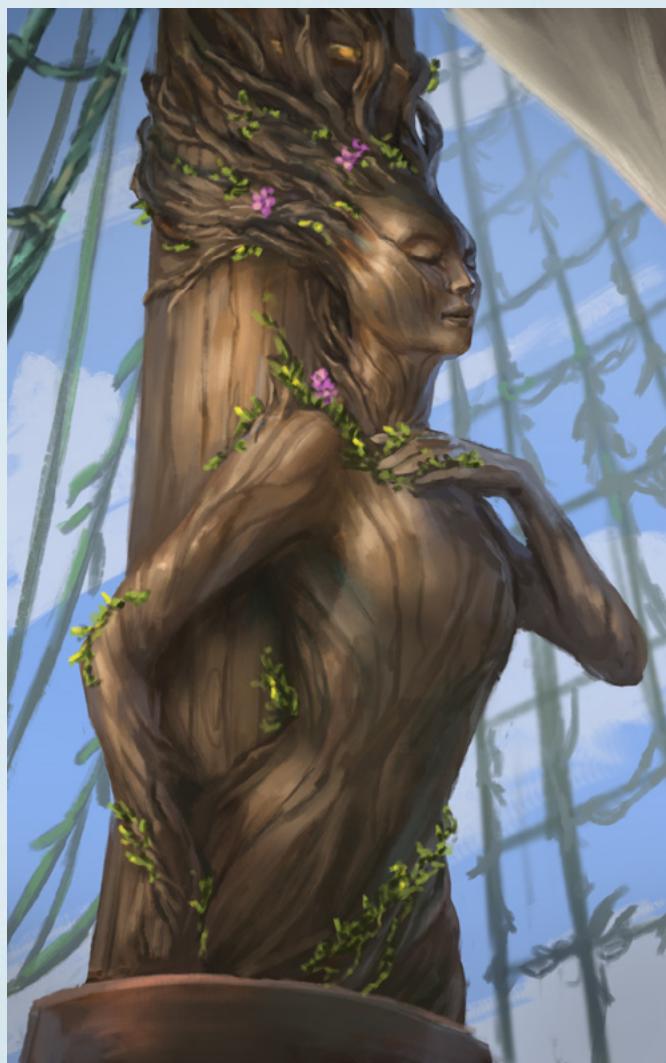
Inside the temple's main chamber lurks Patriarch Jehan, a **mummy lord**. Once the head priest of this temple, Jehan came to believe his potential vastly outweighed that of the gods. After undertaking a blasphemous ritual to lengthen his life, he has continued to pursue dark magic, riches, and artifacts to grow his power. He knows the disc is unique but doesn't know what it's for; he's only interested in its value, and he attacks when the characters make it clear they want the disc.

To adjust the combat for your party, you can run the mummy lord inside the lair for a higher-level party or outside for a lower-level party. The **archmage** stat block is another good alternative for lower-level parties.

Once Jehan is defeated, the characters discover the disc, which is made of chondrite and glitters like an ocean of stars, in his treasure hoard. Additionally, they find a *robe of eyes*, a *staff of power*, 3,000 gp worth of diamonds, 100 pp in currency long out of use (worth 200 pp to historians and collectors), and a ceremonial scepter worth 1,000 gp.

RESTORING THE MARCRIA

Once the characters place the chondrite disc in the *Marcuria*'s third indentation, the ship shakes as magic restores her to her final construction, the **restored Marcuria** (see "Marcuria Statistics" at the end of the article). Her appearance in the mast becomes lifelike, with long, floating hair, elven ears, and a feminine fey form. Her memories and abilities are intact, and the crew can now travel the Sea of Stars on the *Marcuria*.



Marcuria can also cast *transport via plants* as though her mast was a tree, and her mast acts as an inanimate plant for use with the spell.

Marcuria knows how to maintain natural gravity on the ship with fresh, breathable air in a 150-foot-radius bubble surrounding it. When the ship is configured for astral travel, the image of *Marcuria* in the mast becomes a wooden seated helm that she cradles with her arms. However, the seated helm is not required for space travel; asking *Marcuria* to travel to the destination is equally effective.

