# BAY OF BLACKBOTTOM

Bay of Blackbottom is a playtest adventure for Draw Steel, the MCDM RPG. It's written for the player who'll act as the Director of the adventure, and shouldn't be read by any other players. The adventure takes about 2 to 3 hours to complete and is optimized for five 1st-level heroes.

Here's what's needed to play:

- A Director who'll run the adventure (that's you)
- Five players to take on the roles of different heroes
- Two d6s and d10s for you and each player, or a digital way to roll dice
- Pencils and paper, or the digital equivalent
- A battle mat, a printed map, and miniatures; or a virtual tabletop with maps and tokens
- Pregenerated heroes for the other players to run (these are provided for you)

## PREGENERATED HEROES

This adventure comes with a full set of pregenerated heroes:

**Conduit:** A priest who heals allies and smites enemies with divine power.

**Elementalist:** A mage who harnesses the elements of creation to devastate foes.

**Fury:** A warrior who can hit hard and soak up damage thanks to their growing rage in battle.

**Shadow:** A sneaky assassin who teleports around the battlefield.

**Tactician:** A strategist and protector who inspires allies to be more effective.

# ADVENTURE FORMATTING

Sometimes when the adventure text introduces a new scene or adventure area, the formatting looks like this:

### AREA DETAILS

Paragraphs in italics like this one are meant to be read aloud or paraphrased to players when their heroes first enter the area, provided the heroes have the means to sense their environment. These are important details that the heroes immediately notice.

## **DETAILS LEFT OUT**

Because this is an explicitly heroic game, the adventure doesn't note every scrap of food or butter knife the heroes might find in their travels and exploration. If a hero is looking for a particular object and it makes sense for an area to have such an object, such as a knife in a kitchen, then it exists. If it makes no sense for the object to be there, then it isn't. If there's a chance that an object might be in a particular area, roll 1d6. On a 5 or 6, the object is there.

## ADVENTURE MAPS

This adventure uses maps from <u>Eightfold Paper</u>. Combat will occur on at least one of them. Since *Draw Steel* is a tactical game where positioning matters, have the maps printed out or loaded into your VTT of choice so they're ready to go.

## REFERENCE MAP

The reference maps for this adventure contain the starting position of each Director-controlled creature on the map for the combat encounters. There is also a starting area for the heroes. Each hero can start in any space within that area.

# ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The heroes are hired onto the crew of the *Revelation*, a passenger ship en route to Blackbottom. The ship's captain, Oriel, claims that the route has been overrun with pirates lately, and wants the characters working security to keep her passengers safe.

The captain isn't being altogether truthful. The cargo hold, which is off limits to all passengers and the heroes, contains hidden crates of black powder. This is not the first time Oriel and her crew have smuggled black powder into the city, and doing so is exceedingly dangerous. House Vorona, the de facto navy of the great city of Capital across the Bale Sea, enjoys a monopoly on the explosive powder, and any vessel smuggling it risks not only the usual pirates and brigands, but the wrath of the greatest naval fleet in Orden. One armed with cannons and rifles.

Captain Oriel is walking a fine line. She cares for the safety of her passengers but needs the profits that smuggling black powder brings. Though she keeps the secret of her smuggling from the heroes for now, she's hired them in the hopes that having the characters along to deal with any possible trouble during the voyage will let her achieve both objectives.

#### TYING TO THE FALL OF BLACKBOTTOM

This adventure takes place before *The Fall of Blackbottom*, a combat-heavy adventure detailing the destruction of the city by the forces of Ajax the Invincible, the tyrant overlord of Vasloria. If you plan on playing that adventure after this one, *Bay of Blackbottom* provides a number of possible connections between the adventures.

# **ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS**

The heroes begin aboard the *Revelation*, a few days out from Blackbottom. As they cross the open sea, they can get to know the passengers, solve minor problems, and potentially uncover the smuggled goods.

Just before the *Revelation* gets to Blackbottom harbor, pirates waylay the ship and the heroes must defend the passengers and cargo. During the fight, the *Revelation* sustains major damage. The heroes must work to stabilize the ship when it begins to sink, even as fires threaten to ignite the black powder with disastrous results.

When the *Revelation* (or what remains of it) arrives in Blackbottom, members of the Hawklords who patrol the city question Captain Oriel and the heroes. The heroes can attempt to smooth things over for the captain in negotiations if they wish.