If the characters choose to find *Marcuria* in the Feywild, the archfey is delighted to see them in person. The essence she imbued in the ship allows her to exist in both the Feywild and the ship, and she is thrilled with the arrangement. She encourages the characters to take her on more adventures.

FURTHER ADVENTURES WITH THE MARCURIA

Once the players have the restored *Marcuria*, you can use the following plot hooks to continue her story:

Call Me Josiah. Tristan accepts a contract to take a veteran fisherman named Josiah on an expedition to find a legendary hound shark he hopes to befriend (see the end of the article for their stat block). The area is patrolled by sahuagin, so caution is advised.

The Original Crew. *Marcuria*'s description of Miriam sounds like a clear connection to Samuel's ancestor, and the guardian naga mentioned Captain Brytak. These two names could lead to stories of the original crew and their descendants, for which *Marcuria* would grant a boon.

Exploring the Sea of Stars. Tristan has dropped hints to his trusted network that they can travel through the Sea of Stars. A group of refugees requests transportation to another world to escape the hunters pursuing them.

MARCURIA STATISTICS

The *Marcuria* uses the Ship Rules from “The Ballad of Captain Shivershank” by Willy Abeel in [ARCADIA 27](#), included below. Unlike mundane ships, however, the *Marcuria* is a sentient being with a special stat block; instead of hit points, she can endure a maximum number of hits, as described in the “Ship Rules” section below.

Crew Size. The *Marcuria* needs four crew to operate at a minimum.

THE MARCURIA

Gargantuan Ship

Armor Class 15

Hit Max 14

Speed 60 ft. (10 miles per hour out of combat)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, dazed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Control Sails. At the start of a day's journey, roll a d6 to see if *Marcuria* can maintain a strong wind in the sails, keeping the ship on course regardless of weather. On a roll of 1, this trait doesn't function until the next day.

Fey Endurance. When the *Marcuria* takes her maximum number of hits, she doesn't sink but instead becomes a mundane *mid boat*.

Mindful Repairs. *Marcuria* can cast *mending* at will to repair everyday wear and tear on the ship.

Smooth Sailing. While aboard the *Marcuria*, a creature can't suffer from motion sickness.

ACTIONS

Maneuvers. The *Marcuria* takes the Dash or Dodge action.

Cannon (Recharge 5–6). The *Marcuria* fires a magical cannonball at a point within 150 feet of her. Each creature within a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) force damage and 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.



AWAKENED MARCRIA

Gargantuan Ship

Armor Class 16

Hit Max 18

Speed 60 ft., fly 60 ft. (10 miles per hour out of combat)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+1)	15 (+2)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, dazed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Cloud Concealment. While flying, a layer of clouds forms under the *Marcuria*, giving disadvantage on ability checks made to detect the *Marcuria* to creatures below it.

Control Sails. At the start of a day's journey, *Marcuria* must make a DC 10 Wisdom check to maintain a strong wind in the sails, keeping the ship on course regardless of weather. On a failed check, this trait doesn't function until the next day.

Enhanced Repairs. *Marcuria* can cast *mending* to repair everyday wear and tear on the ship. At the end of every hour, her hit count is reduced by 1.

Fey Endurance. When the *Marcuria* takes her maximum number of hits, she doesn't sink but instead becomes a mundane *mid boat*.

Home Base. The *Marcuria* can cast *magnificent mansion* once per day, requiring no material components. The entrance appears on the port side of the bottom deck; vines and flowers decorate the arched door.

Smooth Sailing. While aboard the *Marcuria*, a creature can't suffer from motion sickness.

Telepathic Interpreter. The *Marcuria* understands the language of and can communicate telepathically with any creature touching the ship who speaks at least one language.

ACTIONS

Double Ballista. The *Marcuria* makes two Ballista attacks.

Ballista. Ranged Spell Attack: +6 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d10) force damage.

Maneuvers. The *Marcuria* takes the Dash or Dodge action.

Cannon (Recharge 5–6). The *Marcuria* fires a magical cannonball at a point within 150 feet of her. Each creature within a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) force damage and 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The area is filled with fire, which spreads around corners and ignites flammable objects in the area that aren't being worn or carried. The DC for the Dexterity saving throw is shown on the Ship Categories table.

SHIP RULES

Ship combat can be as simple or as complex as you prefer. These boat rules are quick and keep the action on the adventurers:

- Boats act on initiative count 20, rolling a d20 to determine order amongst themselves. Boats act before characters and lair actions with the same initiative.
- On its turn, a boat with a helmsperson (or someone steering it) can move and use a special action, as described in the Ship Categories table.
- Mid boats and big ships have access to the Cannon special action described below. The saving throw DC is listed next to the action in the Ship Categories table. Small boats can take either the Dash action or the Dodge action on their turn, but not both.
- Each time a boat takes any damage from a siege weapon (including another ship's cannon) or a spell that doesn't deal psychic or poison damage, it takes a hit. A boat has a maximum number of hits it can take before sinking, which is listed in the Ship Categories table.
- A creature can use their action to help repair the boat where it was hit, temporarily reducing its hit count by 1 for 1 hour. A creature that repairs the boat during a long rest reduces its hit count by 2 (to a minimum of 0).
- When a boat takes 20 or more damage in a single hit, it tilts 45 degrees in a direction of the GM's choice. Until the start of the boat's next turn, its surfaces are considered difficult terrain.

Cannon (Recharge 5–6). The ship fires a cannonball at a point within 150 feet of it. Each creature within a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage and 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The area is filled with fire, which spreads around corners and ignites flammable objects in the area that aren't being worn or carried. The DC for the Dexterity saving throw is shown on the Ship Categories table.

RESTORED MARCRIA

Gargantuan Ship

Armor Class 17

Hit Max 20

Speed 60 ft., fly 60 ft. (10 miles per hour out of combat)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, dazed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, incapacitated, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, stunned, unconscious

Astral Travel. The *Marcuria* can travel 100 million miles in 24 hours in the Sea of Stars. Once the *Marcuria* detects gravity, she uses her flying speed.

Cloud Concealment. While flying, a layer of clouds forms under the *Marcuria*, giving disadvantage on ability checks made to detect the *Marcuria* to creatures below it.

Control Sails. At the start of a day's journey, Marcuria must make a DC 10 Wisdom check to maintain a strong wind in the sails, keeping the ship on course regardless of weather. On a failed check, this trait doesn't function until the next day.

Enhanced Repairs. Marcuria can cast *mending* at will to repair everyday wear and tear on the ship. At the end of every hour, her hit count is reduced by 2.

Fey Endurance. When the *Marcuria* takes her maximum number of hits, she doesn't sink but instead becomes a mundane *mid boat*.

Smooth Sailing. While aboard the *Marcuria*, a creature can't suffer from motion sickness.

Telepathic Interpreter. The *Marcuria* understands the language of and can communicate telepathically with any creature touching the ship.

ACTIONS

Double Ballista. The *Marcuria* makes two Ballista attacks.

Ballista. Ranged Spell Attack: +7 to hit, range 240 ft., one target. Hit: 16 (3d10) force damage.

Maneuvers. The *Marcuria* takes the Dash or Dodge action.

Cannon (Recharge 5–6). The *Marcuria* fires a magical cannonball at a point within 150 feet of her. Each creature within a 20-foot-radius sphere centered on that point must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) force damage and 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Remembrance. The *Marcuria* can cast the following spells, requiring no material components (spell save DC 16):

1/day each: *banishment*, *heroes' feast*, *magnificent mansion*, *transport via plants*

BONUS ACTIONS

Fey Grace. Once per day, the *Marcuria* can teleport herself, including everything and everyone on the ship, up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space that she can see.