# **ACT 1: ANCHORS AWEIGH**

In this act, the heroes establish their reasons for taking on the job, get to know each other, and get to know the passengers and crew aboard the *Revelation*.

## RISE AND SHINE

Dawn is just about to break over the ocean. Gentle morning waves cradle and rock the Revelation, and all is quiet save for a few early-morning birds and the snoring of the off-duty crew. You are packed like sardines in the crew quarters of the ship, where sailors sleep in a disorganized mess of hammocks and bedrolls, and moving across the floor without stepping on a body part is all but impossible.

Captain Oriel insisted that you lodge with the crew when you signed on as a bodyguard. Though you're on contract, she's treated you exactly as she does her full-time crew members: with respect, fairness, and the occasional razzing.

In a few moments, a whistle will sound, and these quarters will be abuzz with the day shift's waking. But this quiet moment—a rarity in your last few days at sea—is yours.

Allow the players the chance to introduce their heroes in this quiet moment. Ask them what they do to prepare for the day, and why they're on the ship. Here are a few suggestions you can provide if any players need inspiration:

- A hero needing to get to Blackbottom spends each morning impatiently waiting for the sun to rise, hoping to catch a glimpse of land.
- A hero who is accompanying another passenger might stay staunchly by their side.
- A hero smitten with Captain Oriel might have taken this job to impress her.
- A hero who sees this as just a job could linger in their hammock, trying to squeeze the last moments of sleep from the early morning.

Let your players decide if their heroes have always worked together, or if they met on the ship. When each player has introduced their hero, the whistle marking the shift change sounds out—even as a crew member calls the characters to the deck to address a disturbance (see <a href="Deck Dispute">Deck Dispute</a> below).

## **VOYAGE VIGNETTES**

These vignettes illustrate the passage of time on the ship. You can run as many or as few as you like. The party gains one hero token for each vignette the characters complete.

#### **DECK DRAMA**

Two women, a human and a high elf, are heading to Blackbottom on their honeymoon. The elf, Waves of Moonlight on a Shore of Glass, accidentally dropped her wedding ring overboard. The human, Lorelei, has yelled for the ship's guards. Just before the heroes' arrival, Lorelei jumped overboard to grab the fine porcelain ring, which is light enough to float. Having failed to anticipate the choppiness of the ship's wake, she is now desperately trying—and failing—to hold her head above water as the *Revelation* sails away.

While crew members work to dispatch a lifeboat, a hero can dive into the water and attempt a rescue with an **easy Might test**:

- 11 or lower: The hero keeps the struggling Lorelei above the surface until the lifeboat arrives. Doing so exhausts the hero, who loses 1 recovery.
- 12–16: The hero swims back to the ship with Lorelei, sparing the crew the effort.
- 17 or higher: The hero swims back to the ship with Lorelei, and manages to find and grab the lost ring along the way.

Back on deck, Lorelei's wife admonishes her for acting without thinking. Then with a wry smile, she says, "I know we said 'until death do us part' last week, but I thought you'd have a little longer in you!"

If the hero also recovered the ring, award the party an additional hero token.

#### SAVING PRIVATE STONEHEART

Samuel, an elderly human passenger, laments the disappearance of his precious Private Stoneheart, a pet bird with glorious golden feathers. Unable to pay the extra fee for traveling with a pet or animal companion, Samuel smuggled the bird aboard in his oversized coat, but the creature grew sick of hiding and flew off when Samuel unzipped his coat. Samuel begs the heroes to help find Private Stoneheart—and to be discreet. He promises on Stoneheart's return he'll keep the rascal buttoned up in his coat for the duration of the trip.

Samuel says that Private Stoneheart is affectionate but mischievous. He responds well to music and *loves* being chased. Any character who sees the bird can make a **hard Agility test** to secure him:

- 11 or lower: The bird escapes to another part of the ship. He squawks loudly, drawing the attention of a passenger.
- 12–16: The bird escapes to another part of the ship without drawing attention.
- 17 or higher: The bird is captured.

A hero who can playfully catch the bird's attention (for example, through song or dance) gains an edge on this test. Another hero who creates a distraction to keep passengers away from the bird grants the first hero an edge on the test.