SHIP CATEGORIES

CATEGORY	TYPICAL CREW SIZE	AC	HIT MAX	STR SAVE	DEX SAVE	SPEED	SPECIAL ACTIONS
<u>Small Boat</u> (rowboats, skiffs)	1–3	12	6	+0	+4	15 feet	Dash, Dodge
<u>Mid Boat</u> (sloops, schooners)	10–20	14	12	+2	+4	40 feet	Cannon (DC 10)
<u>Big Ship</u> (barques, galleons)	30–100	16	18	+4	+2	60 feet	Cannon (DC 14)

HOUND SHARK

A smaller species of hunter shark, hounds relentlessly stalk their prey through the oceans.

HOUND SHARK

Medium Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 26 (4d8 + 8)

Speed 5 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +2, Survival +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +2

Aquatic Tremorsense. While the shark is touching a body of water, they can detect and pinpoint the origin of vibrations in the same body of water within 60 feet of them.

Blood Frenzy. The shark has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature who doesn't have all their hit points.

Water Breathing. The shark can breathe only underwater.

ACTIONS

Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage.

BONUS ACTIONS

Hound Sense. The shark acquires a quarry by smelling a creature or an object within 40 feet of them that they can see. If the shark smells an object, their quarry is the last creature to handle the object for at least 5 minutes within the last 10 days. Otherwise, their quarry is the creature they smelled. For the next 24 hours, or until the shark uses this bonus action again, the shark can use their sense of smell to track their quarry. They know the direction to the quarry's location provided the quarry is on the same plane of existence as them.

Unstoppable Hunt (Recharge 6). The shark moves up to their speed without provoking opportunity attacks toward their quarry (see Hound Sense), provided they can see their quarry.

HOUND SHARK COMPANION

The hound shark companion stat block uses the rules found in *Beastheart and Monstrous Companions*. When a beastheart with a hound shark companion uses an exploit that refers to the companion's walking speed, such as Drag Them, use the hound shark's swimming speed instead.

The hound shark companion is great for underwater campaigns, but a generous GM can give a character with a shark companion some of the magic items from "Swimming Through Sand to Sea: More Mounted Adventuring" by Willy Abeel in *ARCADIA 4*, so their shark friend can also accompany them on land

HOUND SHARK COMPANION

Medium Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 13 plus PB (natural armor)

Hit Points 7 + seven times caregiver's level (number of d8 Hit

Dice equal to their caregiver's level)

Speed 5 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Str +3 plus PB, Dex +1 plus PB

Skills Perception +0 plus PB, Survival +0 plus PB

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10 plus PB

Languages —

Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the caregiver's bonus

Aquatic Tremorsense. While the shark is touching a body of water, they can detect and pinpoint the origin of vibrations in the same body of water within 60 feet of them.

Water Breathing. The shark can breathe only underwater.

ACTIONS

Signature Attack (Bite). Melee Weapon Attack: +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d6 plus PB piercing damage.

1st Level: Overwhelming Attack (2 Ferocity). The shark makes a signature attack. On a hit, the attack deals an extra PB damage, and the target can't take reactions until the start of the shark's next turn.

3rd Level: Circling Strike (5 Ferocity). The shark chooses a creature within 5 feet of them. The target must make a DC 10 plus PB Wisdom (Perception) check. On a failed check, the shark makes a signature attack with advantage against the target and deals an extra PBd4 damage on a hit. On a successful check, the shark makes a signature attack against the target.

5th Level: Chompfest (8 Ferocity). The shark moves up to their speed without provoking opportunity attacks. Before, during, or after this movement, the shark can make one signature attack against up to PB creatures.

BONUS ACTIONS

Hound Sense (1/Day). The shark acquires a quarry by smelling a creature or an object within 40 feet of them that they can see. If the shark smells an object, their quarry is the last creature to handle the object for at least 5 minutes within the last 10 days. Otherwise, their quarry is the creature they smelled. For the next 24 hours, or until the shark uses this bonus action again, the shark can use their sense of smell to track their quarry. They know the direction to the quarry's location provided the quarry is on the same plane of existence as them.

MYSTIC CONNECTION: HOUND SHARK

If you're playing a beastheart and have a hound shark companion, you gain the following benefit at 9th level when you gain the beastheart's Mystic Connection feature:

Blood Scent. You gain a swimming speed equal to your walking speed. Additionally, as an action, you enter a blood frenzy for 1 minute. While frenzied, you have advantage on attack rolls against any creature who doesn't have all their hit points. You can't use this benefit again until you finish a long rest.

CREW STATISTICS

This section contains the stat blocks for the *Marcuria*'s crew, using the retainers rules from *Flee, Mortals!* which have been reprinted here for your convenience.

A **retainer** is a sapient creature who adventures alongside the player characters. Each retainer is a less experienced adventurer who a player character can take under their wing. Retainers are never meant to achieve the same power level as the player characters.

MENTOR

Every retainer has a player character **mentor**. A retainer's mentor gives them orders, and the mentor's player also controls the retainer. A retainer acts on the same initiative count as their mentor in combat, acting immediately before or after the mentor (player's choice). As a mentor gains experience and levels up, so does their retainer (see "Statistics" below).

STATISTICS

Retainers are designed to be easy to run so their player (who is already managing a complex character) doesn't get overwhelmed with even more details. Each retainer has a simple stat block—though these are similar to other creature stat blocks, retainers follow a few different rules.

LEVEL

A retainer's level equals their mentor's level. As a retainer levels up, their hit points increase (see "Hit Points and Hit Dice") and they gain combat features (see "Features"). Additionally, a few of their statistics increase when their mentor's proficiency bonus does, including attack bonuses, skills, and save DC (see "Proficiency Bonus"). Their other statistics typically remain the same regardless of their level.

ARMOR CLASS

Unlike player characters, a retainer's armor class isn't determined by a particular set of armor they don (like studded leather). Instead, each retainer's armor class is simplified to one of three armor types:

- Retainers with light armor have AC 13.
- Retainers with medium armor have AC 15.
- Retainers with heavy armor have AC 18.

HIT POINTS AND HIT DICE

Retainers gain one Hit Die per level. Their hit point maximum is based on the size of their Hit Die, as shown on the Retainer Hit Points table.

RETAINER HIT POINTS

HIT DIE SIZE	HIT POINT MAXIMUM
d6	6 times their level
d8	7 times their level
d10	8 times their level
d12	9 times their level

Retainers have exceptionally high hit points—sometimes even higher than their mentor. This allows the party to enjoy the presence of a beloved retainer without worrying about losing them to an unlucky roll of the dice or decision by a single player. The GM often awards characters with retainers in lieu of other treasure. Such rewards shouldn't be lost easily.

PROFICIENCY BONUS

Because a retainer's effectiveness and survivability depend on the training and expertise of their mentor, a retainer's proficiency bonus is equal to their mentor's proficiency bonus.

Some of a retainer's statistics refer to their proficiency bonus, abbreviated as PB. Other statistics use a number of dice equal to a retainer's proficiency bonus; these are expressed with PB in place of the number of dice. For example, if a retainer has a +3 proficiency bonus, PBd10 means 3d10.

A retainer adds their proficiency bonus to any saving throw they make.

FEATURES

Each retainer has a **signature attack** they can make using the Attack action each round. Retainers can use their signature attack to make opportunity attacks, even if their signature attack isn't a melee weapon attack.

A retainer gains new features at 3rd, 5th, and 7th level. Some features can only be used a certain number of times per day (as noted in the retainer's stat block).

Additionally, if a retainer's signature attack is a weapon attack, they typically gain an extra attack at 7th level (as noted in their stat block), allowing them to make two signature attacks per round instead of one.

GEAR

When a retainer joins the party, they typically carry clothes appropriate to their position, a suit of armor, a weapon, and an explorer's pack. If the retainer casts spells, they also carry a spellcasting implement. Any additional equipment must be provided to them by their mentor.