If the bird got the attention of any passenger, that passenger reports the disturbance, with word quickly reaching Captain Oriel. Because Samuel doesn't have enough coin to pay the pet fee, she leads him to the deck, hands him a rag, and tells him to get swabbing. Samuel's sentence lasts one day for each disturbance his bird caused. Even at 1st level, any of the heroes has access to

enough wealth to pay the fee for Samuel if they wish to. This way, he won't have to stay buttoned up to the throat for the rest of the voyage.

#### **HINTS OF HOLD**

You can let Private Stoneheart lead the heroes toward the cargo hold (see <u>What's in the Hold?</u> below) so they can observe that the entryway is watched by two guards. The guards care little for the nonsense of this vignette as long as the heroes (and the bird!) don't try to enter the hold.

#### COMET WATCH PARTY

Percival, a wealthy and entitled passenger, has alerted Captain Oriel to the impending arrival of Aelian's Comet, a heavenly body that has not graced the skies of Vasloria in over two hundred years. Percival insists that the crew prepare a feast in celebration of this momentous occasion this very night. The crew members hadn't planned on such a meal, and have neither the time nor the supplies to prepare it.

To keep Percival happy, one crew member asks the heroes to help plan and execute the meal with what supplies the pantry has to spare. The heroes can attempt an **easy group Reason test** to determine the outcome:

- Less than half succeed: The food is bland. Thankfully, there's plenty to go around, because nobody wants seconds.
- Half or more succeed: The feast is delicious, but by the time it's prepared and laid out, Aelian's comet has already disappeared.
- *All succeed:* The night is one to remember, and the heroes earn Percival's trust and respect.

If half or more heroes succeed on this test, Percival comes to them at the end of the feast:

"Thank you for your help," he says. "You know, I told them I'd pay double if they took more food from the cargo hold. But I was told it was all textiles down there!"

Another passenger frowns. "Textiles? The captain herself told me it was spices."

#### **REASONING OUT OF REASON**

If a player wants to use a different characteristic for this test, such as Agility to cook many meals at once, or Intuition to recall a family recipe, you can let them roll with that instead if you like! As the Director, it's up to you.

#### WHAT'S IN THE HOLD?

The heroes might wish to investigate the cargo hold if they become aware that it's under guard or hear conflicting stories about what the *Revelation* is carrying. If you need more hooks to feed the players' curiosity, try the following:

- In response to any attempt to discuss what's in the hold with Captain Oriel, she flat out tells the heroes that they don't need to know.
- Many of the crew members know about the smuggled black powder, but some genuinely don't know what's in the hold. If the heroes ask any crew member about the hold, roll 1d6. On a 6, the crew member gives an

- incorrect answer (food, textiles, spices, and so forth). On a 1 to 5, the crew member keeps their lips sealed.
- The heroes overhear two teenage passengers talking of attempting to sneak into the hold to obtain some privacy, and being scolded and run off by two angry guards watching the entrance.
- The heroes know that fewer ships have been traveling to Blackbottom lately, with the presence of the Hawklords making the fabled City of Smugglers less conducive to that trade. Even passenger runs have been affected, and with the current voyage less than half booked, Oriel *must* be losing money.

To sneak past the two crew members watching the entrance to the hold and get inside, the heroes must succeed on a **hard group Agility test**. Each character gains an edge on their individual test if they create a distraction. Have each character make an **easy test** using whatever characteristic and skill best matches how they want to get past the guards.

Once inside the hold, the heroes can search it. Any hero who succeeds on a **medium Reason test** finds a hidden panel beneath a barrel of apples. Lifting the panel reveals a secret space beneath the hold that is packed with crates of black powder.

## Moving On

If the heroes find out what's in the hold, don't give them time to react. Start Act 2 and the pirate attack immediately.

If the heroes don't engage with the mystery of the hold, move on to Act 2 whenever you like.

# ACT 2: TROUBLE AT SEA

The *Revelation* is about a mile away from Blackbottom when pirates attack. The heroes have either just discovered the black powder or are in the crew quarters on a break from their duties when they get the alert.

## ATTACK!

Read or paraphrase the following when you're ready to begin this encounter.

A commotion sounds out from the deck: three dull thuds followed by shouts. Then a scream rings out: "FIRE!"

By the time the heroes reach the deck, the threat is clear:

Another ship sails dangerously close to the Revelation, its crew gleefully loading ballistae with flaming bolts. Three such bolts already stick into the hull above the waterline, wooden planks beginning to smolder. The other ship's black sails billow violently in the rough wind. These are pirates, and they're here to raise hell.

Two gangplanks are lowered between the ships, a ragtag group of raiders sprinting across to terrorize frightened passengers attempting to flee the deck.

Use the Pirate Attack Map for this encounter.

Three groups of human pirates have crossed the gangplanks by the time the characters arrive on the scene:

a **scoundrel** captain and two **guards**, a **brawler** captain and two **raiders**, and three **archers**. The pirates want the passengers' valuables, not their lives, but they're not above using human shields or gravely wounding innocents if the heroes take them on.

Both of the heavy wooden gangplanks can be lifted and shoved off the ship's rail with a **medium Might test**, letting it tumble into the sea and preventing more pirates from crossing over on it (see <u>Villain Power</u> below). Each gangplank also has Stamina 10 and fire weakness 5 if attacked or caught in a damaging area effect. If a gangplank is pushed away from the ship or destroyed, any creature standing on it falls into the sea, 3 squares below deck level.

Four civilians remain on the deck at the start of the fight, each a noncombatant with Stamina 10.

#### **TACTICS**

The brawler attempts to grab the nearest noncombatant as a shield, leaving nearby heroes to deal with the raiders. The scoundrel and their guards select the nearest hero and focus attacks on them, attempting to pick characters off one by one. The archers make ranged attacks from the back ranks, doing their best to stay out of melee.

At the start of each round, if at least one gangplank is still up, a group of two **raiders** appears at the far end of a gangplank and prepares to board on their turn.

#### VILLAIN POWER

In addition to the Villain Power granted to these villains by their stat blocks, you can spend VP in the following ways at the beginning of any enemy's turn:

**Rock the Boat! (5 VP)** Ballista bolts hit the water, causing a wave to hit the boat. All creatures on the *Revelation* slide 3 squares in a direction of the Director's choosing.

**Ballista Shot (7 VP):** The pirate ship fires a ballista bolt at one or more heroes.

#### Ballista Shot ◆ AGL RR

Keywords Area, Ranged, Resistance

★ ≤11 5 damage; 3 fire damage
★ 12-16 4 damage; 2 fire damage
+ 17+ 3 damage; 1 fire damage

#### **VICTORIES**

Each hero gains 1 Victory for subduing the pirates, plus 1 additional Victory if at least three of the civilians on deck at the start of the fight survive.

### SAVING THE SHIP

Once the heroes have dealt with all the pirates who were part of the boarding party, read or paraphrase the following:

The pirates can see that their attempt to plunder the Revelation has failed. The pirate captain's call to withdraw echoes across the waves, and within moments, a last round of ballista bolts sink into the Revelation—but below the waterline this time. As the pirate ship pulls away, crew members taking stock of the damage are driven to panic.

"Trouble below, Cap'n!" comes a shout. "She's taking on water—and the fire's spread to the cargo hold!"

Tell the players that to stop the ship from exploding, they must complete a montage test that has a success limit of 6 and a failure limit of 3. The full explanation for a montage test is found in the MCDM RPG rules.

#### MONTAGE TEST CHALLENGES

Use the following narration to set the scene. The list after the narration summarizes the challenges of the montage test and offers a few ideas for activities during the test—though you're free to come up with your own!

Captain Oriel's eyes meet yours. "We'll talk about it later," she says, gesturing to the bodies on the deck and the fire lapping at the mizzen. "But there's something in the hold that'll blow us all sky high, understand?" The ship groans under the stress that the pirates' attack has dealt to it—telling you that you're sinking.

If the characters didn't discover the black powder in the hold during their previous scenes, Oriel reveals the full scope of the danger it presents.

Any of the following challenges can be used as part of the montage test:

**Black Powder:** The contraband can be secured or dumped. Oriel protests if the heroes attempt to dump the black powder, but quickly relents if they insist. If the powder is dumped, the ship doesn't explode, but the heroes don't receive the gift from Captain Oriel in the interlude below.