Magic Items. Retainers can use magic items like anyone else. For example, a +1 weapon increases their

attack and damage rolls by 1, and +1 armor of the appropriate type (light, medium, or heavy) increases their AC by 1.

One happy side effect of having retainers is that as a player character levels up and acquires better equipment, they can pass their obsolete items on to the retainer.

DYING RETAINERS

When a retainer is reduced to 0 hit points, they follow the same rules as player characters. If not killed instantly by massive damage, they fall unconscious, make death saving throws, and can be stabilized or healed.

OPTIONAL RULE: SHARED ATTACKS

If a player wants to speed up their retainer's turn, they can make **shared attacks** at the GM's discretion.

When the mentor hits a creature with an attack, if their retainer can see or hear them, the retainer is inspired by their mentor's success. On the inspired retainer's next turn, for each successful attack their mentor just made, the retainer can automatically hit a creature of their choice within range with their signature attack, up to the number of attacks the retainer can make.

If the mentor hit with fewer attacks than the number of attacks the retainer can make, the retainer can make additional attack rolls for those attacks to see if they hit.

RETAINER ENCOUNTER BALANCE

When building encounters, the GM should consider a retainer as akin to a powerful combat-focused magic item. A retainer gives a party a significant power boost; they not only dish out more damage and provide more hit points for enemies to target, but they also create complications to challenge the party's foes. GMs can increase encounter difficulty by one step (from easy to medium, hard to deadly, and so forth) to properly challenge a group of characters with a retainer.

TRISTAN SUNSAIL (RETAINER)

Medium Humanoid (Human), Chaotic Good

Armor Class 15 (medium)

Hit Points Seven times their level (number of d8 Hit Dice equal to their level)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws +PB to all

Skills Deception +2 plus PB, Perception +0 plus PB, Persuasion +2 plus PB

Senses passive Perception 10 plus PB

Languages Common, Dwarvish

Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the mentor's bonus

Signature Attack (Rapier). Melee Weapon Attack: +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft, one target. *Hit:* 1d8 plus PB slashing damage. Beginning at 7th level, Tristan can make this attack twice, instead of once, when he takes the Attack action on his turn.

FEATURES

3rd Level: Finishing Flourish (3/Day). As a bonus action, Tristan makes a ranged spell attack (+3 plus PB to hit) against a target within 120 feet of him. On a hit, the target takes 1d10 plus PB force damage.

5th Level: Plucky (3/Day). When Tristan misses with an attack roll or fails an ability check or saving throw, he can reroll the die and must use the new roll (no action required).

7th Level: Stylish Swipe (3/Day). Once per turn when Tristan hits with a signature attack, the target takes an extra PBd10 slashing damage (no action required).

GEMMA BIMPNOTTIN (RETAINER)

Small Humanoid (Gnome), Chaotic Good

Armor Class 15 (medium)

Hit Points Seven times their level (number of d8 Hit Dice equal to their level)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws +PB to all

Skills History +1 plus PB, Investigation +1 plus PB

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Gnomish

Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the mentor's bonus

Signature Attack (Spiked Shortbow). Melee or Ranged

Weapon Attack: +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 80/320 ft., one target. Hit: 1d6 plus PB piercing damage. Beginning at 7th level, Gemma can make this attack twice, instead of once, when she takes the Attack action on her turn.

FEATURES

3rd Level: Swift Retreat (3/Day). As a bonus action, Gemma takes the Disengage or Hide action.

5th Level: Sniper Shot (3/Day). As an action, Gemma makes a signature attack against a creature within 320 feet of her. She doesn't have disadvantage for attacking at long range for this attack. On a hit, the attack deals an extra PBd6 piercing damage.

7th Level: Gnomish Spirits (3/Day). As a bonus action, Gemma splashes the contents of a small vial on a willing creature's armor. For 1 minute, a creature wearing the armor gains a +2 bonus to AC and has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

ATI TREVEDI (RETAINER)

Medium Humanoid (Tiefling), Chaotic Good

Armor Class 15 (medium)

Hit Points Seven times their level (number of d8 Hit Dice equal to their level)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)

Saving Throws +PB to all

Skills Medicine +1 plus PB, Religion +0 plus PB

Damage Resistances fire

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Infernal

Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the mentor's bonus

Signature Attack (Daggers). Melee or Ranged Weapon

Attack: +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 2d4 plus PB piercing damage. Beginning at 7th level, Ati can make this attack twice, instead of once, when he takes the Attack action on his turn.

FEATURES

3rd Level: Ship Medic (3/Day). As an action, Ati restores PBd6 hit points to a creature within 5 feet of him.

5th Level: Compassionate Blessing (3/Day). As an action, Ati chooses up to three creatures he can see within 30 feet of him. Each target gains temporary hit points equal to twice his PB. Additionally, a target gains a +2 bonus to damage rolls made with a weapon for 1 minute.

7th Level: Muscle Memory (3/Day). Once per turn when Ati hits with a signature attack, he unfurls three hidden daggers and the target takes an additional PBd12 piercing damage (no action required).

ZAR'LESS (RETAINER)

Medium Humanoid (*Elf*), Chaotic Good

Armor Class 15 (medium)

Hit Points Seven times their level (number of d8 Hit Dice equal to their level)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws +PB to all

Skills Athletics +3 plus PB, Persuasion +0 plus PB

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Elvish

Proficiency Bonus (PB) equals the mentor's bonus

Signature Attack (Unarmed Strike). Melee Weapon Attack: +3 plus PB to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d6 plus PB bludgeoning damage, and Zar'less can use a bonus action to attempt to grapple the target. Beginning at 7th level, Zar'less

can make this attack twice, instead of once, when she takes the Attack action on her turn. Zar'less's melee attacks are magical.

FEATURES

3rd Level: Boatswain's Order (3/Day). When a creature Zar'less can see within 30 feet of her makes an attack roll or a saving throw, she can use her reaction to shout a command. If the creature can hear and understand her, they can add a d6 to their roll.

5th Level: Haymaker (3/Day). As an action, Zar'less makes a signature attack against a creature within range. On a hit, the target is dazed¹ until the end of their next turn.

7th Level: Knockout (3/Day). When Zar'less hits with a signature attack, the target has disadvantage on attack rolls and saving throws until the end of their next turn.

¹ See the Glossary at the end of this issue for more information on the dazed condition.

GLOSSARY

In recent issues of ARCADIA, we've begun to incorporate terminology from the upcoming *Flee, Mortals! The MCDM Monster Book*. These describe new rules designed to make combat encounters easier to run, more fun, and more memorable. Rather than scatter definitions throughout individual articles, this glossary provides a reference for terms used in ARCADIA.

COMPANION CREATURES

Companions are wild allies who adventure with characters. Each companion has unique traits and actions that make them a great ally. Every companion has a player character **caregiver** who commands the creature. The caregiver's player controls the companion most of the time during the game, though the GM can step in to take control if the companion and caregiver are separated, or if the caregiver mistreats the companion in some way.

The full rules for companion creatures are described in *Beastheart and Monstrous Companions*, as well as the packets available for backers of *Flee, Mortals!*

CONDITIONS

Some creatures inflict—or are immune to—the following new condition.

DAZED

A dazed creature can only do one of the following things on their turn: move, use an action, or use a bonus action. If a creature becomes dazed during their turn, their turn ends. The *lesser restoration* spell and *greater restoration* spell remove the dazed condition. At the GM's discretion, other powers, spells, or effects might also remove the dazed condition.

When a dazed creature is affected by a spell or effect that gives them an extra action on their turn (like the *haste* spell or the fighter's Action Surge feature), they can still take this extra action, in addition to the movement, action, or bonus action allowed by the dazed condition.

Some creatures have immunity to the dazed condition. At the GM's discretion, a creature published in another supplement who has immunity to the paralyzed or stunned condition also has immunity to the dazed condition.