**Fire:** The fire spreading through the ship can be suppressed, contained, or avoided.

**Flooding:** Water flooding the hold can be traversed or bailed out.

**Leaks:** Leaks caused by the ballista bolts can be patched or plugged.

**Panicked Crew:** Disorganized crew members can be calmed, directed to action, or inspired to help.

**Passengers:** Passengers can be evacuated, calmed, or persuaded to help.

#### MONTAGE TEST OUTCOMES

If the heroes achieve 6 successes before 3 failures, they achieve total success in the montage test. If time runs out and the heroes have achieved at least two more successes than failures, they achieve a partial success. If the heroes hit the failure limit, or if time runs out and they don't have at least two more successes than failures, they suffer total failure.

### TOTAL SUCCESS

If the heroes earn a total success, they stabilize the ship. Read or paraphrase the following:

Everyone helps in the effort to save the ship, from the captain, to all able passengers, to Private Stoneheart! With quick thinking and quicker hands, you repair the worst of the damage and prevent the dangerous cargo in the hold from exploding. When all is done, the Revelation isn't completely shipshape, but she'll get you safely to port.

#### PARTIAL SUCCESS

If the heroes earn a partial success, they stabilize the ship, but many crew and passengers are injured. Fighting the fire is exhausting work, and each hero takes a bane on their next power roll.

Water flooding the cargo hold stops the fire even as you get the leaks repaired, but renders much of the black powder useless. The ship won't blow, but it isn't moving very quickly either. A fortunate breeze allows the Revelation to creep ever closer to port. Some members of the crew send lifeboats out ahead with passengers, but Captain Oriel remains with her ship until it crawls up to the docks.

#### TOTAL FAILURE

If the heroes earn a total failure, Captain Oriel realizes they can't stop the runaway fires. She orders everyone off the ship, with many passengers injured in the attack or the evacuation. Each hero emerges from the ordeal exhausted, and loses two recoveries.

The Revelation's wake is dotted with lifeboats carrying crew members and passengers to safety. Captain Oriel stands on the nearest one, calling up to you. "No cargo's as precious as life!" she barks. "Jump, before you can't!"

Allow the heroes to narrate how they get into Oriel's boat, then read:

Behind you, the ship goes up, exploding as the black powder burns. You're close enough to feel the heat on your skin. Next to you, Captain Oriel sighs.

#### VICTORIES

Each hero earns 1 Victory if the characters achieve a total or partial success on the montage test.

## INTERLUDE: WHAT THE HELL, CAP?!

Before the heroes reach the docks, they can speak with Captain Oriel to learn the truth behind her risky cargohauling venture.

"I haven't had the money to pay my crew in ages. They've got families at home. I smuggled the powder years ago when I was ... younger. I thought I could again. I didn't tell you because I thought if you didn't know, you wouldn't be implicated. Turns out that was a stupid idea."

If the heroes have any questions, feel free to have Oriel share any of the details in <u>Adventure Background</u> with them.

Oriel offers the heroes a Knife of Nine as apology and thanks (see <u>Treasure</u> below). The knife is a relic she found at sea a long time ago, and it has saved her life on many occasions. She believes it will save even more lives in the hands of the heroes.

# **ACT 3: FINISH LINE**

The *Revelation* (or the flotilla of lifeboats that hold her crew and passengers) pulls into Blackbottom harbor, but the heroes aren't yet in the clear.

## ENTER THE HAWKLORDS

Even as the heroes and Captain Oriel step onto the docks alongside the ship's passengers and crew, two Hawklords serving Ajax the Invincible drop from the sky to confront them. They are:

- Coriad, a human trickshot atop a giant hawk
- Tyria, a human brawler atop a giant hawk

Coriad and Tyria both caught sight of the *Revelation's* misfortune while on patrol above the city, though they were unable to reach the ship during the pirate attack. After ensuring that everyone is safe, they demand an explanation.

Two humans riding giant hawks fitted with saddles and bridles descend to the docks as you arrive. Concern is etched on their faces as they see the damaged ship. "Is everyone safe? We can help with the wounded. And what happened here?" These are Hawklords, the elite guards of Ajax the Invincible, and agents of the Overlord's authority.

### **INITIAL QUESTIONING**

The heroes can intervene on Captain Oriel's behalf with a **hard Presence test**:

- 11 or lower: The Hawklords search the Revelation or its remains (see the What If the Powder's Gone? sidebar), find the black powder, and move to arrest Captain Oriel.
- 12-16: The Hawklords conduct their search as above, but if characters negotiate on Oriel's behalf, the Hawklords start the negotiation that follows with 2 interest instead of 1.
- 17 or higher: The Hawklords accept the heroes' explanation at face value and take their leave.

If the heroes don't intervene, treat the outcome as the tier 1 result on the test. The threat of arrest may move the heroes to more drastic action, but it also means it'll take more than a few nice words to persuade the Hawklords to look the other way. See "Negotiation for Captain Oriel" below.

#### WHAT IF THE POWDER'S GONE?

If the heroes totally failed to save the *Revelation*, there's no ship to search! Or perhaps they opted to throw all the black powder overboard to prevent an explosion. In either case, the Hawklords still have a reason for arresting Oriel. If the ship went up in flames, it's obvious to the Hawklords that black powder was on board. If the powder was dumped, they witnessed that from the air and detain Oriel while they retrieve one of the crates from the sea to confirm what it holds.

## NEGOTIATION FOR CAPTAIN ORIEL

Captain Oriel gives an imploring look at the heroes as the Hawklords move to arrest her. Tell the players that if they wish, they can enter into a negotiation with the Hawklords on her behalf. The full explanation for negotiation is found in the MCDM RPG rules.

**Hawklord Negotiation Stats** 

Interest: 1 • Patience: 3 • Impression: 1

#### Motivations

- Peace: The Hawklords are trying to expend as little effort as possible to do the bare minimum. They don't like eventful days, because that means filing incident reports.
- Greed: The Hawklords won't hesitate to look the other way or even assist in illicit activity if it means greasing their own palms.

#### **Pitfalls**

- Higher Authority: The Hawklords know that Oriel is in clear violation of the law, which is the only higher authority they acknowledge (even if they don't always respect it).
- Benevolence: No one has ever done a good turn for these Hawklords. They have nothing to pay forward.

Negotiation with the Hawklords can have the following outcomes:

Interest 5: The Hawklords look the other way and gain an appreciation for the heroes' honesty and bravery. If you play *The Fall of Blackbottom* after *Bay of Blackbottom* and the heroes negotiate with the Hawklords in Act 2 of that adventure, the Hawklords start with interest 2 instead of interest 1.

Interest 4: The Hawklords recognize that incarcerating Captain Oriel is more trouble than it's worth, and they look the other way.

Interest 3: The Hawklords look the other way, but they demand a magical treasure from the characters in exchange for their trouble. (The Knife of Nine makes a suitable offer.)

**Interest 2:** The Hawklords arrest Oriel but only impose a modest fine on her. If she pays the fine, she'll be out no later than the next morning.

Interest 1: The Hawklords arrest Oriel.

Interest 0: The Hawklords attempt to arrest Oriel and the heroes, whom they now see as accomplices, triggering a combat encounter.

#### BATTLE?

If the heroes threaten the Hawklords at any stage of this encounter, combat ensues. Coriad and Tyria each call a squad of four **human guards** to assist in the arrest, and serve as their group's captain. The Hawklords avoid lethal force against the characters, wanting only to arrest them. The Hawklords fight until they are both winded, until one of them dies, or until one of their hawks dies. If forced to flee, they vow to return with reinforcements. The heroes had better get out of there quickly!

#### **VICTORIES**

Each of the heroes earns 1 Victory if this encounter ends with Oriel walking free.

### Conclusion

After several days at sea, the heroes need a place to unwind and plot their next move. Lorelei and Waves of Moonlight on a Shore of Glass (from <u>Deck Drama</u> above) suggest that the characters seek out the Drunken Fool, an inn famous for its baths—and the couple's first stop on their honeymoon.

You can continue the characters' adventures in *The Fall of Blackbottom*, or can take their story in your own direction!

## **TREASURE**

The heroes can earn the following treasure during the adventure.

#### Knife of Nine

This ivory dagger features nine faintly glowing indentations along the blade

Keywords: Light Weapon, Psionic

When you use this knife with a weapon ability, the ability deals an extra 3 psychic damage. This extra damage increases by 3 each time you attack the same target during the same encounter, to a maximum of 9.