MUNDANE AND SUPERNATURAL

The term **mundane** refers to attacks, items, and effects that are not magical, psionic, or otherwise supernatural.

On the other hand, the term **supernatural** describes an effect or item that is either magical or psionic. For instance, a creature's stat block might say they're resistant to "bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from attacks that aren't supernatural." This means that when you deal them bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage using a spell, power, magic weapon, or psionic weapon, the damage is supernatural and thus the creature isn't resistant to it.

VILLAIN ACTIONS

Some creatures are designed to be bosses: enemies who can take on an entire party by themselves or with a handful of underlings. These creatures have three **villain actions** they can use after an enemy creature's turn. Villain actions are similar to legendary actions with the following exceptions:

- A creature can only use one villain action per round (as such, villain actions tend to be more powerful than legendary actions).
- Each villain action can only be used once during a combat encounter.

Like legendary actions, a creature can't use villain actions if incapacitated or otherwise unable to take actions.

CHOOSING VILLAIN ACTIONS

Each trio of villain actions has a recommended round order. These abilities give the battle a logical flow and a cinematic arc:

- The first villain action is an opener, which shows the characters they're not battling a typical creature. Openers generally deal some damage, summon a lackey or three, buff the boss, debuff the characters, or move the creature into an advantageous position. They're just a taste of what's to come.
- The second villain action provides crowd control. It typically fires after the heroes have had a chance to respond once or twice, get into position, and surround the villain. This second action helps the villain regain the upper hand. Like an opener, this action comes in many flavors, but it's even more powerful than an opener.
- The third and final villain action is an ultimate move or "ult"—a showstopper the villain can use to deal a devastating blow to the characters before the end of the battle.

While every creature has a recommended order of actions, you can take villain actions in any order if it makes your fight more dramatic. You could push back a villain action if a creature is stunned or might stay alive for more than three rounds, or you could perform the recommended third action in round two after several surprise critical hits!

RESOURCES

MCDM TABLETOP SAFETY TOOLKIT

<https://mcdm.gg/SafetyToolkit>

You can find all issues of *ARCADIA* on [Patreon](#) and in the [MCDM shop](#).

A SPIRIT ACROSS SEAS AND STARS

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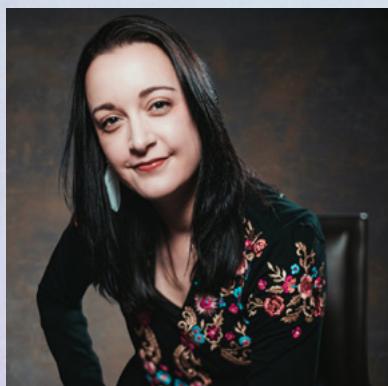
<https://mcdm.gg/Arcadia202306/MarcuriaMaps.zip>



INDRANI GANGULY (she/they) is a queer game designer, community builder, and marketer from Mumbai, India. She is India's first handmade dice-maker, and the co-founder of Desis & Dragons, India's largest tabletop RPG community. When she is not making games, she works as the Marketing Director at Hunters Entertainment (Alice is Missing, Kids on Bikes), and the Social Media Lead at Publishing Goblin Games (an upcoming TTRPG, [Confluence](#)). In 2022, Indrani was inducted into The Game Awards Future Class cohort for their work in the Indian video and tabletop gaming communities. When they're not pretending to be a fantastical wizard, their favorite pastime is looking forward to being a fantastical wizard. You can find Indrani online as [@NonagonDice](#), and Desis & Dragons as [@DesisNDragons](#).



CHRIS BISSETTE is a writer and musician from Manchester in the UK. Their solo journaling game *The Wretched* was selected as one of Tabletop Gaming Magazine's 'Best Games of 2020' and spawned hundreds of new games based on its *Wretched & Alone* engine. More recently they're focusing on their own fantasy adventure game *A Dungeon Game*, available for free at bit.ly/adungeongame. Freelance writing includes "Filthy Peasants!" in ARCADIA #9, *Fallout: The RPG*, *Pathfinder 2nd Edition*, and more.



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